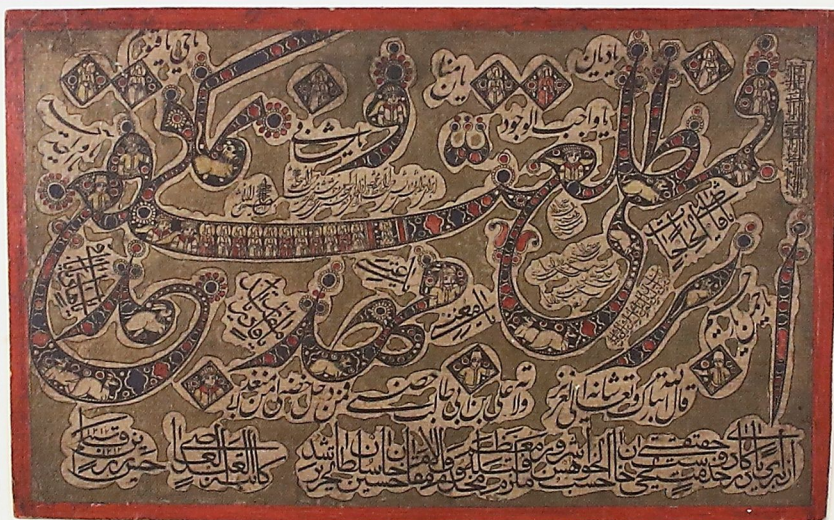


Shi'i Trends and Dynamics
in Modern Times
(XVIIIth–XXth centuries)

Courants et dynamiques chiites
à l'époque moderne
(XVIII^e–XX^e siècles)

Edited by Denis Hermann
Sabrina Mervin



Orient-Institut Beirut

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Institut Français de Recherche en Iran

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BEIRUTER TEXTE UND STUDIEN

HERAUSGEGEBEN VOM
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Introduction

L'avènement de la République islamique d'Iran en 1979-1980 et la politisation croissante des populations chiïtes, notamment au Liban et en Irak, dans les années 1970, ont suscité un regain d'intérêt pour les doctrines chiïtes. Des relectures de leur histoire ont été menées; de nouvelles problématiques de recherche ont été soulevées, des pistes ont été explorées ou approfondies. Certaines thématiques ont fait l'objet d'un intérêt particulier car elles étaient susceptibles d'éclairer les fondements historiques de ces mouvements politico-religieux: ainsi, par exemple, de la rationalisation des doctrines, qui a abouti à la victoire du courant *uṣūlī* sur le courant *akhbārī*, ou bien des relations entre les oulémas et le pouvoir; selon la même logique, la période de l'émergence de l'Empire safavide (1501-1722) a capté l'attention des chercheurs. Toutefois, cette vitalité des études chiïtes – relancée par la chute du régime baathiste en Irak, en 2003, et par l'essor du chiïsme qui s'ensuivit – ne doit pas masquer les lacunes. Des pans entiers de l'histoire intellectuelle, politique et sociale du chiïsme restent à mettre au jour, par l'étude de documents non traités jusqu'à présent comme par la définition de nouvelles perspectives de recherche. Cet ouvrage a pour objectif d'apporter une contribution à cette entreprise, en se focalisant sur une période très riche de l'histoire du chiïsme: la seconde moitié du 18^e siècle, le 19^e siècle et le mouvement constitutionnel iranien (1906-1911).

Cette période a été considérée, à tort, comme une période de déclin intellectuel. D'abord, par rapport au début de l'Empire safavide, qui fut un tournant extrêmement marquant pour l'histoire du chiïsme; ensuite, à cause de l'affaiblissement politique, militaire et économique de l'Iran chiïte au cours des 18^e et 19^e siècles, susceptible d'avoir des répercussions sur la vie intellectuelle. Ajoutons, en outre, que ce sont les mondes musulmans dans leur ensemble qui, tant par les acteurs de l'époque que par les historiens après eux, ont été décrits comme englués dans une phase de déclin.

Or, le chiïsme connut alors un grand dynamisme doctrinal, en direction du littéralisme (même si ce terme serait à nuancer) mais, aussi, de la rationalisation; vers la théosophie et, par ailleurs, la théorie politico-religieuse à visée pratique. Ce dynamisme tous azimuts se concrétisa par l'opposition, parfois violente, de courants concurrents, ou bien par leur coexistence dans la complémentarité, voire leur imbrication. Cette période vit ainsi le succès de l'école traditionnaliste *akhbārī* puis sa quasi-extinction, ainsi que la naissance de l'école théologico-mystique de la *shaykhiyya*, et le succès populaire du soufisme chiïte confrérique. Parallèlement, le mouvement rationaliste *uṣūlī* continua son ascension, marquée par l'institutionnalisation, la hiérarchisation, et la politisation de son clergé. A plusieurs égards, ces quatre courants atteignirent leur apogée intellectuelle au cours des 18^e et 19^e siècles; rappelons brièvement comment.

L'école théologico-mystique de la *shaykhiyya* est née au cours du 19^e siècle, qui vit la formation de communautés shaykhī dans de nombreuses villes et régions d'Irak, d'Iran mais aussi du sous-continent indien. Ce fut aussi une période de production doctrinale florissante, grâce à l'œuvre monumentale de son fondateur, Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī (m. 1241/1826), mais aussi de ses deux successeurs, Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī (m. 1259/1843) et Muḥammad Karīm Khān Kirmānī (m. 1288/1871). A eux trois, ils rédigèrent environ mille traités. Muḥammad Karīm Khān a, en particulier, beaucoup écrit sur la théorie de l'Occultation, précisant le sens à lui donner et ses conséquences sur les doctrines chiïtes. Certains de ces ouvrages, comme le volumineux *Irshād al-ʿawwām*, constituent un sommet: ce traité en quatre volumes peut être considéré comme la « profession de foi » shaykhī, notamment en raison de l'exposé final sur le « quatrième pilier » (*rukn-i rābi'*), qui est certainement la contribution majeure de l'école shaykhī à la pensée chiïte¹.

Pour ce qui concerne le soufisme, la période qajare fut particulièrement productive: les traités de doctrine les plus élaborés furent alors rédigés au sujet de l'autorité des *shaykh* soufis chiïtes pendant l'Occultation. Nous pouvons en particulier mentionner le *Vilāyat-nāma* de Sulṭān ʿAlī Shāh Gunābādī (m. 1327/1909), l'un des principaux *qutb* (pôle mystique/maître sufi) de l'ordre niʿmatullāhī gunābādī, et le *Qawāʿim al-anwār* de Rāz-i Shirāzī (m. 1286/1869), l'un des *qutb* les plus influents de l'ordre dhahabiyya.

De la même manière, en matière de droit islamique *uṣūlī*, quelques traités composés pendant cette période ont marqué un tournant, voire une apogée de la discipline. Ils ont ouvert de nouvelles voies. Complexes, n'ayant pas été suivis d'équivalents, ils occupent toujours une place de choix dans l'enseignement du *fiqh* comme dans celui de ses principes méthodologiques (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) au sein des écoles religieuses chiïtes (*ḥawza*). C'est le cas des *Makāsib*, traité de *fiqh* sur les transactions commerciales, composé par Murtaḍā l-Anṣārī (m. 1281/1864). Ouvrage de référence en la matière, il énonce en outre les règles du *taqlīd* (imitation), qui régissent les relations entre le *marjaʿ* et ses adeptes et constituent la base de l'institution de la *marjaʿiyya*. Murtaḍā l-Anṣārī est d'ailleurs lui-même considéré par les historiens comme le premier *marjaʿ*. Un autre ouvrage de référence pour les étudiants d'un niveau avancé à la *ḥawza* est *Kifāyat al-uṣūl* d'Ākhūnd Mullā Khurāsānī (m. 1329/1911), demeuré en quelque sorte non dépassé en matière d'*uṣūl al-fiqh*. Enfin, *al-ʿUrwa al-wuthqā*, de Muḥammad Kāẓim Yazdī (m. 1919) est un ouvrage de référence pour les traités pratiques (*risāla ʿamaliyya*) de *fiqh* que doivent rédiger les *mujtahid* candidats à la *marjaʿiyya*. Ils l'ont maintes fois commenté.

Les développements de la doctrine *uṣūlī* contribuèrent à la politisation croissante du clergé chiïte au cours du 19^e siècle. Un autre facteur déterminant fut l'influence

¹ Selon cette théorie, durant l'Occultation, il y a une hiérarchie cachée des compagnons de l'Imam; on connaît leur existence, mais l'on ignore leur identité.

occidentale en Iran: le monde musulman en général, et chiite en particulier, se sentit menacé. La domination militaire, politique et culturelle progressive de l'Occident sur l'Iran qajar, mais aussi sur l'Irak et l'Inde, poussa une grande partie du clergé chiite dans l'arène politique. Dès lors, il se considéra comme le défenseur de l'identité chiite/islamique, notamment au sein de la société iranienne. Bien plus, il posa la question de l'autorité politique dans le chiisme et, ce, particulièrement, lors du mouvement constitutionnaliste en Iran (1906-1911), moment charnière pour le courant *usūlī*. Les débats qui divisèrent alors les milieux cléricaux sont toujours d'actualité, aujourd'hui; pourtant, les historiens n'en ont pas encore répertorié tous les éléments. Ainsi, cette période a posé les questions qui sont encore débattues aujourd'hui, et elle a pourvu les doctrines chiites d'un corpus désormais « classique » touchant différents aspects de la pensée religieuse.

Ce volume présente des contributions qui envisagent ces questions à travers plusieurs perspectives et domaines d'études, regroupés en trois parties. La première partie (*Diversity and Change in Philosophy and Mystic*) revient sur certains aspects marquant de l'histoire de la pensée philosophique et mystique chiite au cours du 19^e siècle. L'histoire intellectuelle du chiisme au début du 19^e siècle est marquée par la naissance de l'école théologico-mystique *shaykhiyya* sous l'autorité de Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī et Sayyid Kāzīm Rashtī, ainsi que par la renaissance d'un soufisme confrérique chiite en Iran, avec le succès populaire de la *ni'matullāhiyya*, et dans une moindre mesure de la *dhahabiyya*, une branche de la *kubrāwiyya*. L'indien Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh (m. 1212/1797-98) est à l'origine de nombreux ralliements iraniens à la *ni'matullāhiyya*. Celui-ci migra vers l'Iran à partir du Deccan, où il était l'un des maîtres d'une branche de l'ordre implantée à Golconde par Mīr Maḥmūd (m. 1100/1688), savant originaire de Najaf qui fut initié à la *ni'matullāhiyya* à Bidar. Après une répression sévère sous le règne de Faṭḥ 'Alī Shāh (r. 1797-1834), le soufisme bénéficia du soutien de nombreux membres de l'élite qajare, dont son successeur immédiat, Muḥammad Shāh (r. 1834-1848), et son premier ministre, Mirzā Āqāsī (m. 1849). Il remporta alors un succès populaire considérable. En revanche, à notre connaissance, le soufisme confrérique chiite demeura dès lors strictement iranien et ne s'étendit pas vers l'extérieur. Un grand nombre de voyageurs occidentaux soulignèrent l'influence du soufisme au sein de la population pendant l'ère qajare (1796-1925).

Durant cette période, la tradition philosophique se maintint. La plupart des auteurs s'inscrivirent dans la continuité de la pensée sadrienne, tels Mullā 'Alī b. Jamshīd Nūrī (m. 1246/1830-31), 'Abd Allāh Zunūzī (m. 1257/1841-42), Sayyid Ja'far Kashfī (m. 1267/1850-51), Mullā Hādī Sabzavārī (m. 1289/1873), Muḥammad Riḍā Qumshāhī (m. 1306/1888-89), Āqā 'Alī Zunūzī (m. 1307/1889-90) et Sayyid Abū l-Ḥasan Jilva (m. 1315/1896). En revanche, les auteurs de l'école *shaykhī*, au contraire, remirent en question la pensée de Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī (m. 1050/1640) et, plus largement, de l'école philosophique d'Ispahan. Todd Lawson

(Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī and the World of Images) étudie l'une des contributions majeures du fondateur de l'école théologico-mystique de la *shaykhiyya* à la pensée chiite, sa réflexion sur l'un des mondes intermédiaire, le *‘ālam al-mithāl*, traduit par « monde des images » (World of Images). Todd Lawson analyse dans cet article l'interprétation de ce monde intermédiaire que fait Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī, en la comparant aux développements produits à ce sujet par certains membres de l'école philosophique d'Ispahan, notamment Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī (m. 1091/1680).

Oliver Scharbrodt (The *qutb* as Special Representative of the Hidden Imam: the Conflation of Shi'ī and Sufi *Vilāya* in the Ni'matullāhī Order) analyse l'interaction entre le concept de sainteté (*vilāya*), dans le soufisme, et la question de la représentation de l'Imam du Temps sur terre, dans le chiisme, chez plusieurs maîtres ni'matullāhī du début du 19^e siècle, en particulier Nūr 'Alī Shāh (m. 1211/1797) et Muẓaffar 'Alī Shāh (m. 1214/1800). Muẓaffar 'Alī Shāh rédigea un traité en partie consacré à cette question, le *Majma' al-biḥār*, qui constitue ici la principale source de l'auteur. Muẓaffar 'Alī Shāh a donc développé une pensée soufie spécifiquement chiite qui trouve son expression dans le statut particulier du *qutb* (pôle mystique de l'ordre), comme représentant spirituel de l'Imam du Temps sur terre. Ce statut, inexistant dans le soufisme confrérique sunnite, explique notamment l'impossibilité, pour les chiites, d'effectuer le pacte initiatique (*bay'at*) dans plusieurs ordres.

Sajjad Rizvi (*Ḥikma Muta'aliya* in Qajar Iran: Ḥajj Mullā Ḥādī Sabzavārī and the School of Mullā Ṣadrā) revient sur le rôle central du philosophe, juriste et mystique Mullā Ḥādī Sabzavārī, dans la continuité de l'enseignement philosophique en milieu chiite au cours du 19^e siècle, en Iran. Celui-ci était dominé par la pensée de Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī, devenue en quelque sorte un dogme pour les *uṣūlī* réfléchissant sur la philosophie. A tel point que pour s'y être opposé, Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī fut frappé d'excommunication (*takfir*), à Qazvin, en 1824. Sajjad Rizvi souligne ici que l'œuvre majeure de Mullā Ḥādī Sabzavārī, le *Sharḥ-i manẓūma*, est devenu un texte de référence pour l'enseignement de la philosophie dans les séminaires chiites (*ḥawza*) au cours de l'ère qajare, et qu'il l'est toujours. Mullā Ḥādī Sabzavārī est par ailleurs connu comme un *mujtahid* quiétiste et un mystique proche de l'ordre soufi ni'matullāhī gunābādī, alors très influent dans le Khorasan.

L'article de Robert Gleave (Continuity and Originality in Shi'ī Thought: the Relationship between the *Akhhāriyya* and the *Maktab-i Taṣfīk*) ré-examine les relations historiques et intellectuelles entre l'akhbarisme et le *Maktab-i Taṣfīk* (littéralement « l'école de la séparation »), qui restent souvent mal comprises. En effet, on a présenté le *Maktab-i Taṣfīk*, fondé par Mīrzā Mahdī Iṣfahānī (m. 1365/1946) dans la première moitié du 20^e siècle, comme un mouvement fondamentalement anti-philosophique et héritier de l'akhbarisme. Robert Gleave analyse les contributions d'auteurs appartenant au mouvement *akhhārī* et au *Maktab-i Taṣfīk* sur trois questions de doctrine spécifiques pour illustrer les facteurs de continuité mais aussi

d'opposition entre ces deux courants intellectuels chiïtes: la définition du savoir; la différence entre une conceptualisation humaine et divine du langage; le rôle de la raison (*‘aql*) dans la découverte de la pensée religieuse.

Les contributions de la deuxième partie (*Shi‘i Jurisprudence*) sont consacrées aux développements du *fiqh* chiïte à l'époque moderne. Au cours des 18^e et 19^e siècles, les débats sur le *fiqh* furent des plus animés. La période vit d'abord le succès du courant *akhbārī*, en particulier dans les *‘atabāt* (villes saints chiïtes de l'Irak), au Bahreïn et dans la partie orientale de l'Arabie. La mort du Shaykh Yūsuf Baḥrānī en 1186/1772-73, l'activisme violemment anti-*akhbārī* de Vaḥīd Bihbihānī (m. 1207/1792) puis l'assassinat de Mirzā Muḥammad Akhbārī Nayshābūrī en 1232/1817 à Kazimiyya marquèrent toutefois le déclin, puis la quasi-disparition de l'école au début du 19^e siècle. Pour autant, les principes du droit (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) élaborés par le clergé chiïte *uṣūlī* furent continuellement remis en question par la nouvelle école théologico-mystique en formation, la *shaykhiyya*.

Cependant, le courant *uṣūlī* était en pleine expansion, tant au plan des doctrines que pour les hommes et les institutions. La hiérarchie du clergé continua de se constituer autour de la maîtrise de l'*ijtihād*, d'abord avec l'émergence de nouvelles titulatures comme celle de « Ḥujjat al-islām wa-l-muslimīn » (Preuve de l'islam et des musulmans) – qui fut pour la première fois utilisée par Muḥammad Bāqir Shāftī (m. 1260/1844) – puis avec l'institution de la *marja‘iyya*. Les prérogatives du *mujtahid* s'étendirent, lui conférant un rôle accru dans la collecte et la redistribution des impôts religieux tel le *khums*, dans la gestion des *vaqf* et au sein des tribunaux religieux (*shar‘ī*). En outre, si Murtaḍā l-Anṣārī, le premier *marja‘*, fut un religieux quiétiste, son disciple Mirzā Ḥasan Shirāzī (m. 1312/1895) révéla le potentiel politique de la *marja‘iyya*. La fatwa qu'il émit, en 1891, prohibant la consommation de tabac en Iran pour protester contre l'obtention du monopole du tabac par une régie britannique entraîna un mouvement de masse sans précédent. Avec lui, le *fiqh* servit la contestation politique, le *mujtahid* devint un activiste.

Sabrina Mervin (La quête du savoir à Najaf. Les études religieuses chez les chiïtes imāmītes de la fin du 19^e siècle à 1960) décrit le système d'enseignement dans les séminaires chiïtes (*ḥawza*) de Najaf, où le *fiqh* occupait une place prépondérante. Les matières étudiées, les méthodes, les cycles d'étude et les ouvrages sont passés en revue. Les relations, verticales, entre maîtres et disciples, et celles, horizontales, entre compagnons d'études, sont mises au jour, ainsi que les conditions de vie des étudiants qui, souvent, passaient de longues années dans l'effort et la pauvreté afin de s'approcher du degré de l'*ijtihād*, leur but ultime. Le modèle dépeint ici, même s'il fut réformé à partir de la fin des années 1950 pour donner naissance à des écoles modernisées, demeure le modèle classique, vu comme un idéal, notamment pour les études du troisième et dernier cycle. Il est aujourd'hui qualifié de « système libre », car il se fonde sur l'entière liberté des étudiants, et sur le caractère informel des cours.

Le second article de cette partie revient, de manière originale, sur les relations entre *fiqh* et soufisme. Shahram Pazouki, dans (*Fiqh* et soufisme à la période qajare: quelques notes sur l'œuvre juridique des maîtres ni'matullāhī gunābādī) décrit les positions juridiques de maîtres soufis, en l'occurrence les *quṭb* de l'ordre ni'matullāhī gunābādī. Si les maîtres de cette confrérie sont connus pour leur charisme spirituel, ils suivirent aussi une formation juridique solide. Ils reconnaissent la légitimité de l'*ijtihād* et ne s'opposent pas, de ce point de vue, au clergé *usūlī*, à l'instar des *akhbārī* ou des *shaykhī*. Shahram Pazouki montre la complexité de leur position et du rôle qu'ils jouèrent auprès de leurs disciples (*murīd*). S'ils invitèrent ces derniers à s'adresser, de manière générale, à des juristes (*fuqahā*) extérieurs à l'ordre, ils intervinrent de manière ponctuelle sur quelques questions qu'ils estimaient urgent de réformer. Ils prirent ainsi des positions très fermes concernant le divorce, qu'ils prohibèrent sauf cas extrême, l'esclavage, qu'ils interdirent totalement dès la fin du 19^e siècle ou bien encore la consommation d'opium (*taryāk*) qu'ils proscrivirent également.

La troisième partie (*Doctrinal Debates and Political Theories*) rassemble trois études sur plusieurs aspects concernant les débats doctrinaux et les théories politiques diffusés dans le monde chiite à la période moderne. La légitimité religieuse du pouvoir monarchique absolu est régulièrement défendue par les oulémas durant la période qajare. Les théories anciennes élaborées sous les Safavides par des clercs comme Shaykh Bahā'ī (m. 1030/1620-21), l'auteur du *Jāmi'-i 'Abbāsī*, à propos de la coexistence nécessaire entre les deux types de pouvoir que sont le gouvernement (*salṭanat*) chiite et le savoir religieux (*'ilm*), représenté par les oulémas, sont toujours en vigueur jusque dans les années 1870-1890. L'autorité du Shāh sur terre est alors perçue comme un reflet du règne de Dieu. Le Shāh est donné pour être son député, ainsi que l'expression de sa grâce (*Farr-i izzadī*). Certains de ses titres, tels *Zill-Allāh* (ombre de Dieu) ou *Quṭb-i 'ālam* (pivot de l'univers) permettent de suggérer ce statut. Les oulémas font régulièrement référence, dans leurs correspondances avec le gouvernement ou dans leurs traités théologiques, au rôle de protecteur de l'islam et du chiisme attribué au souverain. Ils nomment souvent ce dernier « Roi, refuge de l'islam » (*Pādishāh-yi islām-panāh*) ou bien « Roi, refuge de la Loi » (*Pādishāh-yi shari'at-panāh*). Ces théories valent aussi bien pour l'Inde où peu après la chute des États chiites du Deccan après la conquête d'Awrangzeb (r. 1659-1707) est constitué un Etat chiite dans le Nord, celui d'Avadh (1722-1859).

Elles s'effilochent progressivement, en Iran, dans la seconde moitié du 19^e siècle, suite à l'accroissement de l'influence britannique et russe. En Inde, elles n'ont plus de réelles influences après la prise de Lucknow par les armées britanniques en 1859. Depuis, les chiites n'ont d'ailleurs jamais pu retrouver une influence politique majeure dans le sous-continent. Dans ce sens, le mouvement constitutionnel iranien, avec l'élaboration de nouvelles théories politiques chiites, vient ponctuer un demi-siècle de progressive contestation de l'ordre politique par les oulémas.

Sajida Sultana Alvi (Sunni Ulama's Discourses on Shi'ism in Northern India during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: An Overview) se concentre dans son article sur l'état de la polémique anti-chiite parmi les oulémas sunnites indiens du Nord de l'Inde, principalement au cours des 18^e et 19^e siècles, une période qui vit l'affaiblissement des Moghols, la fondation de l'Etat chiite d'Avadh, et l'influence des pratiques chiites, y compris en milieu sunnite. Elle revient en particulier sur la littérature polémique de quatre auteurs naqshbandī très influents: Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī (m. 1032/1623), Shāh Valī Allāh (m. 1175/1762), Qāḍī Thanā' Allāh Pānīpatī (m. 1224/1810), et Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz (m. 1239/1824). Leurs critiques concernent principalement la doctrine chiite sur l'autorité politique, ainsi que certaines pratiques culturelles consistant à vilipender et maudire (*sabb*) les trois premiers califes et 'Ā'isha, l'épouse du Prophète (m. 58/678).

La contribution de Denis Hermann (Système parlementaire et consultation selon Thiqat al-Islām-i Tabrizī: légitimation religieuse et justification historique) est dédiée au débat sur l'autorité politique ayant cours en Iran durant le mouvement constitutionnel iranien (1906-1911). Il analyse l'argumentation pro-constitutionnaliste de Thiqat al-Islām-i Tabrizī (m. 1330/1911) – l'un des principaux idéologues du mouvement à Tabriz ainsi que le chef spirituel de la communauté shaykhī tabrizī – qui fut pendu par les forces russes lors de leur entrée dans la ville en décembre 1911. Le recours à des arguments historiques pour justifier la nécessité de la consultation (*mashvurat*) et la fondation d'un parlement (*majlis*) constitue sans doute l'un des aspects les plus originaux de l'exposé de Thiqat al-Islām-i Tabrizī.

Mohammad Baqer Vosuqi (Remarques sur la pensée politique de l'ayatollah Lārī durant le mouvement constitutionnel) examine certaines des positions politiques de l'ayatollah sayyid 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Lārī (m. 1342/1923-24) au cours du mouvement constitutionnel. L'ayatollah Lārī était jusqu'alors surtout connu pour son appel au *jihād* contre les Britanniques au cours de la première guerre mondiale. Il était pourtant déjà l'un des principaux dirigeants politico-religieux du sud de l'Iran au début du 20^e siècle. Il fut un auteur prolifique au cours du mouvement constitutionnel et insista tout particulièrement sur l'illégitimité de la monarchie en islam. Il plaidait également pour un rôle accru du clergé au sein du parlement et, plus largement, dans la direction du mouvement constitutionnel.

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Enfin, un grand merci à tous les contributeurs... pour leur patience.

Denis Hermann et Sabrina Mervin

Part One

Diversity and Change
in Philosophy and Mystic





Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsāʿī and the World of Images

Todd Lawson

When considering the role of Shiʿism in the modern and contemporary world, one topic of importance is infrequently broached, namely the enduring reality of a spiritual realm referred to as the World of Images (*ʿālam al-mithāl*). This placeless place emerges as one of the chief distinguishing features of the work of the so-called Isfahan School.¹ Taking Avicenna (d. 1037) as inspiration, Suhrawardī (d. 1191), Shaykh al-Ishrāq, established the ontic reality of a world of “apparitional forms” for subsequent Eastern philosophical discourse. In the Safavid thinkers, this world would come to occupy a permanent and essential place, helping to make philosophical (i.e. “scientific”) sense out of such Twelver Shiʿi religious beliefs as the continued existence and return of the Hidden Imam. The West has long since rejected the reality of a World of Images for reasons apparently unrelated to sectarian religious beliefs. According to Corbin, the crucial event was the rejection of the Avicennan cosmological realm of celestial Soul. The result was the stranding of the human soul without readable guidance for its journey home. Since this rejection, few Western thinkers have managed to rediscover the all but forgotten realm of the imaginal. Among these, Paracelsus (d. 1541) and Swedenborg (d. 1772) have been singled out as having somehow survived spiritually and philosophically. To these may be added the artist and visionary William Blake (d. 1827) for whom the imaginal realm was most real and crucial and Carl Jung (d. 1961), for whom the imaginal powers of the human being were necessary for its psychological salvation. More recently, the influence of both Corbin and Jung on psychology has been unmistakable in the writings of

¹ For the history of the idea, see Henry Corbin, “Mundus imaginalis or the Imaginary and the Imaginal”, *Spring* (1972), 1-19. [First published in French in the *Cahiers internationaux de symbolisme* 6 (1964), 3-26.]; Fazlur Rahman, “Dream, Imagination and ‘Ālam al-Mithāl”, in: *The Dream and Human Society*, Gustave von Grunebaum and Roger Caillois, eds., Berkeley: University of California Press 1966, 381-408; Henry Corbin, “The Visionary Dream in Islamic Spirituality”, in: *The Dream and Human Society*, Gustave von Grunebaum and Roger Caillois, eds., Berkeley: University of California Press 1966, 410-419; Henry Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, translated by Nancy Pearson, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1977 [originally published as *Terre céleste et corps de résurrection: de l’Iran mazdéen à l’Iran Shīʿite*, Paris: Buchet Chastel 1960]. It is also studied in John T. Walbridge, *The Science of Mystic Lights: Qutb al-Dīn Shīrāzī and the Illuminationist Tradition in Islamic Philosophy*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 1992, esp. 126ff. for an analysis of the idea in the work of Shīrāzī (d. 1311), whom the author describes as possibly the first Islamic philosopher “to have made a determined effort to work out the philosophical implications of the concept”.

von Franz and Hillman, among others.² Finally, a recent book on mysticism has reasserted the value and reality of the imaginal realm, again influenced by Corbin.³ It remains, however, that even though we may find here and there thinkers and artists for whom an imaginal realm is real and crucial, in the main such Western thinkers have been marginalised by the greater Western religious and philosophical tradition.

In the East, the reality of this realm has remained a theological, philosophical and mystical commonplace. From Suhrawardī and his followers to Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 1240) and his wide and deep influence, to the later Shi‘i and Sufi writers and thinkers, some form of the imaginal realm remained an essential feature of life as such: even when its ontic status would be questioned by the likes of Sirhindi (d. 1625), its usefulness for spiritual pedagogy would appear to remain unquestioned by him.⁴ Here is not the place to speculate on all the possible reasons for this basic difference between East and West. The task at hand is much more focused, and perhaps by comparison, elementary.

Corbin’s *Spiritual Body*, the groundbreaking study of the *‘ālam al-mithāl*, can leave a reader with the false impression that because all the numerous Eastern sages treated therein agree on the reality of the *‘ālam al-mithāl*, that they also therefore agree on all other aspects of religion or philosophy or, that whatever differences there might be are trivial. This is most certainly not the case, as the following comparison will demonstrate. By briefly discussing the serious doctrinal and philosophical differences between two Eastern scholars on the topic of the *‘ālam al-mithāl*, the axiomatic status of the doctrine will be underscored.

Here, then, we are concerned with the main characteristics and function of this world as found in the writings of Mullā Muḥammad Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī (d. 1680) and Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā‘ī (d. 1826). The first is considered the faithful bearer of the thought of his teacher and father-in-law, Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1640) and one of the more important authorities of post-Safavid religious teachings. The second is frequently seen as reviving an archaic pre-classical religiosity, and as a severe critic of Ṣadrīan philosophical presuppositions. In this context, it is im-

² Marie Louise von Franz (d. 1998), *Alchemical Active Imagination*, Irving, Texas: Spring Publications, University of Dallas 1979, or *On Dreams and Death: A Jungian Interpretation*, trans. by Emmanuel X. Kennedy and Vernon Brooks, Boston: Shambhala 1987; James Hillman, author of numerous books and articles, many of which are concerned with “soul making,” the imaginal realm, and most recently, “character”. See as an example James Hillman, “Imaginal Practice: Greeting the Angel”, in: *A Blue Fire: Selected Writings by James Hillman*, Thomas More, intro. and ed., New York: Harper & Row 1989, 50-70 where he wrote: “Our method has been partly described by Henry Corbin when writing of *ta’wīl*. For us, it is the conservation and exploration and vivification of the imagination and the insights derived therefrom, rather than the analysis of the unconscious, that is the main work of therapy.” (Hillman, “Imaginal”, 59).

³ Jess B. Hollenback, *Mysticism: Experience, Response, and Empowerment*, University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press 1996.

⁴ Rahman, “Dream”, 419.

portant to emphasise, philosophical presuppositions take on some of the character of religious beliefs ('*aqā'id*'). That both scholars rely on the '*ālam al-mithāl*' for the solution to problems of cosmogony, cosmology, ontology, epistemology and eschatology indicates the degree to which recourse to this realm is a commonplace, particularly in later medieval Shi'ī thought. That is to say, for both men the world of images functions as a bridge between reason and revelation. Yet, the differences between their respective teachings surrounding this topic are fundamental, ultimately indicating two mutually exclusive religious types.

Kāshānī is widely esteemed as one of the pillars of post-Safavid Shi'ī religious culture. He produced a number of important books on Twelver doctrine and practice. In addition, Fayḍ Kāshānī was the most prolific student of the great Mullā Ṣadrā, producing two important and influential works on *ḥikmat* (philosophy), the *Kalimāt-i maknūna* and the *Uṣūl al-ma'ārif*.⁵ He was also the student of Sayyid Mājīd al-Baḥrānī (d. 1657), the avid Akhbārī scholar.⁶ Kāshānī's formation combined salient features of the Akhbārī approach⁷ to *fiqh* with the Ṣadrian approach to metaphysics and ontology. This also involved a further advance in the Shi'ī domestication of the thought of Ibn 'Arabī, a process that may be seen to have begun as early as Maytham al-Baḥrānī (d. ca. 1280).⁸ These elements, there can be no doubt, also combined with *ṭarīqa*-type Sufi influences, although apparently he did not commit himself to any particular order.⁹ Whatever the reality of

⁵ Mullā Muḥammad Muḥsin Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *Kalimāt-i maknūna min 'ulūm abl al-ḥikma wa-l-ma'rifā*, Tehran: n.p. 1383/1342sh./1963-64; by the same author: *Uṣūl al-ma'ārif*, Jalāl al-Dīn Ashtiyānī, ed., Mashhad: n.p. 1353sh./1974-75.

⁶ See the biographical sketch in 'Alī Husayn al-Jābirī, *al-Fikr al-salafī 'ind al-shī'a al-ithnā'asharī*, Beirut – Paris: n.p. 1977, 326-366. See also Etan Kohlberg, "Some Aspects of Akhbārī Thought", in: *Eighteenth Century Renewal and Reform in Islam*, Nehemia Levtzion and John O. Voll, eds., Syracuse: Syracuse University Press 1987, 133-160 for a useful nuancing of Kāshānī's particular version of Akhbārism.

⁷ The complex subject of Kāshānī's Akhbārī allegiance has been recently broached in Robert Gleave, "Two Classical Shi'ī theories of *qadā'*", in: *Studies in Islamic and Middle Eastern Texts and Traditions: in Memory of Norman Calder*, Gerald Richard Hawting, Jawid Ahmad Mojaddedi and Alexander Samely, eds., Oxford: Oxford University Press 2000, 105-120; Andrew J. Newman, "Fayḍ al-Kashani and the Rejection of the Clergy/State Alliance", in: *The Most Learned of the Shi'a: The Institution of the Marja' Taqlid*, Linda S. Walbridge, ed., New York: Oxford University Press 2001, 34-52; and Todd Lawson, "Akhbārī Shi'ī Approaches to *tafsīr*", in: *Approaches to the Qur'an*, Gerald Richard Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef, eds., London: Routledge 1993, 173-210, esp. 180-187.

⁸ The most recent detailed discussion of this is Ali Oraibi, *Shi'ī Renaissance: A Case Study of the Theosophical School of Bahrain in the 7th/13th century*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, McGill University 1992.

⁹ Leonard Lewisohn, "Sufism and the School of Isfahān: *Taṣawwuf* and '*Irḥān*' in Late Safavid Iran", in: *The Heritage of Sufism* vol. 3: *Late Classical Persianate Sufism (1501-1750)*, Leonard Lewisohn and David Morgan, eds., Oxford: Oneworld 1999, 63-134. This is the most thorough inquiry into the Sufism of al-Kāshānī available. See pp. 44-66 (references here are to a typescript kindly provided by its author). See p. 48 for a discussion of Kāshānī's controversial Nūrbakhshī affiliation, and Fayḍ Kāshānī's reputation in court circles for being an authority on Sufism and *ḥikmat*.

Kāshānī's true Sufi allegiances, he has become known in later scholarship as the "Ghazālī" of post-Safavid Twelver Shi'ism.¹⁰ Kāshānī's teaching on the imaginal realm may be schematised as follows:¹¹

- 1) That the realm exists.
- 2) That it begins at the convex surface of the ninth sphere.
- 3) It is known by several names: *barzakh*, *hūrqalyā*, the 8th clime beyond Mt. Kāf.
- 4) Figures reflected in clear water and mirrors or any reflecting medium are of the *ʿālam al-mithāl*.
- 5) "It is through this world that the truth is confirmed of the accounts of the Prophet's assumption to Heaven which mention that, in the manner of an eyewitness, he has a vision of the angels and prophets."¹²
- 6) It is in this intermediate world that the Holy Imāms are present when they appear before a dying person, as related in so many traditional accounts.
- 7) This is the world in which the interrogation of the tomb takes place, with its delights and its torments.
- 8) This is the world in which departed spirits will recognise and associate with each other, as has been mentioned in the Traditions. It is where, for example, the believer may visit those closest to him after death.
- 9) The Shi'i doctrine of Return and Resurrection depends upon the reality of this world. Here also would be included the "descent of Jesus", which will occur during the Return.¹³

The master of the Shaykhiyya, or the Kashfiyya as its adherents preferred to be designated, was Shaykh Aḥmad b. Zayn al-Dīn al-Aḥsā'ī. He was born in 1753 in a small village in Bahrain, apparently of pure Arab lineage. His family had been followers of the Shi'i version of orthodoxy for five generations. From his early childhood, it was clear that Shaykh Aḥmad was strongly predisposed to the study of religious texts and traditions. By the age of five, he could read the Qur'ān.

¹⁰ Lewisohn, "Sufism and the School of Iṣfahān", p. 114. Lewisohn is quoting 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Zarrīnkūb, *Dunbalā-yi Justujū-yi dar taṣawwuf-i Īrān* (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr 1362 sh./1983-84, p. 257). For Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī there is absolutely no doubt that Kāshānī's religious vision shares much in common with Ghazālī's, but for Aḥsā'ī, this is no commendation or point of honor. See Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī, *Sharḥ Risāla fi 'Ilm Allāh*, recently published in Muḥammad 'Alī Isbīr, ed., *al-ʿAllāma al-Jalīl Aḥmad bin Zayn al-Dīn al-Aḥsā'ī fi Dā'irat al-Dawr*, Beirut: n.p. 1413/1993, 149-278, specifically 209, 223. Hereafter reference to this work will be as *Risāla*.

¹¹ This summary is taken from his *Kalīmāt-i maknūna*, 70-73. This section has been translated by Corbin in *Spiritual*, 176-179.

¹² Corbin, *Spiritual*, 178, Kāshānī, *Kalīmāt-i maknūna*, 72.

¹³ It should be noted that the Kāshānī's language here is quite striking, he speaks of Jesus' return "after his death" (Kāshānī, *Kalīmāt-i maknūna*, 72). Does this indicate a creative reading of the famous "non-crucifixion" verse (Qur'ān IV : 156) more in line with standard Christianity? If so, there can be no question that this reading relies on the reality of the Imaginal Realm. East and West, in this instance, may be seen to be brought closer together through the agency of the spiritual imagination.

During the remainder of his primary education, he studied Arabic grammar and became exposed to the mystical and theosophical expressions of Ibn 'Arabī and the less well known Ibn Abī Jumhūr (d. after 1501), author of the *Kitāb al-mujlī*.¹⁴ His teachers in his homeland included the Dhahabī Sufi, Quṭb al-Dīn Muḥammad Shīrāzī, through whom he possibly gained his first (negative?) exposure to the work of Ibn 'Arabī.¹⁵ In 1772-3, Shaykh Aḥmad left his home to pursue advanced religious studies in the 'atabāt shrine cities of Kāzīmāyn, Najaf, and Karbalā.¹⁶ In 1209/1794-5, he received his first *ijāza* from the renowned scholar Sayyid Muḥammad Mahdī Ibn Murtaḍā l-Ṭabāṭabā'ī Baḥr al-'Ulūm (d. 1212/1797), and eventually six others from various recognised teachers.¹⁷

In 1793, at the age of forty-six, Shaykh Aḥmad took up residence in Basra, seeking refuge from the Wahhābī attack on his native al-Aḥsā'. From this time on, Shaykh Aḥmad remained in either the region of 'atabāt or in Iran. He travelled widely and gained the respect of the Iranian religious and political elite. From 1807 to 1813, he lived mainly in Yazd. It was during this period that he was invited to visit the ruling Qajar monarch, Fath 'Alī Shāh (r. 1797-1834). In 1813 he moved from Yazd to Kirmānshāh where he lived until 1816. At this time he went to Mecca on pilgrimage after which he returned to the 'atabāt. He eventually moved back to Kirmānshāh where he remained, except for a few visits to other Iranian centers, from 1818 until he departed for another pilgrimage to

¹⁴ See al-Aḥsā'ī, *Risāla*, 226, where Shaykh Aḥmad directly quotes from Ibn Abī Jumhūr, specifically his book *al-Mujlī*, a *ḥadīth* on the authority of the Prophet: "All existents appeared from the bā' of the *basmala* (*zāharat al-mawjūdāt min bā' bismillāh al-raḥmān al-raḥīm*)."
Aḥsā'ī adds that this is a coded symbol (*ramz*) for the Preserved Tablet, *al-lawḥ al-maḥfūz* [cf. Qur'ān, LXXXV : 22]. See Lawson, "Ebn Abī Jumhūr", in: *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 7, New York: Routledge, 662-663 where this *ḥadīth* is discussed. See now, Sabine Schmidtke, *Theologie, Philosophie und Mystik im zwölfterschiitischen Islam des 9./15. Jahrhunderts: die Gedankenwelten des Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsā'īs (um 838/1434-35-nach 906/1501)*, Leiden: Brill 2000, 30-31, note 93, for references to other discussions of traces of Ibn Abī Jumhūr's influence on Shaykh Aḥmad, such as those in works by Murtaḍā Mudarrisi Chahārdīhi, Corbin, Juan Ricardo I. Cole and Idris Samawi Hamid. The similarities between several specific formulations in *al-Mujlī* to the language of the writings of both al-Aḥsā'ī and Sayyid Kāzīm Rashtī (d. 1259/1843) are presented in Todd Lawson, *The Qur'ān Commentary of Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad Shīrāzī, the Bab*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, [forthcoming in revised form as *Islamic Apocalyptic: the Literary Beginnings of the Babi Movement*, London: Routledge] McGill University 1987, 67, 118-120, 189-191, 205-206, 332. See also Vahid Rafati, *The Development of Shaykhī Thought in Shī'ī Islam*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of California Los Angeles 1979, 22, 40.

¹⁵ Rafati, "Development", 40, although he could have become acquainted with him through the works of Ibn Abī Jumhūr.

¹⁶ Dennis MacEoin, *From Shaykhism to Bābism: A Study in Charismatic Renewal in Shī'ī Islam*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge University 1979, 58 citing Sayyid Kāzīm Rashtī, *Dalīl al-mutaḥayyarīn*, n.p.: n.p. 1276/1859-60, 12.

¹⁷ For the names of those who issued the several *ijāzāt* to Shaykh Aḥmad see Rafati, "Development", 41. See also the relevant chapters in Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: the Making of the Babi Movement in Iran 1844-1850*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press 1989, and MacEoin, "Charismatic".

Mecca. It was during this journey that Shaykh Aḥmad died, not far from Mecca, in 1241/1826. He was buried in the Baqī' cemetery in Medina.¹⁸

For Aḥsā'ī, who would appear to subscribe to most if not all of the points listed above as constituting Kāshānī's teaching, the imaginal realm is further distinguished by its place in an overall cosmic design. Here one of Aḥsā'ī's more distinctive doctrines comes into play. In order to appreciate this doctrine and the implications it has for the present discussion, we must digress briefly. The doctrine is not found explicitly articulated in the passages selected for Corbin's *Spiritual Body*, but among the many places where it is expressed, one is particularly suited to the present discussion. This would be Aḥsā'ī's prolonged critique and unequivocal condemnation of Kāshānī's position on the topic of God's knowledge, or more accurately God's knowing.¹⁹

Aḥsā'ī's unrelenting rejection of Kāshānī's attachment to *waḥdat al-wujūd* is perhaps the most prominent feature of his critique. *Waḥdat al-wujūd*, existential monism, is understood by him to violate the utterly transcendent essence (*dhāt*) of God. This perhaps reflects faithfully a strong wariness – particularly amongst the Shi'a of the 'atabāt – about common interpretations of *waḥdat al-wujūd* that were seen as tainting the otherwise laudable – if not indispensable œuvre of Fayḍ al-Kāshānī.²⁰ Aḥsā'ī quotes as follows against those who profess *waḥdat al-wujūd*: "It is rather as our Imām, the Commander of the Faithful, a.s., has said: 'The created thing ends only in its likeness and the resort of the quest is only in its likeness. The road [to the Essence] is forever blocked, and the search for it is eternally barred.'"²¹

According to Aḥsā'ī, both Kāshānī and his teacher Mullā Ṣadrā had strayed from the true teachings of religion in that they had allowed the transcendence of the divine essence to be violated. For Aḥsā'ī, the cosmos or creation is, by very definition, everything other than God.

Here we must direct attention to a speculation touching upon the nature of Aḥsā'ī's spiritual and intellectual genealogy made by Hermann Landolt over

¹⁸ Rafati, "Development", 44-45. According to Amanat, *Resurrection*, 67, Aḥsā'ī's departure from Iran and 'atabāt was precipitated by the enmity of a growing number of ranking Shi'i ulama.

¹⁹ See above note 10 for the bibliographic details for this work, *Risāla fi 'ilm Allāh*. Corbin does not refer to this work in his *Spiritual Body*. He characterizes Aḥsā'ī's originality as being equally at odds with the philosophers and the theologians (Corbin, *Spiritual*, 324, n. 57). What we are emphasizing here is that, on the basis of such texts as *Risāla fi 'ilm Allāh* (and passages of Aḥsā'ī's *Sharḥ ḥikmat 'arshiyya* not highlighted by Corbin in his *Spiritual Body*) we see that for Aḥsā'ī, at least, the gulf separating him and Kāshānī (and his master) was unbridgeable.

²⁰ Idris Samawi Hamid, *The Metaphysics and Cosmology of Process According to Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī: Critical Edition, Translation and Analysis of "Observations in Wisdom"*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, State University of New York at Buffalo 1998, 22, 30-31.

²¹ al-Aḥsā'ī, *Risāla*, 217. Incidentally, this happens to be a suggestive Arabic paraphrase of the Greek idea contained in the word *aporia* (i.e. "path strewn with obstacles").

thirty years ago. Landolt observed an intriguing similarity between the influential Iranian Sufi, 'Alā l-Dawla Simnānī (d.1336) and Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī: both heavily criticised *waḥdat al-wujūd* and sought to replace it with a dynamic view of the divine Act (*fi'l*), even as both were accused of having misunderstood *waḥdat al-wujūd* in the first place. In some ways, it is even more suggestive that both shared, as Landolt points out, similar views about a "subtle body".²² It may be that Aḥsā'ī was directly influenced by Simnānī on these characteristic subjects.²³ It may be that both authors, one from the 14th, the other from the 19th centuries were ultimately indebted to the Ismā'īlī tradition for their ontological views, since they appear to have so much in common with them. It has recently been observed that "the figures who come closest to prefiguring Simnānī's cosmological scheme are the Ismā'īlī philosophers [...] as-Sijistānī (d. between 996 and 1003) and Ḥāmid al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. after 1020)."²⁴ Simnānī's distinctive attachment to the Family of the Prophet²⁵ may represent nothing more than *tashayyū' ḥasan* (good Shi'ism). Could it be that the same theological elan that characterised so much of Simnānī's influential legacy and great popularity contributed to Aḥsā'ī's fall from grace as the "philosopher of the age"?

²² Hermann Landolt, "Der Briefwechsel zwischen Kāshānī und Simnānī über Waḥdat al-Wuḡūd", in: *Der Islam* 50 (1973), 29-81, esp. 62-63. See also Hermann Landolt, "Simnānī on Waḥdat al-Wujūd", in: *Collected Papers on Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism*, Mehdi Moḥaghegh and Hermann Landolt, eds., Tehran: The Institute of Islamic Studies McGill University, Tehran Branch 1971, 91-114, esp. 109-110. In 1985 Josef van Ess, "'Alā-al-Dawla Semnānī", in: *Encyclopedia Iranica*, vol. 1, London-New York: Routledge-Kegan Paul, 774b-77a, citing Landolt, discussed further this problem. Henry Corbin, *En Islam iranien: Aspects spirituels et philosophiques*, 4 vols., Paris: Gallimard 1971-1972, vol. 4, 102, n. 133 compares Simnānī's *jism maḥshūr* with Ṣadrā's. Details on Simnānī's idea of the resurrection body in Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, vol. 3, 312-318.

²³ Even though the original sources are now better accessible than they were thirty years ago, still no one it seems has taken up Landolt's original suggestion to pursue a comparative study of terminology and thought shared by Simnānī and the Shaykhis (Landolt, "Der Briefwechsel", 63). One exception may be noticed here, although there is no indication in his remarks that he is aware of Landolt's much earlier work: Hamid, *Metaphysics*, 49, points out that although it is difficult to determine any direct influence, Aḥsā'ī approvingly quotes a series of ontological technical terms from Simnānī in the course of his commentary on the *'Arshiyya*. This statement of Hamid's seems, on the face of it, to be self-contradictory.

²⁴ Jamal J. Elias, *The Throne Carrier of God: the Life and Thought of 'Alā ad-dawla as-Simnānī*, Albany: State University of New York Press 1995, 153-154.

²⁵ His veneration of the *ahl al-kiswā*, his spiritual pedigree through the Imams from 'Alī b. Riḍā to the Prophet (skipping al-Ḥasan Ibn 'Alī!), his citation of the *Nahj al-balāgha*, certainly do not need to mean more than this. Cf. Hartwig Cordt, *Die Sitzungen des 'Alā ad-Dawla as-Simnānī*, Zurich: Juris 1977, 232-239. That one of his students, Shaykh Khalīfa Māzandarānī, is the founder of the radical Shi'ī Sarbadārī movement may mean nothing in this context but is nonetheless an interesting fact. See Elias, *Throne*, 51-53. A focused study on the question of Simnānī's real attitude to Shi'ism is perhaps needed. An earlier discussion is Marijan Molé, "Les Kubrawiya entre sunnisme et shiisme aux huitième et neuvième siècles de l'hégire", *Revue des Études Islamiques* 29 (1961), 61-142.

However this may be, when Aḥsā'ī says that the *‘ālam al-mithāl* occurs between the divine Acting (*fi'l*) and the Acted Upon (*maf'ūl*),²⁶ his language is indicative of the wide gulf he saw separating him and Kāshānī. That the imaginal realm represents a “transitional stage” between *fi'l* and *maf'ūl* is quite characteristic of Aḥsā'ī's thought. He raises this and related points repeatedly during his many condemnations of *waḥdat al-wujūd* and those, like Kāshānī, who propagate it. The point to be made by drawing attention to this incompatibility is to underscore the fact that in the East, unlike the West, the imaginal realm was such an unquestioned feature of religion and philosophy that even two such otherwise incompatible religious types had no choice but to uphold it.

It is also interesting to observe that both Kāshānī and Aḥsā'ī see the imaginal realm as the world where meetings with the Hidden Imām and the rest of the Fourteen Pure Ones occur. Kāshānī says: “It is in this intermediate world that the Holy Imams are present when they appear before a dying person, as related in so many traditional accounts.”²⁷ But note that he does not speak about a person visiting the Imams apart from the circumstances of morbidity. In contrast, Shaykh Aḥmad speaks frequently about an ecstatic (*ḥāl*) encounter with the Imams in the imaginal realm. It was in this world that Shaykh Aḥmad received his ability to “understand” directly from the Imams themselves.²⁸ The reality of the imaginal realm for him is reflected in the strength of his own considerable certitude, whether applied to his reading of the Qurʾān or *akhbār* (statements in *ḥadīth* form that are traced to one of the 14 *chahārdah maʿṣūmāt*, or Sinless Ones – Muhammad, his daughter Fāṭima and the 12 Imams) or his critique of what he considered to be erroneous philosophical speculations. The source of this certitude is experiential – not logical²⁹ – namely, the *‘ālam al-mithāl* and his encounters with it. Such a function appears to be absent in Kāshānī's schema. That is to say, on the basis of the brief text we have on the topic, as well as scattered references in his other writings, Kāshānī does not speak of the *‘ālam al-mithāl* in the context of a type of ecstasy or spiritual encounter with the Imām resulting from individual spiritual discipline, *sulūk*.³⁰

For Aḥsā'ī, the imaginal realm was also an essential stage in the development of the individual believer's “resurrection body”. He speaks about this process in dizzying detail, whereas Kāshānī speaks only in very brief and general terms about the same problem in *Kalimāt-i maknūna*. It may be, of course, that Kāshānī's teachings about the imaginal realm represent in this instance a foundation for the

²⁶ al-Aḥsā'ī, *Risāla*, 274-275.

²⁷ Kāshānī, *Kalimāt-i maknūna*, 72.

²⁸ Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī, *Sirat al-shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī*, Husayn 'Alī, ed., Maḥfūz, Baghdad: Maṭba'at al-Ma'ārif 1957/1372, 14-17.

²⁹ See Simnānī's dismissal of logic, noted in Landolt, “Simnānī”, 96.

³⁰ In addition to Kāshānī, *Kalimāt-i maknūna*, cf. his *Ilm al-yaqīn fi uṣūl al-dīn*, 2 vols., Muḥsin Bīdārfar, ed., Qum: Bīdār 1418/1997-98, vol. 2, 1060-1088.

later, very complex theories of Aḥsā'ī.³¹ In such a case, Aḥsā'ī's theories may represent an example of "scientific progress", building upon, and working out the details of the insights, however general, of earlier scholars and making reasonable, by recourse to alchemy and appropriate support from the Qur'ān and *akhbār*, such categorical statements as the one by Kāshānī that the imaginal realm is where spirits are embodied and bodies are spiritualised.³² It falls to Aḥsā'ī to offer the highly complex and somewhat baroque array of details explaining the operation left mysterious by Kāshānī, even though they both agree that this is where Resurrection truly occurs.

The main point here is that the Resurrection body is "made" by the believer as a result of his moral and ethical decisions and actions, his response to the primordial covenant and obedience to the *sharī'at*. The example given by Aḥsā'ī, based on a specific theme found in the Qur'ān and *akhbār*, is of the individual who was created "according to what he was" at the time of the covenant (Qur'ān, VII : 172). In many cases, such individuals may have outwardly responded correctly to the divine question: "Am I not your Lord?", but inwardly their response was insufficient. The result, according to Aḥsā'ī, is that:

[A]t the very moment when his secret thought was contradicting his answer, his "clay", that is, the consubstantial matter of his being, was molded by his thought in the likeness of an animal [...] So when he descended to this world, [...]and when he had consummated his choice by repetition and by applying his effort to what he had already undertaken in the world of seminal reasons [*‘ālam al-dharr*] what had existed in his secret thoughts was revealed in the light of day and he manifested the works of his animal nature. That is also why he is resurrected in the animal state.³³

Aḥsā'ī's certitude that he understood the nature of God's knowledge and knowing as perfectly as possible in this sub-lunar realm was utterly unshakeable, even though (or perhaps because) such certitude is based ultimately on the aporia of

³¹ Certainly it is the case that many of these details are articulated in dialogue with Kāshānī's teacher, Mullā Ṣadrā. See the excerpts from Aḥsā'ī's *Sharḥ ḥikmat al-‘arshiyya*, translated in Corbin, *Spiritual*, 203-221. It was in connection with his critique of the *‘Arshiyya*, for example, that charges of Aḥsā'ī's lack of philosophical sophistication were perhaps first voiced and recorded. See, for example, the remarks quoted from Mullā ‘Alī l-Nūrī in Sayyid Muḥsin al-Amīn al-Ḥusaynī l-‘Āmilī, *A‘yān al-Shī‘a*, 11 vols., Beirut: Dār al-Ta‘āruf, 1406/1985-86, vol. 2, 591. For an extensive and invaluable study of this critique see Henry Corbin, *Mollā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī (980/1572-1050/1640) Le livre des pénétrations métaphysiques (Kitāb al-Mashā‘ir)* Texte arabe publié avec la version persane de Badi‘ol-Molk Mirzā ‘Emad-oddawleh, traduction française et annotations, Tehran – Paris: Institut Français d'Iranologie de Téhéran & Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient A. Maisonneuve 1964) [reprinted Paris: Lagrasse 1981 without the Arabic and Persian texts] the reference here is to the original edition], s.v. index "Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī (Shaykh)". For Corbin, the accusations against Shaykh Ahmad are beneath contempt. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, vol. 4, 212-213.

³² Kāshānī, *Kalimāt-i makhnūna*, 71. As Kāshānī says: "Through and in this world, ways of being and moral behaviour are personalized, and supersensory realities are manifested in the forms and figures with which they symbolize" (see Corbin, *Spiritual*, 177).

³³ Corbin, *Spiritual*, 220, extract from Aḥsā'ī's *Sharḥ ḥikmat al-‘arshiyya*.

God's absolute unknowable Essence.³⁴ An example of the certitude I am speaking of is exemplified in Shaykh Aḥmad's response to those who charged him with relying upon strange and unsound *akhbār* to support his ideas. He serenely responded that he could distinguish a sound *ḥadīth* from a weak one through its "fragrance".³⁵ Such a response ultimately implies a rejection of *taqlīd* which is then not merely "imitation" but "blind imitation", in matters religious.³⁶

For Aḥsā'ī, the imaginal realm would seem to be more a part of a process while for Kāshānī it is more of a place. This difference is in harmony with their respective and profoundly conflicting views on ontology. If we take the similar differences noted by Landolt in Simnānī's critique of Ibn 'Arabī as a model, for Kāshānī, absolute existence is "static" being, while for Aḥsā'ī, absolute existence is "dynamic" – God's Act, or more accurately, God's Acting. Such Acting issues somehow from the divine essence which remains separate, inaccessible and utterly ineffable. One of the ways in which Aḥsā'ī preserved this essence was through a complicated theory of temporal modes. In descending order, these are called *azal*, *sarmad*, *dahr* and *zamān*. The first is identified with the divine essence, and there is no more to be said. From this, however, issues the other three temporal stages. While there is no space here to explore this in any detail, it is interesting to note that while Aḥsā'ī locates the imaginal realm between the cosmogonic stages of *fi'l* and *ma'fūl*, he also says that it is located between *dahr* and *zamān*.³⁷ Such speculations also seem to be absent from Kāshānī's work. And such details also empha-

³⁴ See, e.g., Henry Corbin, *Le paradoxe du monothéisme*, Paris: Editions de l'Herne 1981; Corbin has elsewhere quoted Shaykh Aḥmad's own summation of the existential predicament as follows: "C'est pourquoi, dit Shaykh Ahmad, c'est bien vers l'Essence inaccessible que l'homme se tourne, bien qu'à tout jamais il ne puisse la trouver; et cependant il ne cesse de la trouver, alors même qu'à tout jamais elle lui reste inaccessible". (Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, vol. 1, 194).

³⁵ Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, vol. 4, 259.

³⁶ So vehement was his repudiation of *taqlīd* that several scholars have seen him as a democrat, hardly beyond the domain of "secular humanism". Alessandro Bausani, *Religion in Iran: from Zoroaster to Baha'ullah* [originally published as *Persia religiosa da Zaratustra a Bahā'u'llāh*, Milan: Il Saggiatore 1959], New York: Bibliotheca Persica Press 2000, 340-34, offers an alternate characterization: "Generally speaking, Shaikhism contains a stronger theological "impetus" and is more purely "religious" than philosophers such as Mullā Ṣadrā were. Iqbal's statement that Shaikh Aḥmad was an enthusiastic reader of Mullā Ṣadrā's works is based on a misunderstanding: the Shaikhs studied Mullā Ṣadrā but did not always approve of what he said; in fact, on some points (for example questions concerning the knowledge of God) they returned to less philosophical and more religious positions. If the complex theological position of the Shaikhs could be summed up in a few words I would say that it is based on two points, one deeply religious and the other with rational tendencies to symbolic explanations (which sometimes go beyond the realistic symbolism of Ṣadrā) to enter into a truly rationalist allegory of the miraculous aspect of traditional theological legends. Everything is easily resolved by transposing the historical reality of the facts of revelation onto metahistorical planes (Muḥammad, 'Alī, etc. = First Creature): it is here, and not in a humanistic rationalism, that the secret of Shaikhī symbolism lies."

³⁷ al-Aḥsā'ī, *Risāla*, 274.



sise the idea of process “through” time over place “in” space. Ultimately, Aḥsā'ī's critique of *waḥdat al-wujūd* and its later theoreticians such as Fayḍ Kāshānī is more purely experiential and theological than it is philosophical.

In closing this brief comparison of two modern Shi'ī theoreticians of the world of images, I would like to revisit the question of the absence of the imaginal realm from serious philosophical discourse and speculation in the West. Corbin traced this absence to the rejection of Avicennan angelology by Averroes, leaving only two, instead of three, worlds: the sensible and the intellectual. Rahman suggested, on the other hand, that one of the factors determining the extended life of the imaginal realm in the East was that thinkers and Sufis “in a milieu of political uncertainty, socioeconomic imbalance, and general external deterioration – sought refuge in a realm that was more satisfying and certainly more liquid and amenable to imaginative powers.”³⁸

For those who did maintain its ontic (i.e. scientific, philosophic) reality, however, it remained possible also to maintain the validity of such otherwise “irrational” religious doctrines as bodily resurrection, the ascension of the prophet and so on. Post-Enlightenment European religious discourse, as we know, wasted no time in demonstrating the falseness, not to mention the “spiritually” pernicious nature, of such beliefs. On the other hand, the Imagination itself remained of interest to certain rare thinkers in psychology (Jung), philosophy (Langer) and art (Blake, et al.). It is as if in the West the imaginative realm also somehow became more real than what the medieval scholars call the sensible realm. But it also became fully “secularised”. Apart from such Westerners as Swedenborg and Blake, the major religious discussions ignored the imaginal realm, transferring whatever interest there might have been to areas of hermeneutics and philology, among other of the auxiliary theological sciences. The imaginal realm continues to have virtually no place in “serious” philosophical discussions. Quite to the contrary, recent condemnations by philosophers of “the image” have acquired the features of a near-phobic polemic:

Thus perhaps at stake has always been the murderous capacity of images, murderers of the real, murderers of their own model, as the Byzantine icons could murder the divine identity. To this murderous capacity is opposed the dialectical capacity of representations as a visible and intelligible mediation of the Real. All of Western faith and good faith was engaged in this wager on representation: That a sign could refer to the depth of meaning, that a sign could exchange for meaning, and that something could guarantee this exchange – God, of course. But what if God himself can be simulated, that is to say, reduced to the signs which attest his existence? Then the whole system becomes weightless, it is no longer anything but a gigantic simulacrum – not unreal, but a simulacrum, never again exchanging for what is real, but exchanging in itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference. [...]

³⁸ Rahman, “Dream”, 419. He also suggests here that the suppression of the arts in the East may be partly responsible.

This would be the successive phases of the image:
 it is the reflection of a basic reality.
 it masks and perverts a basic reality.
 it masks the absence of a basic reality.
 it bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum.³⁹

One imagines that Corbin himself might have predicted such extreme invective against the image. On the other hand, we occasionally find a validation of the imaginal in contemporary intellectual discourse. Thus Castoriadis:

[P]hilosophers almost always start by saying: "I want to see what being is, what reality is. Now, here is a table; what does this table show to me as characteristic of a real being?" No philosopher ever started by saying: "I want to see what being is, what reality is. Now, here is my memory of my dream of last night; what does this show me as characteristic of a real being?" No philosopher ever starts by saying "Let the Requiem of Mozart be a paradigm of being", and seeing in the physical world a deficient mode of being, instead of looking at things the other way around, instead of seeing in the imaginary, i.e., human mode of existence, a deficient or secondary mode of being.⁴⁰

Needless to say, the philosophers mentioned here are not our Eastern sages. Yet this passage seems quite remarkable as an example of the transposition, cum secularisation, of the ideas we have been speaking about.

The world today is in serious travail, this no one denies. Those who value the realm of the imaginal tend to agree that one of the reasons for our current predicament is precisely the denial of that world. Here it is impossible to forbear mentioning that of the numerous methods of entering or encountering the imaginal realm discussed by our authors (i.e., the dream, visions, spiritual ecstasy) there is one that seems to stand out as particularly emblematic for us, whether in the East or the West. Most of our Eastern theoreticians of the imaginal realm agree that one of the most ready means of encounter is none other than pure clear water, on whose luminous surface images from that realm may appear to us as guides and teachers. Thus we are asked to bear in mind that while the earth's most valuable natural resource is absolutely necessary for biological life, it is equally necessary for the life of the soul. Indeed, it is at the "problem" of water where soul and body meet today. It may therefore be fitting to close with a few words from one of the more serious modern students and theoreticians of the imagination, the American poet Wallace Stevens (1879-1955) who long ago told

³⁹ Jean Baudrillard, "The Evil Demon of Images and the Precession of Simulacra", in: *Post-modernism: A Reader*, Thomas Docherty, ed., New York: Columbia University Press 1993, 194.

⁴⁰ Cornelius Castoriadis, "The Imaginary Creation in the Social Historical Domain", in: *Disorder and Order: Proceedings of the Stanford International Symposium (Sept. 14-16, 1981)*, Edward P. Livingston, ed., Saratoga: Anma Libri 1984, 146-161, this is from p. 148. See also Cornelius Castoriadis, *World in Fragments: Writings on Politics, Society, Psychoanalysis, and the Imagination*, David Ames Curtis, ed. and trans., Stanford, California: Stanford University Press 1997 [originally published as *Les carrefours du labyrinthe, tome 3: le monde morcelé* Paris: Seuil 1990].

us that the “imagination is the power that enables us to perceive the normal in the abnormal, the opposite of chaos in chaos.”⁴¹ His poem, entitled “Exercise for Professor X”⁴² was written between the years 1913-15 and leaves us with the congenial images of water and light – and maybe even hope.

I see a camel in my mind.
 I do not say to myself, in English,
 “There is a camel.”
 I do not talk to myself.
 On the contrary, I watch
 And a camel passes in my mind.
 This might happen to a Persian.
 My mind and a Persian’s
 Are as much alike, then,
 As moonlight on the Atlantic
 Is like moonlight on the Pacific.

⁴¹ Wallace Stevens, chap. “Imagination as Value”, *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination*, New York: Knopf 1951, 153. It is perhaps unnecessary to observe that neither of our eastern authors would have much patience with such modern ideas as chaos.

⁴² Wallace Stevens, *Collected Poetry and Prose*, New York: Library of America 1997, 519.

The *qutb* as Special Representative of the Hidden Imam: The Conflation of Shi'i and Sufi *Vilāyat* in the Ni'matullāhī Order¹

Oliver Scharbrodt

Introduction:

Sources of Religious Authority in late 18th Century Shi'ism

The question of who exercises spiritual and secular authority in the time of the occultation of the Hidden Imam has occupied Twelver Shi'i theological discourse since the 12th Imam went into hiding after the death of his father in 874CE. While political authority was held by the secular rulers, Shi'i ulama developed the notion of their general deputyship (*al-niyāba al-'amma*). In their collectivity, the class of the learned ones in Shi'ism act as the delegates of the Hidden Imam, and their rulings – although not infallible – provide guidance for the Shi'a until the 12th Imam returns from his occultation. With the supremacy of the *uṣūlī* school, established at the end of the 18th century, the ulama gained further theoretical justification for assuming the collective deputyship of the Hidden Imam. In the course of the 19th century, the *uṣūlī* conception of the role of the ulama would also provide a foundation for their more active role in the political and social life of Iran.² The *uṣūlī* school divides the Shi'a community into *mujtahid* who are entitled to pursue independent *ijtihād* and other ulama and laymen who are obliged to follow a *mujtahid* and practice *taqlīd* and hence provided the *mujtahid* with a superior position in society.³ In some sense, the *uṣūlī* ulama routinised the Imam's charismatic authority and thereby challenged groups within Shi'i Islam favoring

¹ I would like to express my gratitude to Dr Leonard Lewisohn for his constant support and encouragement of my research on the Ni'matullāhī Order. I would also like to thank the Nimatullahi Sufi Center in New York City for getting hold of a copy of Muḥaffar 'Alī Shāh's *Majma' al-Biḥār*.

² For the socio-political role of the Shi'i ulama in 19th century Iran see Hamid Algar, *Religion and State in Iran, 1785-1906: The Role of the Ulama in the Qajar Period*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1969. See also Nikki R. Keddie, "The Roots of the Ulama's Power in Modern Iran", *Studia Islamica* 29 (1969), 31-53.

³ For the emergence of the Shi'i concept of *ijtihād* see Norman Calder, "Doubt and Prerogative: The Emergence of the Imāmī Shi'i Theory of Ijtihād", *Studia Islamica* 70 (1980), 57-78. On the rise of the *uṣūlī* school see Juan R. Cole, "Shi'i Clerics in Iraq and Iran, 1722-1780: The Akhbārī-Uṣūlī Conflict Reconsidered", *Iranian Studies* 18 (1985), 3-34, and Andrew J. Newman, "The Nature of the Akhbārī Uṣūlī Dispute in Late Safawid Iran. Part one", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 55 (1992), 22-51.

more charismatic conceptions of religious authority.⁴ Since the ulama acted as the Imam's vicegerents the appearance of the Hidden Imam could be indefinitely delayed so that there was no need of an individual channel of communication between the Imam and his followers. As ulama were legal scholars, they replaced the stress on esoteric knowledge and mystical initiation with proper training in jurisprudence.⁵

At the time of the consolidation of the *uṣūlī* school and its monopoly in defining orthodoxy, Sufism experienced a revival in Iran. Within Sufism and its notion of sainthood (*vilāyat*) one finds the most pervasive conception of charismatic authority which managed to manifest itself beyond sectarian boundaries in both Sunni and Shi'i Islam. While originally Shi'ism and Sufism shared a certain affinity with their common stress on divine guidance via charismatic authority and their allegorical interpretation of scripture, the establishment of the Safavid dynasty in Iran and the rise of the ulama as sole sources of religious authority in official Iranian Shi'ism led to the marginalisation of Sufism in its organised form.⁶ Although some Shi'i ulama were also affiliated to Sufi orders, they constituted a minority among the mainstream of clerics with an explicit anti-Sufi stance like Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī (1627-1700), one of the most important Safavid clerics. While the Safavid Shahs saw in Sufi saints and their orders a potential source for political dissent given the Sufi background of the Safavid dynasty itself, the Shi'i ulama considered Sufis to compete with the charismatic authority of the Imams by making claims to divine inspiration and to challenge the religious monopoly of the ulama in defining orthodoxy.⁷

⁴ See for instance the Shaykhī School with its more charismatic conception of religious authority within a Twelver Shi'i context: Muhammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, "Une absence remplie de presences: Herméneutiques de l'occultation chez les Shaykhiyya (Aspects de l'imamologie duodécimaine VII)", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 64 (2001), 1-18 (English version: Muhammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, "An Absence filled with Presences: Shaykhiyya Hermeneutics of the Occultation", in: *The Twelver Shia in Modern Times. Religious Culture & Political History*, Rainer Brunner and Werner Ende, eds., Leiden: Brill, 2001, 38-57); Juan R. I. Cole, "Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i on the Sources of Religious Authority", in: *The Most Learned of the Shi'a: The Institution of the Marja' Taqlid*, Linda Walbridge, ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press 2001, 82-93; Denis Hermann, "Quelques remarques à propos de l'interprétation du sens du *rokn-e rābe'* chez Mohammad Bāqer Hamadānī, le fondateur de l'école shaykhī hamadānī", *Journal Asiatique* 295 (2007), 461-490.

⁵ Said A. Arjomand, "Introduction: Shi'ism, Authority, and Political Culture", in: *Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism*, idem, ed., Albany: State University of New York Press 1988, 4-6. See also John Cooper, "Allāma al-Hilli on the Imamate and Ijtihād", in: *ibid.*, 240-249.

⁶ Said A. Arjomand, "Religious Extremism (*Ghuluww*), Sufism and Sunnism in Safavid Iran: 1501-1722", *Journal of Asian History* 15 (1981), 10-24.

⁷ Mangol Bayat, "Anti-Sufism in Qajar Iran", in: *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*, Frederick de Jong and Bernd Radtke, eds., Leiden: Brill 1999, 626-627.

The Sufi revival was initiated by the arrival of Ma'šūm 'Alī Shāh (d. 1209/1796) from India in 1770 who re-established the Ni'matullāhī Order in Iran.⁸ Despite the hostility of most ulama and the anti-Sufi policies of the early Qajar rulers, the order managed to spread around the country and found particular appeal among the urban elite and intelligentsia and aristocratic circles.⁹ After the revival of the Ni'matullāhī Order in Iran in the late 18th century, its adherents developed a different notion of religious authority in the time of occultation. The Ni'matullāhī opposed the general deputyship of the ulama. For them, the *qutb* (pole), the spiritual and secular leader of the order, is in contact with the Hidden Imam and receives direct communications from him. He, therefore, is considered to be his special deputy (*nā'ib-i khāṣṣ*). This paper will investigate the conflation of Sufi sainthood (*vilāyat*) with the question of Imamic deputyship in the religious discourse of Ni'matullāhī Sufis in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. It will discuss how the Sufi understanding of sainthood was combined with Shi'i theological concerns in order to develop an alternative model of religious authority against the claim of the Shi'i ulama to be the sole sources for religious guidance for the believers. Sufi treatises by several leading figures of the order from the late 18th and early 19th centuries are examined in order to illustrate how the Ni'matullāhī gave Sufi *vilāyat* a particular Shi'i colouring. Very little research has been undertaken so far on the works of those Ni'matullāhīs who played an important role in re-establishing the order in Iran in the first half of the 19th century.

*The Ni'matullāhī Revival in late 18th Century Iran:
the Activities of Ma'šūm 'Alī Shāh and Nūr 'Alī Shāh (d. 1211/1797)*

The Ni'matullāhī Order traces its origins back to Shāh Ni'matullāh who was born in 1331 into a family of sayyids in Aleppo. His mother was of Iranian origin and therefore he was brought up in a primarily Persian-speaking household.¹⁰ He studied *kalām* under the famous Sunni theologian 'Aḍud al-Dīn al-Ījī (d. 1355)¹¹ in

⁸ For a discussion of the modern history of Sufism in Iran see Leonard Lewisohn, "An Introduction to the History of Modern Persian Sufism, Part I: The Ni'matullāhī Order: Persecution, Revival and Schism", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 61 (1998), 437-464 and "An Introduction to the History of Modern Persian Sufism, Part II: A Socio-cultural Profile, from the Dhahabī Revival to the present Day", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 62 (1999), 36-59.

⁹ Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran, 1844-1850*, Ithaca – London: Cornell University Press 1989, 78.

¹⁰ Hamid Algar, "Ni'mat-Allāhiyya", in: *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., vol. 8, Leiden: Brill 1993, 45.

¹¹ 'Aḍud al-Dīn al-Ījī (ca. 680/1281-757/1355) was a Shāfi'i jurist and Ash'ari theologian whose major theological work *Aḡa'id al-Adudiyya* is still used as a textbook in *kalām* within Sunni *madrasas*. See Josef van Ess, "al-Ījī", in: *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., vol. 3, Leiden: Brill 1979, 1022; Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Literatur*, 2nd ed., vol. 2, Leiden: Brill 1949, 267 and Supplement vol. 2, Leiden: Brill 1938, 287. See also William

Shiraz and after performing the pilgrimage to Mecca stayed there for seven years. During that time, he joined the Sufi circle of Shaykh ‘Abd Allāh al-Yāfi‘ī (d. 1366-67) who was the leader of the Ma‘rūfiyya Order – a Sufi order claiming its descent from Ma‘rūf Karkhī (d. 815-6), a Sufi who was initiated by the 8th Imam al-Riḍā and to whom all of the Shi‘i orders trace back their origins.¹² After traveling to Egypt and Transoxania, Shāh Ni‘matullāh finally settled in Iran, first in Kerman and finally in the village of Māhān close to Kerman where he died some time between 1417 and 1437. Already during his sojourns in Transoxania, he appeared as a *murshid* and gathered students around him who would form the nucleus of the future Ni‘matullāhi Order.

In terms of its sectarian identity, the order had a Sunni orientation in the time of Shāh Ni‘matullāh and his immediate successors. Shāh Ni‘matullāh was trained in Shāfi‘ī law and Sunni theology and quoted *ḥadīth* of Abū Ḥurayra which would be most uncommon for a Shi‘i.¹³ Either his Sufi order – as many other orders in Iran in this period¹⁴ – gradually adopted a stronger Shi‘i orientation, enhanced by the Sufi veneration of the *abl al-bayt*, or the order just adopted a Shi‘i identity when the Safavids came to power in Iran and forced all Sufi orders in their empire to adopt Twelver Shi‘ism as their official sectarian affiliation in order to avoid persecutions.¹⁵

Already Shāh Ni‘matullāh received an invitation by the Bahmanid ruler of the Deccan in India to settle in his kingdom. Aḥmad Shāh Bahmān (d. 1436) was ini-

Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, New Brunswick, N.J.: Aldine Transaction 2009, 153; Louis Gardet and M. M. Anawati, *Introduction à la théologie musulmane*, Paris: J. Vrin 1948, 165-169; Josef van Ess, *Die Erkenntnislehre des ‘Aḍudaddīn al-Īlī*, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner 1966.

¹² Javad Nurbakhsh, “The Nimatullahi”, in: *Islamic Spirituality: Manifestations*, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ed., New York: Crossroads 1991, 144-146. The late Javad Nurbakhsh (1927-2008), until his death the *qutb* (pole) of the Munavvar ‘Alī Shāhī (also known as Dhur Riyasatayn) branch of the Ni‘matullāhi Order, played a central role in making many Ni‘matullāhi manuscripts available through his own publishing house. The publishing house *Intishārāt-i Khānaqāh-i Ni‘mat Allāhī* was established in the late 1950s in order to publish Ni‘matullāhi manuscripts and other Sufi writings in Persian. See Lewisohn, “Modern Persian Sufism I”, 459. Leaving Iran for the USA and later United Kingdom in 1979, Nurbakhsh established several *khānaqāh* of his order in the West as well. See Leonard Lewisohn, “Persian Sufism in the Contemporary West: Reflections on the Ni‘matullahi Diaspora”, in: Jamal Malik and John Hinnells, eds., *Sufism in the West*, London: Routledge 2006, 49-70.

¹³ Algar, “Ni‘mat-Allāhiyya”, 45.

¹⁴ Concerning the Shi‘itisation of Sunni Sufi orders in Iran during the pre-Safavid period see Marijan Mole, “Les Kubrawiyya entre Sunnisme et Shiisme aux huitième et neuvième siècles de l’hégire”, *Revue des Etudes Islamiques* 29 (1961), 61-142, and Annemarie Schimmel, “The Ornament of Saints: the Religious Situation in Pre-Safavid Times”, *Iranian Studies* 7 (1974), 88-111. Concerning the Shi‘itisation of the Safavid Order itself see Michel M. Mazzaoui, *The Origins of the Safavids, Shi‘ism, Sufism, and the Ghulat*, Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1972.

¹⁵ Terry Graham, “The Ni‘matullahi Order Under Safavid Suppression and in Indian Exile”, in: *The Heritage of Sufism, Vol. III: Late Classical Persianate Sufism (1501-1750): the Safavid and Mughal Period*, Leonard Lewisohn, ed., Oxford: Oneworld 1999, 166.

tially a follower of the Chishtiyya Order and hoped to find in Shāh Ni'matullāh a saint who would provide spiritual patronage to his secular rule.¹⁶ However, Shāh Ni'matullāh did not relocate to the Deccan and decided to stay in Māhān. The invitation was later extended to his son and successor Shāh Khalil Allāh (d. 1455-56) who moved the centre of the order from Iran to India between 1433 and 1435, where it would remain for the next four hundred years. The relations between the leaders of the Ni'matullāhī Order and the Safavids were quite friendly, and in the course of Safavid rule descendants of Shāh Ni'matullāh would intermarry with members of the ruling family, be appointed to administrative positions in the capital and in the provinces and be associated with the court aristocracy.¹⁷ Although the Ni'matullāhī Order would turn "from a dynamic spiritual institution into a moribund family tradition,"¹⁸ it only disappeared from the religious map of Iran after the demise of the Safavid dynasty in 1722.¹⁹

In 1770, the *qutb* of the Ni'matullāhī Order in India, Riḍā 'Alī Shāh Dakkānī, sent one of his disciples known under the Sufi epithet Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh to Iran following requests from the few Ni'matullāhī Sufis left in Iran to send a teacher in order to re-organise the order in its homeland.²⁰ Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh was born into an aristocratic family in Hyderabad. After receiving a privileged education and spending years in service for the local ruler, he abandoned his secular career and became a student of Riḍā 'Alī Shāh Dakkānī.²¹ By sending one of his students to Iran, Dakkānī states, he followed a vision of the 8th Imam al-Riḍā who told him to do so.²²

Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh's efforts to revive the order in Iran would find a decisive momentum when he arrived in Shiraz in 1774-75 and could win a father and a son as his adherents who would play a vital role in the establishment of the order throughout Iran. Mirzā 'Abd al-Ḥusayn, coming from a clerical family in Isfahan, was the *imām-i jum'a* of the small town of Tabas near Isfahan. Apart from his role as an *'ālim*, he also enjoyed links to the Nūrbakhshiyya Order. Dissatisfied with his religious vocation, he left his hometown with his son and encountered Ma'sūm

¹⁶ Algar, "Ni'mat-Allāhiyya", 45.

¹⁷ Graham, "Ni'matullahi", 188-193.

¹⁸ Ibid., 178.

¹⁹ Ibid., 178-200. See also Sholeh A. Quinn, "Rewriting Ni'matullahi History in Safavid Chronicles", in: *The Heritage of Sufism, Vol. III: Late Classical Persianate Sufism (1501-1750): the Safavid and Mughal Period*, Leonard Lewisohn, ed., Oxford: Oneworld 1999, 201-222; Jean Aubin, "De Kūhbanān à Bidar: la famille ni'matullahi", *Studia Iranica* 20 (1991), 233-261; Said Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam: Religion, Political Order, and Societal Change in Shi'ite Iran from the Beginning to 1890*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1984, 116-118.

²⁰ Lewisohn, "Modern Persian Sufism II", 440.

²¹ Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh, *Ṭarā'iq al-ḥaqā'iq*, vol. 3, Tehran: Kitābfurūshī-yi Bārānī 1345sh./1966-67, 170.

²² Nasrollah Pourjavady and Peter L. Wilson, *Kings of Love: The Poetry and History of the Ni'matullahi Sufi Order*, Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy 1978, 92.

‘Ali Shāh in Shiraz.²³ He and his son became followers of the Indian Sufi and received the Sufi *laqab* Fayḍ ‘Ali Shāh and Nūr ‘Ali Shāh respectively. All three managed to gain followers in Shiraz, primarily from among remnants of Sufi groups still living in this city.²⁴ Among the new adherents was also Mushtāq ‘Ali Shāh (d. 1792), a young musician who lacked the erudite education of the other Sufis but was venerated as the epitome of the *shaykh ummī*, the illiterate or unlettered Sufi master.²⁵

While initially enjoying peaceful relations with the local Zand ruler Karīm Khān (d. 1779), the four Sufi leaders would get involved in the power struggles of post-Safavid Iran, between the Zands and Qajars in particular. According to Ni‘matullāhī sources, a local pro-Zand Sufi from India, named Jānī Hindī, approached Ma‘šūm ‘Ali Shāh in order to be instructed in alchemy. As the latter refused the request, Jānī Hindī began to discredit the Shirazi Sufis accusing them of sharing and spreading heretical beliefs, of using magical powers and – most importantly – of laboring political ambitions in order to overthrow the local Zand ruler.²⁶ The fact that the Sufis would carry the royal title “shāh” as part of their Sufi epithets was presented as an indication of their covert political plans to assume power in Iran. Although it remains doubtful whether the allegations of political plans are accurate, fears of an increasing political influence of Sufi orders do not appear to be too farfetched given the historical roots of the Safavid dynasty in a militant Sufi order. There is also evidence suggesting that the Ni‘matullāhī Sufis began to favor the rising Qajars in their power struggle with the Zands. Ma‘šūm ‘Ali Shāh established contacts with the later founder of the Qajar dynasty, Āqā Muḥammad Khān (d. 1797), while the latter was detained in Shiraz.²⁷

After traveling throughout Iran without a new base to carry out their activities, the Ni‘matullāhī Sufis could win the favor of the Zand ruler of Isfahan, ‘Alī Murād Khān (d. 1785), who was not on very good terms with his relative in Shiraz. In ‘Alī Murād Khān the Sufis found a ruler who was positively disposed to their activities. The Zand ruler felt particular sympathy for Fayḍ ‘Ali Shāh and built a convent (*khānaqāh*) in his honor. ‘Alī Murād Khān also appreciated Fayḍ ‘Ali Shāh’s knowledge in numerology and used his expertise in order to let his fortune and future been foretold. In addition, Fayḍ ‘Ali Shāh prepared banners and flags for his patron’s army, giving his spiritual blessings to their military ventures.²⁸ However, it would not take too long until the Sufi residents of Isfahan would again collide with their patron. When Karīm Khān Zand died, ‘Alī Murād Khān hoped to

²³ Ma‘šūm ‘Ali Shāh, *Ṭarā’iq al-ḥaqā’iq*, 3, 187.

²⁴ Amanat, *Resurrection*, 71.

²⁵ Pourjavady and Wilson, *Kings*, 99-103.

²⁶ Ibid., 109.

²⁷ Amanat, *Resurrection*, 75.

²⁸ Ma‘šūm ‘Ali Shāh, *Ṭarā’iq al-ḥaqā’iq*, 3, 172; see also Javād Nūrbakhsh, ed., *Majmū‘a az āthār-i Nūr ‘Ali Shāh Isfahānī*, Tehran: Intishārāt-i Khānaqāh-i Ni‘mat Allāhī 1350sh./1971-72, Introduction.

achieve supremacy within the Zand family and to emerge as the new ruler of Iran. 'Alī Murād Khān was initially quite successful and managed to conquer some of the land possession the former ruler of Shiraz held, but lacked the resolution to finalise his ambitions, as he fell victim to inner-tribal rivalries within his own family. Ni'matullāhī sources provide a religious and moral explanation for the decline of 'Alī Murād Khān's power and the ultimate demise of the Zand dynasty. The governor of Isfahan began to indulge in pleasures like drinking wine. Since Fayḍ criticised his patron for pursuing such a lifestyle and neglecting his duties as a ruler, his relationship with his patron deteriorated. 'Alī Murād Khān would not listen to the advice of his spiritual counselor and would develop antagonistic feelings against his Sufi protégés, feelings also stirred by the activities of the ulama in Isfahan who opposed the increasing influence and the social standing of the Sufis. When Fayḍ 'Alī Shāh died in 1780, the Zand ruler of Isfahan withdrew his patronage of the Sufis and allowed a mob led by local ulama to storm and burn down the Sufi convent.²⁹ The expulsion of the Sufis from Isfahan might also have been politically motivated as the Ni'matullāhī Sufis, sensing the decline of Zand power in Iran, developed greater sympathies for the Qajars.³⁰

Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh and his two main disciples Nūr 'Alī Shāh and Mushtāq 'Alī Shāh could flee in time. According to Ni'matullāhī sources, Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh predicted further hardship and alluded to their prospect of dying as martyrs on the Sufi path while they were resting during their escape. He gave his disciples the option to leave him now in order to avoid their otherwise inevitable fate. However, all present Sufis rejected this alternative, as Nūr 'Alī Shāh, one of the leading disciples, expressed it: "Where else shall I go, my place is here with you."³¹ Soon, the Sufis were caught by agents of 'Alī Murād Khān who cut off the ears of Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh and Nūr 'Alī Shāh and escorted them out of the province of Isfahan to the borders of Tehran where the Qajars were ruling.

The Sufi entourage decided to travel to Mashhad where they were well-received by a local 'ālim, Mullā Ja'far Shūshtarī, who supported the Qajar pledge for supremacy in Iran, and who on hearing about the maltreatment of the Sufis at the hands of various Zand rulers offered them asylum. From Mashhad, Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh decided to travel to Herat and then back to India, while he instructed Nūr 'Alī Shāh and his other disciples to return to central Iran and to continue their missionary activities there.³² Nūr 'Alī Shāh went together with Mushtāq 'Alī Shāh to Kerman and settled in Māhān at the shrine of the founder of their order, Shāh Ni'matullāh. Both managed to attract many followers in Kerman, among them a well-known scholar, Mīrzā Muḥammad Tāqī (d. 1798), who would become a student of the unlearned Sufi Mushtāq 'Alī Shāh and receive the Sufi epithet

²⁹ Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh, *Tarā'iq al-ḥaqā'iq*, 3, 172.

³⁰ Amanat, *Resurrection*, 75.

³¹ Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh, *Tarā'iq al-ḥaqā'iq*, 3, 173.

³² Ibid.

Muẓaffar ‘Alī Shāh.³³ However, also in Kerman, the Sufis faced the increasing opposition of the ulama. As Mushtāq ‘Alī Shāh was object of particular popular veneration, the *imām-i jum‘a* of Kerman directed his efforts to suppress the activities of the Sufis against him in particular. On a Friday when he gave his sermon Mushtāq ‘Alī Shāh attended the service at the mosque. While the imam preached against the Sufis, he incited the congregation to kill one of their leading representatives who was just sitting amongst them in the mosque. Mushtāq and other Sufis were stoned right in front of the mosque in 1792.³⁴

Nūr ‘Alī Shāh managed to escape to Iraq and settled first in Karbala. As a consequence of the opposition of the ulama, he moved to Baghdad where the Ottoman governor let him stay in his guesthouse.³⁵ Re-united in Karbala with his teacher Ma’sūm ‘Alī Shāh who had returned from India, he moved with his teacher and other Sufis back to Iran and settled in Kermanshah. However, in Kermanshah their persecution would find its climax in the activities of the leading *mujtahid* of the region, Muḥammad ‘Alī Bihbahānī (d. 1801), son of Muḥammad Bāqir Bihbahānī (d. 1792), the famous *uṣūlī* scholar who contributed to the firm establishment of the *uṣūlī* school as the major school of Shi‘i jurisprudence. Bihbahānī would earn the title “Sufi-killer” (*ṣūfī-kush*) because of his efforts to suppress Sufism and to persecute its leading proponents. As soon as Ma’sūm ‘Alī Shāh arrived, Bihbahānī ordered his arrest and execution in 1795. Nūr ‘Alī Shāh managed to escape to Iraq but was killed two years later by Bihbahānī’s followers in Mosul. Muẓaffar ‘Alī Shāh, then *qutb* of the order in Iran, suffered the same fate and was poisoned in 1800.³⁶

The historical accounts on the Ni‘matullāhī revival in the late 18th century and on the activities of its chief propagators, Ma’sūm ‘Alī Shāh and Nūr ‘Alī Shāh, follow the same patterns. The Sufis are initially welcomed by a local ruler and receive patronage. Then the ruler turns against them, fearing a political complot against his rule or giving in to the pressure of the ulama, who see the Sufis as competitors in the religious arena. The Sufis are expelled and find refuge under another ruler until he expels them.

Conceptions of Religious Authority of Ni‘matullāhī Sufis in the late 18th and early 19th Centuries

The historical accounts on the activities of Ma’sūm ‘Alī Shāh and Nūr ‘Alī Shāh provide much room for describing the conflicts between the Sufis and the

³³ Nūrbakhsh, *Nūr ‘Alī Shāh*, Introduction.

³⁴ Pourjavady and Wilson, *Kings*, 123.

³⁵ Nūrbakhsh, *Nūr ‘Alī Shāh*, Introduction; see also Pourjavady and Wilson, *Kings*, 125-128.

³⁶ Ma’sūm ‘Alī Shāh, *Ṭarā’iq al-ḥaqā’iq*, 3, 174; see also Pourjavady and Wilson, *Kings*, 128-131.

ulama, and as a consequence with the secular rulers who were willing to follow the verdicts of their clerics. Motivations for the persecutions were based, on the one hand, on the fear of the secular rulers that the increasing influence of a particular Sufi order would turn into political power, as happened in the past with the Safavids. On the other hand, they were based on a general hostility of the ulama to the Sufis they had inherited from the Safavid period, when the Sufi saints were seen as illegitimate objects of veneration competing with the charisma of the Imams, and when the ulama attempted to establish themselves as *sole foci* of religious authority – an objective that required the eradication of the popular support for Sufi saints.³⁷

The Ni'matullāhī shaykhs introduced a new challenge. With their Shi'i colouring of Sufi *vilāyat*, they questioned the theoretical foundations of the collective deputyship of the ulama. In their view, the *qutb*, the spiritual and secular leader of the Sufi order, rather than the ulama in their entirety should be considered to be the special representative of the Hidden Imam. Such a theoretical formulation of religious authority challenged the very foundations of the claims to religious authority raised by the *uṣūlī* ulama. In the following, the theoretical formulations of this particular Shi'i reading of Sufi *vilāyat* will be examined. Not enough is known about the teachings of Ma'ṣūm 'Alī Shāh and the Ni'matullāhī understanding of *vilāyat* during its presence in India in order to answer the question whether Ni'matullāhī had believed in the deputyship of the *qutb* before the order was re-established in Iran or whether these were novel ideas developed by Ma'ṣūm 'Alī Shāh's Iranian disciples.

Like in many other contemporary Sufi orders, the sectarian identity of the Ni'matullāhī Order shifted towards Shi'ism either before or after the rise of the Safavid dynasty. Hence, when the order was revived in Iran in the late 18th century, one can discern a clear attachment to Twelver Shi'ism. The Shi'i orientation of the order is for example evident in one of the works by Nūr 'Alī Shāh, the *Risāla-yi uṣūl va furū'*. This treatise begins with a discussion of the five foundations of Shi'i creed (*uṣūl-i dīn*), monotheism (*tawḥīd*), divine justice ('*adl*), prophethood (*nubuwwat*), Imamate (*imāmat*) and resurrection (*ma'ād*), before embarking on a brief discussion of various branches (*furū'*), i.e. questions of ritual worship like praying, fasting etc. Hence, the first part follows the standard Shi'i account of the basic beliefs of the Shi'a and provides a Twelver Shi'i reading of the Imamate. The only difference to a standard Shi'i catechism, revealing the Sufi background of the author, is that Persian poetry is constantly employed to illustrate and explain certain doctrinal points. About the Imamate, Nūr 'Alī Shāh says that it is held by "the center of the circle of guidance, the governor of the land of *vilāyat*, the victorious lion of God, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, deputy and succes-

³⁷ Bayat, "Anti-Sufism in Qajar Iran", 627.

sor of Muḥammad, the Chosen One, the Imam of truth and the guide on the path of truth together with his eleven descendants.”³⁸

In addition to the belief in ‘Alī as the rightful successor of Muḥammad, the belief in the twelve Imams is reiterated as well as the belief in the occultation and eschatological role of the 12th Imam: “The eleventh of his [‘Alī’s] descendents is the 12th Imam,... the Owner of Command, Lord of the Age (*ṣāhib al-amr wa-l-‘aṣr wa-l-zamān*) [all titles of the Mahdī]. Order in the world and the resurrection of humanity occurs through the blessing and existence of this generous one. Through the order of God, he will become manifest, fighting tyranny and injustice in the world.”³⁹ To this prose exposition on the Imamate, Nūr ‘Alī Shāh attaches a small poem. The poem basically repeats the points on the Imamate made earlier but devotes much space on extolling the virtues of ‘Alī, presenting him as “the seal of the Imamate (*khatm-i imāmat*)”⁴⁰ in order to underline his central role as successor of Muḥammad but also as a particular object of veneration for the Sufis.

In Nūr ‘Alī Shāh’s major work, the *Jannāt al-wiṣāl*⁴¹, he discusses a variety of Sufi topics and expounds also traditional Sufi doctrines on the *pīr*, i.e. the spiritual guide on the Sufi path. The concept of religious authority developed in the *Jannāt al-wiṣāl* follows standard Sufi themes. What is however striking is the lack of references to any Shi‘i doctrines. There seems to be a general dissonance between the Sufi teachings in this work and Shi‘i doctrines which Nūr ‘Alī Shāh adhered to, but which are not mentioned at all. When referring to the Muḥammadan Light (*nūr-i muḥammadiyya*) which becomes manifest in the Perfect Man, he does not talk about its manifestation in the Imams. Likewise a distinction between two lights emanating from God, one being the light of prophethood, the other being the light of Imamate, is not made, as mentioned in Shi‘i traditions.⁴² ‘Alī is introduced as the perfect *valī* but not as the initiator of a chain of twelve Imams. For Michel de Miras in his comprehensive study of Nūr ‘Alī Shāh’s *Jannāt al-wiṣāl*, the lack of Shi‘i references signifies a dissociation of the author from Shi‘i Islam as a superficial sectarian identity which ultimately does not reflect true Islam as Sufism does. When Nūr ‘Alī Shāh made references to Shi‘ism in his other works, then this was done in order to appeal to an Iranian Shi‘i audience.⁴³ Miras’ conclusion might be a bit too hastily made though. The lack of references to Shi‘i doctrines in his *magnum opus* does not necessarily indicate Nūr ‘Alī Shāh’s estrangement from Twelver Shi‘ism but rather reflects the context in which this treatise was written in Bagh-

³⁸ Nūrbakhsh, *Nūr ‘Alī Shāh*, 45.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Javād Nūrbakhsh, ed., *Jannāt al-wiṣāl az āthār-i Nūr ‘Alī Shāh, Razwaq ‘Alī Shāh, Niẓām ‘Alī Shāh*, Tehran: Intishārāt-i Khānaqāh-i Ni‘matullāhī 1348sh./1969-70.

⁴² Michel de Miras, *Le méthode spirituelle d’un maître du Soufisme iranien: Nur Ali-Shah*, Paris: Éditions du Sirac 1974, 151.

⁴³ Ibid., 207-211.

dad. Living as a guest of an Ottoman pasha who was mystically inclined, he would not have impressed his Sunni host and patron with overt references to Shi'i doctrines.

In Nūr 'Alī Shāh's shorter treatise, the particular Shi'i coloring of Sufi ideas becomes more apparent. After discussing the five basic doctrines of Shi'ism and basic ritual questions, Nūr 'Alī Shāh turns his attention to Sufi topics, letting his reader know: "The foundations and branches that preceded were exoteric (*zāhir*)... So now strive for the esoteric (*bāṭin*) foundations and branches."⁴⁴ Nūr 'Alī Shāh explains certain moral attitudes a Sufi adept must adopt and different steps he needs to take on the mystical path, before he describes the characteristics and role of the mystical guide (*hādī*): "He is a person versed in all sciences, endowed with all divine attributes. He spreads the law of Muḥammad (*sharī'at-i mustafawī*) and renews the path of 'Alī (*ṭarīqat-i murtaḍawī*)..."⁴⁵ All these characteristics follow descriptions of the Perfect Man, before Nūr 'Alī Shāh introduces *en passant* "the guide of the time (*hādī-yi waqt*)" as "the deputy of the Mahdī of the End of Time (*nā'ib-i mahdī-yi ākhir al-zamān*)"⁴⁶. In this instance, one can find an almost hidden reference to the *pīr* as being the deputy of the Hidden Imam.

While in this case, Nūr 'Alī Shāh at least implicitly claims for the *qutb*, the leader of the Ni'matullāhī Order, the vicegerency for the Hidden Imam, his poetry and the poetry of his successor Muẓaffar 'Alī Shāh make this claim more obvious. In one of his poems, Nūr 'Alī Shāh identifies himself not only with the Mahdī but also with prophetic figures of the past and raises quasi-messianic claims:

I came again like Moses to reveal the White Hand
Drown the Pharaoh and his legion again in the Red Sea
I come again like Jesus to cut the throat of Anti-Christ
And by the Mahdī's command resurrect the universe with a breath.⁴⁷

Similarly, Muẓaffar 'Alī Shāh proclaims in one of his poems: "I am the deputy of the Mahdī of the 'Askarī faith."⁴⁸ Thereby, he not only reiterates the Ni'matullāhī claim of the *qutb* to Imamic vicegerency but likewise expresses the firm commitment of the order to Twelver Shi'ism – described in this line as "the 'Askarī faith" after the name of the 11th Imam Ḥasan al-'Askarī. The quasi-messianic claims in the poetry of the Ni'matullāhī can be viewed as a reflection of the general adventist spirit in Iran in the early 19th century.⁴⁹ Another way of looking at these claims in the poetry of Ni'matullāhī Sufis is to see them as expressions of a hyperbolic

⁴⁴ Nūrbakhsh, *Nūr 'Alī Shāh*, 49.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 52.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 52.

⁴⁷ Javād Nūrbakhsh, ed., *Dīwān-i Nūr 'Alī Shāh Isfahānī*, Tehran: Intishārāt-i Khānaqāh-i Ni'matullāhī 1349sh./1970-71, 105. See also Pourjavady and Wilson, *Kings*, 201.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Amanat, *Resurrection*, 74.

⁴⁹ See Amanat, *Resurrection*, 33-105.

poetic language composed in states of mystical ecstasy (*shabḥiyyāt*).⁵⁰ The expressed claims need to be seen in this particular literary genre and its conventions and ought not to be taken literally.⁵¹

In the writings of Muẓaffar ‘Alī Shāh, the conflation of Sufi and Shi‘i *vilāyat* finds its strongest expression. His works were central in formulating the Shi‘itisation of Sufi *vilāyat* within the Ni‘matullāhī Order and influential among Iranian Sufis in the 19th century in general.⁵² Succeeding Nūr ‘Alī Shāh as *qutb* of the order in Iran, he remained a significant figure for all branches of the Ni‘matullāhī Order in Iran which began to emerge after the death of Rahmat ‘Alī Shāh in 1861.⁵³ His major work *Majma‘ al-biḥār*⁵⁴ begins as a theological commentary on *al-Fātiḥa*, the first *sūra* of the Qur‘ān, before it embarks on a comparative study of different legal schools and theological and philosophical traditions prevalent within Twelver Shi‘ism. He distinguishes between the approaches of the *mujtahid* – a reference to the *uṣūlī* scholars –, the *akhbārī* and the Sufis in order to discuss the prophetic tradition that the ulama are the heirs of the prophets.⁵⁵ Which of these groups within contemporary Shi‘ism can claim to provide heirs to the prophets? Muẓaffar ‘Alī Shāh discusses the assumptions, methods and objectives of each of these three groups and favors the Sufi approach in his provisional conclusion. For the Sufis, “the scholar who is the heir of the Prophet is the spiritual guide of the Sufi order (*murshid-i ṭarīqat*) to whom the soul of the Imam (*nafs-i imām*) [...] has arrived.”⁵⁶ The other two groups, the *mujtahid* and the *akhbārī*, do not enjoy the privilege of such a special rapport with the Imam.

While these three schools (*madhāhib*) are distinguished based on their different *modi operandi* in order to arrive at legal judgments, Muẓaffar ‘Alī Shāh also pre-

⁵⁰ See for example Carl W. Ernst, *Ruzbihan Baqli: Mysticism and the Rhetoric of Sainthood in Persian Sufism*, Richmond: Curzon 1996, 93-101 and for a fuller discussion Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism*, Albany: State University of New York Press 1984.

⁵¹ I would like to thank Dr Leonard Lewisohn for making me aware of this alternative, more sober reading of such ecstatic poetry.

⁵² See Lewisohn, “Modern Persian Sufism I”, 445.

⁵³ Ibid., 449-451.

⁵⁴ The treatise was published by Javād Nūrbakhsh, ed., *Majma‘ al-biḥār az āthār-i ḥadrat-i Muẓaffar ‘Alī Shāh Kirmānī*, Tehran: Intishārāt-i Khānaqāh-i Ni‘matullāhī 1344sh./1965-66. Written in 1208/1793-94, the treatise consists in its published version of 131 pages. Nurbakhsh used three manuscripts of the treatise as sources for his edition. See ibid., 7. (Introduction by Javād Nūrbakhsh). While this treatise is a prose commentary on *al-Fātiḥa*, he also produced a commentary on the same *sūra* in rhyme, entitled *Baḥr al-asrār*. His treatise *Kibrīt al-aḥmar*, containing explanations of the various litanies (*awrād*) and *dhikr* of the Ni‘matullāhī Order, was written on the request of Mirzā Ṣādiq, brother of Abū l-Ḥusayn Khān, governor of Kirman in the Zand period (1750-1794) and forty second Imam of the Nizārī Ismailis (Lewisohn, “Modern Persian Sufism I”, 444). The particular close attachment of Muẓaffar ‘Alī Shāh to Mushtāq ‘Alī Shāh is expressed in his *Dīwān-i Mushtāqīyya*, in which he adopted Mushtāq as his *nom de plume* in honor of his teacher. On the works of Muẓaffar ‘Alī Shāh see Nūrbakhsh, *Majma‘ al-Biḥār*, 7 (Introduction by Javād Nūrbakhsh).

⁵⁵ Nūrbakhsh, *Majma‘ al-Biḥār*, 77.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 80.

sents different methods (*mashārib*) in terms of religious beliefs and spiritual practices; those of the theologians, the Peripatetic philosophers, the Ishrāqī philosophers and the Sufi gnostics.⁵⁷ All these groups employ different intellectual and dogmatic approaches. While the theologians and the Peripatetic philosophers favor “thought and opinion (*fikr va naẓar*)”⁵⁸ in order to arrive at their beliefs, the Ishrāqī philosophers and the Sufi gnostics use “refinement and purification (*taḥ-liyya va tasfiyya*)”⁵⁹. While some of them work within the confines of the divine religion (*sharī‘at*), like the theologians and Sufis, others disregard the basic assumptions of the divine religion in their intellectual pursuits like the Peripatetic and Ishrāqī philosophers. While all the schools have their merits, only the Sufi gnostics developed a viable spiritual method, because “this method is based on submitting the insinuating self, obliterating opinion, moving beyond contingent ascertainment, diving into the sea of annihilation (*fanā*), ascending unto the heaven of constancy (*baqā*), acquiring mystical states (*ḥuṣūl*), achieving union (*vuṣūl*) and encountering the divine (*liqā*)”⁶⁰. Apart from the Sufi approach, all other groups exhibit in their assumptions and methods flaws. The Sufi, as he advances on the mystical path, becomes the recipient of “effulgence (*ḥayd*), inspiration (*ilhām*), unveiling (*kashf*) and revelation (*tajallī*)”⁶¹. The approaches of the other groups – regardless of their methodical sophistication – employ deduction, opinion, logic and reason, hence humanly devised methods which do not provide the secure knowledge the Shi‘a seek after.⁶²

Muẓaffar ‘Alī Shāh argues for the superiority of the Sufi approach and its conception of religious authority based on the very *raison d’être* of the Shi‘i sect, the veneration of the *ahl al-bayt* and the submission (*taslīm*) to their teachings.⁶³ Muẓaffar ‘Alī Shāh refers to the famous and in Shi‘i apologetics popular prophetic tradition: “I left for you two weighty matters (*thaqalayn*): the book of God and my family.”⁶⁴ This tradition is used to justify the sole religious authority of the family of the Prophet. The Prophet gave his community the book of God to act as one of his vicegerents (*khalīfa-yi khūd*).⁶⁵ But as the interpretation of the Qur’ān has proven to be difficult and has led to different exegetical methods and consequently divergent interpretations, God has bestowed another gift to his community in the person of the Imam who as one of the two weighty matters partakes in being the vicegerent of the Prophet. As the Imam is in occultation now and therefore not accessible in person, “the books of *ḥadīth* are the vicegerents (*khalīfa*) of

⁵⁷ Ibid., 84.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 85.

⁶¹ Ibid., 104.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid., 95.

⁶⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*, 87.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 102.

the *ahl al-bayt*”⁶⁶. These traditions contain the teachings of the Imams and make them accessible to their followers. However, they still require interpretation – as the Qur’anic text does –, and different methods have been developed in order to enable understanding of these traditions. But whose understanding can be considered to be reliable and truthful to the teachings of the Imams?

Muẓaffar ‘Alī Shāh cites a tradition attributed to ‘Alī who acknowledges the difficulty of comprehending the traditions of the Imams. For ‘Alī, only “the believer whose faith God has tested (*imtaḥana*) in his heart”⁶⁷ has access to true understanding. By implication, so Muẓaffar ‘Alī Shāh argues, ‘Alī introduces “the tested believer (*mu’min-i mumtaḥan*) and the *ḥadīth* as the two weighty matters (*thaqalayn*), the two vicegerents (*khalīfatayn*) of the Imam”⁶⁸. Not surprisingly, the tested or true believer is the one who has embarked and excelled on the Sufi path for Muẓaffar ‘Alī Shāh. By being “the supporter of the Imam (*shī‘a-yi imām*)”, he is “the true Sufi novice (*murīd-i ḥaqīqī*)” whose “weak being achieves annihilation (*fanā*) in the overpowering being of the Imam (*wujūd-i qābir-i imām*). This station is called by the Sufi gnostics ‘annihilation in the shaykh’. As the essence of God is in the secret of the Imam, this station will inevitably lead to the higher station of annihilation in God.”⁶⁹ By having his own will annihilated in the will of the Imam, the true believer assumes the role of the perfect deputy of the Imam. The ultimate goal of the mystical path, annihilation, becomes in Muẓaffar ‘Alī Shāh’s Shi‘i reading a spiritual prerequisite for representing the Imam during his occultation.⁷⁰

Muẓaffar ‘Alī Shāh employs light symbolism in connection with esoteric Shi‘i notions of emanation theology in order to argue that the true believer is the vicegerent of the Hidden Imam. The first creation of God was the Muḥammadan light or the Muḥammadan reality (*ḥaqīqat-i muḥammadiyya*).⁷¹ On the level of the first divine emanation, Muḥammad is not only identical with ‘Alī – based on the tradition that both were made out of the same light – but also identical with all the other Imams. Out of the Muḥammadan light, which is manifest in Muḥammad as well as in all the Imams, the world was created. Hence, in everything created there are sparkles of the light of the Imam (*nūr-i imām*).⁷² In this world, the most perfect reflection of the Imamic light and the most perfect manifestation of divine attrib-

⁶⁶ Ibid., 103.

⁶⁷ Quoted in ibid., 103.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 103.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 102.

⁷⁰ The practice of the Sufi novice to visualise his shaykh is therefore seen as a prerequisite to attain visions of the Hidden Imam himself. For a discussion of different methods to attain visions of the Imam in modern Shi‘ism see Mohammed Ali Amir-Moezzi, “Visions d’Imams en mystique duodécimaine moderne et contemporaine (Aspects de l’imamologie duodécimaine VIII)”, in: *Autour du regard: Mélanges Gimaret*, Émile Chaumont et al., eds., Louvain: Peeters 2003, 107-115.

⁷¹ Nūrbakhsh, *Majma‘ al-Biḥār*, 107.

⁷² Ibid., 108.

utes is the Perfect Man (*insān-i kāmīl*).⁷³ Hence, knowledge of God is only possible through the knowledge of the Imam and at this time through his deputy, the Perfect Man. Since knowledge of God is only possible through the person of the Imam, knowledge of the Imam can only be achieved through his most perfect supporter, the Perfect Man or the special Shi'a (*shī'a-yi khāṣṣ*)⁷⁴: "As long as someone has not recognised the man of truth (*mard-i haqq*) in each age and has not seen the light of the Imam in him, he cannot claim to know God (*arīf-i haqq*) or the Imam."⁷⁵ The Sufi notion that one needs to meet the friends of God in order to win the friendship of God is given a Shi'i esoteric interpretation, as the Imam acts as a further necessary intermediary between God and the Perfect Man.⁷⁶

The obedience of the Shi'a to the true believer of the time is justified in Shi'i terms by Muẓaffar 'Alī Shāh as well: complete obedience to the 12th Imam is a basic religious duty upon the Shi'a, a duty which has not been suspended during the time of occultation. During the time of his occultation, one needs to turn to his representative, namely to the true believer as his will is identical with the will of the Imam.⁷⁷ In these formulations, one encounters a complete identification of the Perfect Man with the Perfect Shi'a not unlike the Shaykhī concept of the Fourth Pillar.⁷⁸ There is in this world a single individual endowed with sufficient charismatic authority to act as the representative of the Hidden Imam. The fusion of Sufi and Shi'i *vilāyat* could also have political implications because "the Persian Sufi *murshid* is considered not only an absolute monarch over his disciples – quite in accordance with ordinary *pīr-murīdī* tenets and teachings found in other areas of the Islamic Sufi world – but also the only genuine *ruler* in the invisible and visible worlds of being."⁷⁹ The Sufi vicegerent holds both the spiritual and secular authority of the Hidden Imam but is willing to delegate his secular authority to the just ruler who supports the Ni'matullāhī Order and listens to the advice of the *qutb*.⁸⁰

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Richard Gramlich, *Die schiitischen Derwischorden Persiens*, vol. 2, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner 1976, 232.

⁷⁷ Nūrbakhsh, *Majma' al-Bihār*, 109. See also Gramlich, *Derwischorden Persiens*, vol. 2, 245.

⁷⁸ Amanat, *Resurrection*, 74; see also Lewisohn, "Modern Persian Sufism I", 444, and Bayat, "Anti-Sufism in Qajar Iran", 629. Despite the conceptual similarities between the Ni'matullāhī and Shaykhī understanding of the Perfect Shi'a, it is important to note that the Shaykhī School opposed many Sufi doctrines like *wahdat al-wujūd* and the absolute devotion to the shaykh. Early Qajar rulers like Faṭḥ 'Alī Shāh, who invited Shaykh Aḥmad to work at his court, saw in the Shaykhī School and its mystical inclinations a tool to counter the increasing popularity of Sufism in Iran. Shaykhī teachings were mystical and at the same time firmly based on orthodox Twelver Shi'i creed of *akhbārī* provenience. See Todd Lawson, "Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy in Twelver Shi'ism: Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'i on Fayḍ Kāshānī (the *Risālat al-'Ilmiyya*)", in: *Religion and Society in Qajar Iran*, Robert Gleave, ed., London – New York: Routledge Curzon 2005, 139-141.

⁷⁹ Lewisohn, "Modern Persian Sufism II", 51 [italics in the original].

⁸⁰ Amanat, *Resurrection*, 75.

Conclusion

The Ni‘matullāhī Sufis formulated an alternative notion of religious authority and conceived the role of the *qutb* as the true vicegerent of the Hidden Imam in direct challenge to the claim of the ulama to be his collective representatives. It was said earlier that the ulama routinised the Imam’s charismatic authority with their notion of collective deputyship. In a sense, there is no need to await the appearance of the Hidden Imam, because his representatives assume his prerogatives in this world, even though waiting for his appearance forms an integral part of Shi‘i doctrine. The Ni‘matullāhī understanding of *vilāyat* and consequently of the question of Imamic vicegerency has implicitly the same effect. The Mahdī is stripped off his eschatological role and turned into the supreme spiritual guide of the *qutb*. Due to the Perfect Man, the Imam’s *vilāyat* is not in occultation but accessible in the person of the Perfect Shi‘a. Hence expecting his arrival becomes unnecessary because his *vilāyat* – and therefore divine guidance – is existent in this world.⁸¹ In addition, such an understanding of the role of the *qutb* confers particular significance to the oath of allegiance (*bay‘at*) to him, as he is the singular representative of the Imam – a claim that renders affiliations to a Sufi order more exclusivist in Shi‘i Islam and does not allow for multiple allegiances to several Sufi masters simultaneously.⁸²

By the year 1800, all of the leaders of the Ni‘matullāhī Order had been killed. The following leaders of the order attempted to establish the order permanently in Iranian society and adopted the practice of *taqiyya* (pious dissimulation) in order to avoid confrontations with the clergy and the state.⁸³ In addition, the recruitment ambitions were lowered. Rather than trying to turn into a mass movement and to seriously challenge the authority of the ulama, the Ni‘matullāhī Sufis accepted their marginal status and molded a niche for their activities without attracting much attention of their opponents. The authority of the ulama could not be challenged effectively at this time, as the Qajar dynasty under the leadership of Fath ‘Alī Shāh (d. 1834) managed to gain supremacy in Iran and decided to cooperate with the ulama in order to give their rule the religious credentials it required.⁸⁴ This cooperation put the Sufis in a difficult position, as Fath ‘Alī Shāh in particular would either support the persecutions of Sufis or turn a blind eye on them in order not to antagonise his newly won allies among the ulama. Rather than competing with the ulama over religious authority, the Ni‘matullāhī accommodated to the given situation and tried to increase their following without openly challenging the authority of the Shi‘i clergy. Only later, when Muḥammad Shāh (d. 1848) succeeded Fath ‘Alī Shāh to the throne in 1834, the Ni‘matullāhī

⁸¹ Miras, *Méthode spirituelle*, 207.

⁸² Lewisohn, “Modern Persian Sufism II”, 51.

⁸³ Bayat, “Anti-Sufism”, 627.

⁸⁴ Amanat, *Resurrection*, 76–79.

experienced a political environment that was favorable to their activities. The understanding that the *qutb* is the special representative of the Hidden Imam would be upheld by the Ni‘matullāhī, also when they split up in several competing sub-branches in the latter part of the 19th century. As a result of the anti-Sufi stance of mainstream Twelver Shi‘ism until today, “this assimilation of the *qutb* with the hidden *imām* is implicit but camouflaged”⁸⁵ in Ni‘matullāhī discourse on religious authority.

⁸⁵ Lewisohn, “Modern Persian Sufism II”, 52.

Ḥikma Mutaʿāliya in Qajar Iran: Hājī Mullā Hādī Sabzavārī and the School of Mullā Ṣadrā

Sajjad H. Rizvi

This age is devoid of wisdom and suffers from a dearth of grace of faith from the clouds of Mercy and from a multitude of sins committed by those who are negligent and ignorant. The gates of the heavens of the intellect have been barred to them, and true understanding of the Lord of Heaven has been made forbidden to them and deceit has contaminated their love. They have forsaken the Truth for falsehoods and have become addicted to ornamentation and affectation. They no longer traverse the land of absolutes nor swim in the seas of the realities of Revelation; they have exchanged everlasting, righteous deeds (*al-bāqīyyāt al-ṣāliḥāt*) for partial, transient deeds that will become obsolete. Their deeds reveal the conjectural nature of their aims, and the purpose of their desires is self-centred and mal-intended...

When I saw philosophy, it was woven by spiders of forgetfulness, and its character and dominance had been discarded to a corner where it languished, exiled.¹

It is not uncommon for philosophers and thinkers in the Islamic period to lament the intellectual lassitude and decline of their times; such a complaint provides the key justification for insisting upon their own world-historical importance and bombast. But in the context of the 19th century, the lament did signal a sense of revolution, change and anguish in society. The intellectual and spiritual turmoil of the Qajar Iran, somewhat mirroring political uncertainties and vagaries allowed for the flourishing both of new (and at times heterodox) ideas, fresh encounters with European thought and the revival of modes of traditional reasoning. The problems of the Qajar period were exacerbated by messianic and chiliastic movements associated with the millennium of the disappearance of the Twelfth Imam. The revival of charismatic authority and the inflated claims of extreme social, religious and political agents coupled with the social class divisions emerged into the Bābī and Bahāʾī disturbances and revolts of the 19th century. Messianism and eschatological expectation clashed with the traditional orders in the absence of central authority and its legitimacy, as well as the new moves towards social,

¹ Hādī Sabzavārī, *Sharḥ al-manzūma: Qism al-ḥikma*, ed. Masʿūd Ṭālibī, Tehran: Nashr-i Nāb 1374sh./1995-96, vol. 1, 37–38.



political and cultural modernisation, even “soft colonialism”.² The retreat of the state and its lack of a standing army allowed the encroachment of colonial powers leading to the major defeats at the hands of the Russians in the wars of 1805–13 and 1826–28 culminating in the humiliating Treaty of Turkmanchay.³ The advent of new learning in philosophy and science triggered a traditionalist (even nativist) response from the ulama as the class of specialists with vested interests in the current systems of education.⁴ At the same time, the upheavals of the 18th century had given way to relative stability in some major Iranian cities; in particular, Isfahan had retained some of its past cultural glories. Despite the sack of 1722 at the hands of the Afghans tribes that struck a death blow to the Safavid state, the pursuit of knowledge and its transmission continued unabated.⁵ It was to this city that students eager to study in the traditional Shi‘i seminaries, the *ḥawza ‘ilmiyya*, flocked.⁶ One of these students in the early 19th century was a khorasani Hādī Ibn Mahdī Sabzavārī who would later become one of the most important philosophers of the Sadrian tradition in the Qajar period.⁷ It was his training in the revived philosophical tradition of Mullā Ṣadrā (d. c. 1045/1635) and his espousal of that tradition in his commentaries and especially in his new textbook on philosophy, *Sharḥ ghurar al-farā’id*, better known as *Sharḥ-i manzūma*, that established the

² Nikki Keddie, *Roots of Revolution: an Interpretive History of Modern Iran*, New Haven: Yale University Press 1981, 40–48; idem, “Religion and Irreligion in early Iranian Nationalism”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 4 (1962), 270; Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: the Making of the Babi Movement in Iran, 1844–1850*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1989, 29; Said Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam: Religion, Political Order, and Societal Change in Shi‘ite Iran from the Beginning to 1890*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1984, 14.

³ Abbas Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe: Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar and the Iranian Monarchy, 1831–1896*, London: I.B. Tauris 1997, 15–16.

⁴ Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe*, 351–405; Monica Ringer, *Education, Religion, and the Discourse of Cultural Reform in Qajar Iran*, Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers 2001. One of the best studies of the role of the ulama in society and politics in the period remains Hamid Algar, *Religion and State in Iran, 1785–1906: The Role of the Ulama in the Qajar Period*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1969.

⁵ On the sack of Isfahan, see Willem Floor, *The Afghan Occupation of Safavid Persia, 1721–1729*, Paris: Association pour l’avancement des études iraniennes (*Studia Iranica*, Cahier 19) 1998.

⁶ There are now a number of studies on the functioning of the Shi‘i seminary both at the shrine cities of Iraq (the *‘atabāt*) and in Iran, and on the three stages of becoming a jurist: preliminaries (*muqaddimāt*), intermediate jurisprudential training (*suṭūḥ*), and advanced independent reasoning based on responses to the work on a living model of emulation (*marja’*) known as *baḥṭh* (or *dars*) *al-kbārīj*. See Sabrina Mervin’s article in this volume: “La quête du savoir à Najaf. Les études religieuses chez les chiites imâmites de la fin du 19^e siècle à 1960”; Chibli Mallat, *The Renewal of Islamic Law: Muhammad Baqer as-Sadr, Najaf and the Shi‘i International*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1993, 35–45.

⁷ A couple of useful studies are: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Renaissance in Iran: Hāji Mullā Hādī Sabziwārī”, in: *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, Mian Mohammad Sharif, ed., Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz 1966, vol. 2, 1543–1556, and Wahid Akhtar, “Sabzavārī’s Analysis of Being”, *al-Tawḥīd* 2/1 (1984), 29–70.

intellectual hegemony of the philosophical system known as *ḥikma muta'āliya* that dominates the *ḥawza* (at least in Iran) to this day.⁸

In this paper, I will argue that it is the pivotal contribution of Sabzavārī to the intellectual history of the Qajar period that established the domination of the school of Mullā Ṣadrā, to the exclusion of other philosophical trends. After providing an account of his intellectual formation in Iran, I will discuss his curriculum formation, pedagogical method and writings, giving an account of what has sometimes been described as the “school of Khorasan” (by analogy to the famed Safavid “school of Isfahan” as defined by Henry Corbin and Seyyed Hossein Nasr); and finally conclude with some observations of his legacy, the parallels developments in so-called “school of Tehran” and the perpetuation of traditional Shi'i philosophy in the face of the encroachment of new European thought in the reformed educational institutions of the late Qajar state.⁹

Life and Intellectual Formation

Hādī Sabzavārī was born in 1212/1797-98 in the town of Sabzavār (within the region of Bayhaq), a Shi'i centre of learning some 230 kilometres west of Mashhad, the famous shrine city where the eighth Shi'i Imam 'Alī l-Riḍā (d. 818) is buried.¹⁰ His father Mīrzā Mahdī Ibn Muḥammad Ṣādiq was an educated merchant and landowner, whose interest in learning and relative wealth provided the conditions of leisure and encouragement for the young Hādī.¹¹ On his return from the pilgrimage to Mecca in 1220/1805–06, his father died in Shiraz and left the

⁸ On Mullā Ṣadrā, see Sajjad Rizvi, “Mollā Ṣadrā Ṣirāzi”, in: *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, available at: <http://www.iranica.com/articles/molla-sadra-sirazi>. Last accessed 23rd June 2010.

⁹ See Sajjad Rizvi, “Isfahan, School of”, in: *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 14, New York: Biblioteca Persica Press, 2008, 119–125. On the notion of the school of Isfahan and later of Tehran, see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Philosophy from its Origin to the Present*, Albany: State University of New York Press 2006, 209–257.

¹⁰ Sabzavārī's modern biographer Ghulām-Ḥusayn Riḍā-Nizhād “Nūshīn” argues on the basis of a chronogram of the author in which he alludes to his year of birth with the term “gharīb” that he was born in 1212 AH – see Ghulām-Ḥusayn Riḍā-Nizhād, “Nūshīn”, in: *Hakīm-i Sabzavārī: zindagī – āthār – falsafa*, no ed., Tehran: Intishārāt-i Sinānī 1371sh./1992-93, 35. An important source is his own autobiography that was written in Sabzavār around 1280/1863–64 and published by Qāsim Ghanī in *Yādgar*, 1/3 (1944), 45–47. The biographical sources on his life are: Riḍā-Qulī Khān, “Hidāyat”, in: *Tadbkhira-yi riyāḍ al-ʿarīfīn*, no ed., Tehran: Chāpkhāna-yi Āftāb 1316sh./1937-38, 417–420 (Asrār-i Sabzavārī); Muḥammad Ḥirz al-Dīn, *Maʿarīf al-rijāl fī tarājīm al-ʿulamāʾ wa-l-udabāʾ*, Qum: Kitābkhāna-yi Marʿashī Najafī 1985, vol. 3, 220–223; Sayyid Muḥsin al-Amin, *Aʿyān al-shīʿa*, ed. Sayyid Hasan al-Amin, Beirut: Dār al-taʾarūf 1983, vol. 10, 234; Manūchihr Ṣadūqī “Suhā”, *Tārīkh-i ḥukamāʾ va ʿurafāʾ-yi mutaʾakhhirīn az ṣadr al-mutaʾallibīn*, Tehran: Iranian Academy of Philosophy 1359sh./1980-81, 109–155.

¹¹ Riḍā-Nizhād, *Hakīm-i Sabzavārī*, 54; Masʿūd Ṭālibī, “Introduction”, to Sabzavārī, *Sharḥ al-manzūma*, 3.

young Sabzavārī an orphan at the age of eight.¹² His cousin Mirzā Ḥusayn took charge of the boy as a surrogate father and in pursuit of his education installed him around 1222/1807–08 in Mashhad at the Madrasa-yi Ḥājj Ḥasan near the shrine to undertake the preliminaries (*muqaddimāt*) of his study.¹³ There, he shared Mirzā Ḥusayn's quarters and the latter initiated him into the study of Arabic grammar, syntax and morphology, *fiqh* and jurisprudence, legal theory, Euclidean mathematics and some logic (*manṭiq*). Sabzavārī later gave an account of these beginnings:

Until I completed ten years, I remained in Sabzavār...

The possessor of excellences, the complete practising scholar and intellect, the comprehensive mind, the pious and abstemious, worshipful and penitent, the most excellent of the notables, who needs no introduction, the son of my aunt, Ḥājj Mullā Ḥusayn Sabzavārī who had studied for years in the holy city of Mashhad took me from Sabzavār to Mashhad. The late scholar was my teacher in Arabic, law and jurisprudence, but as for those disciplines to which I was myself inclined and desirous of pursuing namely systematic theology, philosophy, he spoke little, but he did teach me logic and some mathematics.¹⁴

He stayed in Mashhad for ten years and acquired a taste for mystical speculation and philosophy.¹⁵ In 1232/1817, he returned to Sabzavār and married. Desiring to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca and to undertake the study of philosophy in Isfahan, he set out alone from Sabzavār in 1233/1818 leaving his family in the care of his cousin.¹⁶ There, he lodged and studied at the Madrasa-yi Kāsa-Girān also known as the Madrasa-yi Shamsiyya.

Isfahan was witnessing a revival of interest in philosophy and generally in the study of the rational sciences and he soon became devoted to the study of the school of Mullā Ṣadrā. In Isfahan, he studied with major figures. In the scriptural and jurisprudential disciplines, he began his studies with a young scholar, Shaykh Muḥammad 'Alī Najafī (d. 1245/1829), attending his classes for two years.¹⁷ Najafī was also renowned for his skill in theology and wrote *marginalia* on the *Shawāriq al-ilhām* of 'Abd al-Razzāq Lāhijī (d. 1661) and on the commentaries on the *Tajrīd al-ī'tiqād* of Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (d. 1274).

¹² Riḍā-Nizhād, *Hakīm-i Sabzavārī*, 40. Murtaḍā Mudarrīsī Chahārdahī argues that he died in Mecca during the Ḥajj – see Murtaḍā Mudarrīsī Chahārdahī, *Zindagānī va falsafa-yi Ḥājj Mullā Hādī Sabzavārī*, Tehran: Kitābkhāna-yi Ṭahūrī 1334sh./1955–56, 16.

¹³ The *madrasa* no longer exists. With the modern expansion of the shrine complex it has been demolished. Riḍā-Nizhād, *Hakīm-i Sabzavārī*, 46.

¹⁴ Riḍā-Nizhād, *Hakīm-i Sabzavārī*, 40–41.

¹⁵ Browne and Mu'allim-i Ḥabībābādī suggest that he only stayed in Mashhad for five years but this seems to be incorrect – see Muḥammad 'Alī Mu'allim-i Ḥabībābādī, *Makārim al-āthār dar ahvāl-i rijāl-i dawra-yi Qājār*, Isfahan: Maṭba'-yi Muḥammadi 1958, vol. 2, 451; cf. Riḍā-Nizhād, *Hakīm-i Sabzavārī*, 43–46.

¹⁶ Riḍā-Nizhād, *Hakīm-i Sabzavārī*, 47.

¹⁷ Ibid., 55.

However, Sabzavārī's main teachers in jurisprudence were famous in their time. He himself said that he was excited by the city of knowledge that was Isfahan and within a month of arriving he began to attend the classes of Mullā Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Kalbāsi (d. 1261/1845) and Shaykh Muḥammad Taqī (d. 1248/1832).¹⁸ Kalbāsi was the most important *uṣūlī* jurist of his time, and his works *Shawārī' al-hidāya* and *Ishārāt al-uṣūl* in jurisprudence and *Minhāj al-hidāya* and *Irshād al-mustarshidīn* on positive legal judgements became major sources of study and reference.¹⁹ Shaykh Muḥammad Taqī Iṣfahānī (d. 1248/1832) was an important jurist and author of *Hidāyat al-mustarshidīn*.²⁰

In philosophy, he studied with two prominent teachers of the school of Mullā Ṣadrā: Mullā Ismā'il Iṣfahānī (d. 1268/1853) and Mullā 'Alī Nūrī (d. 1246/1830). Mullā Ismā'il Iṣfahānī taught the major works of Mullā Ṣadrā such as *al-Hikma al-muta'aliya fi l-asfār al-'aqliyya al-arba'a* and *al-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyya* and *al-Mabda' wa-l-ma'ād*, on which he wrote *marginalia*, and the theological texts of Tūsī and Lā-hijī.²¹ Mullā Ismā'il was a comprehensive scholar particularly renown for his piety and asceticism, and Sabzavārī studied with him for at least five years. He himself had been a student of Nūrī, Sabzavārī's more famous instructor.

Mullā 'Alī Nūrī was the most important reviver of the school of Mullā Ṣadrā during the early Qajar period.²² He had himself studied with Muḥammad Bidābādī (d. 1196/1782–83), one of the few philosophers between the late Safavid and early Qājār period who had perpetuated the study of the rational sciences and an interest in mystical speculation, and hence Sabzavārī had an intellectual genealogy stretching back to Mullā Ṣadrā in the following chain: Nūrī – Muḥammad Bidābādī – Ismā'il Khājū'i (d. 1173/1759) – Ḥaydar Āmulī (d. 1150/1737–38) – Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī (d. 1091/1680) – Mullā Ṣadrā.²³ He wrote commentaries on

¹⁸ Ibid., 57.

¹⁹ Hossein Modarressi Tabātabā'i, *An Introduction to Shī'ī Law: A Bibliographical Study*, London: Ithaca Press 1984, 93, 99.

²⁰ Chahārdahī, *Sabzavārī*, 29. For some reason unclear to me, Riḍā-Nizhād does not mention him (cf. FN 10).

²¹ Riḍā-Nizhād, *Ḥakīm-i Sabzavārī*, 58–65.

²² Ibid., 65–69.

²³ For some of Bidābādī's works, see "al-Mabda' wa-l-ma'ād", in: *Anthologies des philosophes iraniens*, Henry Corbin and Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī, eds., Tehran: L'Institut Franco-Iranien 1971–78, vol. 4, 275–417; 'Alī Ṣadrā'i Khū'i, ed., *Tadhkirat al-sālikin: nāma-hā-yi 'irfānī-yi marḥūm Aqā Muḥammad Bidābādī*, Qum: Nūr al-Sajjād 1385sh./2006-07. On Bidābādī, see 'Alī Karbāsi, *Ḥakīm-i muta'allih Bidābādī: ihyāgar-i ḥikmat-i shī'ī dar qarn-i dawāz-dahum-i hijrī*, Tehran: Pazūhishgāh-i 'ulūm-i insānī va muṭāla'āt-i farhangī 1381sh./2002-03; 'Alī Ṣadrā'i Khū'i, *Āshnā'i-yi haqq: sharḥ-i aḥwāl va afkār-i Aqā Muḥammad Bidābādī*, Qum: Intishārāt-i Nihāvandī 1379sh./2000-01.

For some of Khājū'i's works, see Ismā'il Khājū'i, "Thamarat al-fu'ād fi nubudh min masā'il al-ma'ād", in: *Anthologies des philosophes iraniens*, Henry Corbin and Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī, eds., vol. 4, 229–306; idem, "Risāla ibtāl al-zamān al-mawhūm", in: *Sab' rasā'il*, Sayyid Aḥmad Tūsīrskānī, ed., Tehran: Mīrāth-i Maktūb 1381sh./2002-03, 241–283; idem, *al-Arba'ūna ḥadīthan*, Qum: Maktabat al-marḥūm Āyat Allāh al-Ṣadr al-Khādīmī 1992;

all the major works of Mullā Ṣadrā, and Sabzavārī studied with him for at least three years.

In 1240/1824, Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsāʾī (d. 1241/1826), founder of the Shaykhī school and a philosopher highly critical of the school of Mullā Ṣadrā came to Isfahan²⁴. On the advice of Nūrī, Sabzavārī attended his class for about two months.²⁵ While he respected Aḥsāʾī's piety and reputation, he was influenced by Mullā Ismāʿīl's hostile attack on his commentary on the *ʿArshīyya* of Mullā Ṣadrā, and later back in Sabzavār, he was quite critical of the ideas of Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsāʾī although he never concurred with the condemnation of *takfīr* pronounced by Mullā Muḥammad Baraghānī in Qazvin.²⁶

He remained in Isfahan for eight years and in 1242/1826–27 returned to Mashhad to complete his study of jurisprudence.²⁷ This was the same year that one of his teachers in philosophy, Mullā Ismāʿīl, left for Tehran to teach there.²⁸ The third critical event of that year was the commencement of his *magnum opus*, the philosophical poem *Ghurur al-farāʾid*, known simply as *manẓūma* (the poem), and then later its commentary that was completed in 1261/1845. Having taught and studied in Mashhad for a further five years, he returned to Sabzavār and then once again set out for the pilgrimage to Mecca returning in 1250/1834.²⁹ The recent death of Faṭḥ ʿAlī Shāh and the subsequent turmoil made a quick return to Sabzavār dangerous, so Sabzavārī went to Kirman and stayed at the Madrasa-yi Maʾṣūmiyya for around a year. There he married a woman.³⁰ His time in Kirman may explain some elements of his mystical inclinations and even possible Sufi affiliations. Riḍā-Nizhād and Ibrāhīmī Dīnānī claim that his father-in-law, Mullā Muḥammad ʿĀrif,

idem, *al-Rasāʾil al-fiqhiyya*, Qum: Dār al-Kitāb al-Islāmī 1991; idem, *al-Rasāʾil al-ʿitqādiyya*, Qum: Dār al-Kitāb al-Islāmī 1991; idem, *Miftāḥ al-falāḥ wa-miṣbāḥ al-najāḥ fī sharḥ duʿāʾ al-ṣabāḥ*, Sayyid Maḥdī l-Rajāʾī, ed., Mashhad: Majmaʿ al-buḥūth al-Islāmiyya 1993.

²⁴ On Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsāʾī contribution to Shiʿi philosophy see Juan R.I. Cole, "Casting away the Self: The Mysticism of Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i", in: *The Twelver Shia in Modern Times. Religious Culture & Political History*, Rainer Brunner and Werner Ende, eds., Leiden: Brill 2001, 25-37; Idem, "The World as Text: Cosmologies of Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i", *Studia Islamica* 80 (1994), 145-163; Todd Lawson, "Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy in Twelver Shi'ism: Aḥmad al-Aḥsāʾī on Fayḍ Kāshānī (the *Risalat al-ʿIlmiyya*)", in: *Religion and Society in Qajar Iran*, Robert Gleave, ed., London: Routledge Curzon 2005, 127-154.

²⁵ Riḍā-Nizhād, *Ḥakīm-i Sabzavārī*, 69–74.

²⁶ For example, he defended Fayḍ Kāshānī against Aḥsāʾī's criticism of his treatise on knowledge in *al-Muḥakamāt wa-l-muqāwamāt*, in: *Rasāʾil-i ḥakīm-i Sabzavārī*, Sayyid Jalāl Aṣṭhiyānī, ed., Tehran: Markaz-i Uṣwa 1376sh./1997-98, 581–601; Maḥdī Muḥaqqiq, "Introduction", in: Hādī Sabzavārī, *Sharḥ Ghurur al-farāʾid maʾrūf biḥ Sharḥ-i Manẓūma-yi ḥikmat: Qisṣat-i umūr-i ʿammeh va jawhar va ʿarāḍ*, Toshihiko Izutsu and Maḥdī Muḥaqqiq, eds., Tehran: McGill Institute of Islamic Studies 1969, 11.

²⁷ Edward Browne, *A Year among the Persians*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1926, 132 mentions a stay of seven years; Riḍā-Nizhād, *Ḥakīm-i Sabzavārī*, 52.

²⁸ Ṭalibī, "Introduction", 4; Ḥirz al-Dīn, *Maʿārif al-rijāl*, 220.

²⁹ Riḍā-Nizhād, *Ḥakīm-i Sabzavārī*, 82.

³⁰ Riḍā-Nizhād, *Ḥakīm-i Sabzavārī*, 83–84, 257; Ḥirz al-Dīn, *Maʿārif al-rijāl*, 220.

was his spiritual master in that city.³¹ Of course, some of his students were well known Sufis, and we shall return to the question of Sabzavārī and Sufism.

In 1252/1836–37, he returned to his birthplace, stopping in Mashhad on the way to teach and perform the visitation to the shrine of the Imam where it is said that he remained for ten months.³² Back in Sabzavār, he began to teach at the Madrasa-yi Faṣḥiyya, which had been founded in 1126/1714 by a Safavid notable, ‘Abd al-Šānī.³³ From here, his fame spread and he attracted students from around the Persianate world. In 1863, Comte Arthur de Gobineau (d. 1882), the French ambassadorial minister, visited him and was much impressed. In his *Religions et philosophies dans l’Asie centrale*, he left an important account of philosophy in Iran since Mullā Ṣadrā and stressed the role of Sabzavārī:

Hadji Moulla Hady of Sebzewar is an eminent thinker, an accomplished master in the study of metaphysics... He has composed a large number of commentaries on the various works of Moulla Sadra... He enjoys an unrivalled regard in Iran...

The true value of Hadji Moulla Hady is to have revived the work of Moulla Sadra. Just as the latter restored the study of Avicenna as far as possible, the former did the same with Moulla Sadra, taking advantage of the latitude and freedom of the times in which we live... This is the cause of the enthusiasm that he elicits and for this reason one cannot doubt that he represents an interesting moment in the history of philosophy in this country.³⁴

At the height of his fame, he was visited by the ruler Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh (d. 1313/1896) on 28 Muḥarram 1284/1 June 1867 while the king was on a visitation to the shrine at Mashhad.³⁵ The king was struck by his piety and poise and arranged for the court photographer Āqā Riḍā to make a portrait of him. Sabzavārī acquiesced to a royal commission to write a short Persian work on philosophy; this was *Asrār al-ḥikam* (The Secrets of Philosophy) which was lithographed and distributed to scholars free of charge at the expense of the court vizier.³⁶

Sabzavārī died at the age of 77 on 22 Dhū l-Ḥajja 1289/20 February 1873 and was buried near his house.

Contribution

Sabzavārī was a prolific writer. Before discussing his works and his legacy through his students, I want to sketch his pedagogy as expressed in his autobiography and in the accounts of his many students.

³¹ Riḍā-Nizhād, *Ḥakīm-i Sabzavārī*, 82; author’s interview with Prof. Ghulām Ḥusayn Ibrāhīmī Dīnānī at the University of Tehran on 3 January 1996.

³² Browne, *A Year among the Persians*, 132; Riḍā-Nizhād, *Ḥakīm-i Sabzavārī*, 85–86.

³³ Riḍā-Nizhād, *Ḥakīm-i Sabzavārī*, 87.

³⁴ Arthur de Gobineau, *Religions et philosophies dans l’Asie centrale*, Paris: Gallimard 1933, 95–97.

³⁵ Riḍā-Nizhād, *Ḥakīm-i Sabzavārī*, 259–261. Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe*, 416.

³⁶ Chahārdahī, *Sabzavārī*, 15; Muḥaqqiq, “Introduction”, 14.

A demanding teacher, Sabzavāri divided his classes by ability. New and elementary students were required to follow the basic programme: grammar through the *Alfiyya* of Ibn Mālik (d. 1274), logic taught with the *Sharḥ al-maṭālī* of al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1413) and *al-Risāla al-shamsiyya* of Dabirān Kātibi Qazwīnī (d. 1276), basic Euclidean mathematics and *fiqh*, theology through the *Shawāriq al-ilhām* of Lāhijī and the *Sharḥ al-hidāya* of Mīr Ḥusayn Maybudī (d. 1504). The foundational course in philosophy lasted eight years based almost exclusively on the works of Mullā Ṣadrā. Later in life, he divided his philosophical teaching into three: an introductory class of three hours a day based on his own *Sharḥ-i manẓūma*, an intermediate class based on the works of Mullā Ṣadrā, and an advanced class of higher speculation based upon Sabzavāri's own experience.³⁷ For those more interested in philosophical mysticism (ʿirfān), he taught the major texts of the school of Ibn ʿArabī (d. 1240) namely *Miṣbāḥ al-uns* of Ḥamza Fanārī (d. 1431), *Maṭlaʿ khusūṣ al-kilām fī sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* of Dāwūd Qaysārī (d. 1350) and *Tamhīd al-qawāʿid* of Ṣāʾin al-Dīn Turka Iṣfahānī (d. 830/1437).³⁸ This range of teaching reflected his own interests and ideas about pedagogy but also the requirements of his students: some wanted an intellectual training, others wanted a philosophical understanding of their faith and a grasp of definitions that could aid their study of jurisprudence, and a small group were attracted to the introspective and mystical speculation and taste. The following account is provided by his son Muḥammad Ismāʿīl as recounted by Iʿtimād al-Saltāna:

The late Ḥājji spent the last third of the night awake and in the dark engrossed in prayer, regardless of whether it was winter, summer, autumn or spring, until sunrise [...] He certainly had no taste or inclination to take opium or any sort of tobacco. Two hours into the day, he would go to the *madrasa* and teach for four hours [...] He would spend three to four and a half hours of the night in prayer in the darkness [...] He did not have a library, just a few volumes [...]

He would not keep the revenues from his lands but distribute them to the poor. Every year for the last ten days of Ṣafar, he would hold mourning for Imam Husayn and lament himself and wail loudly inviting people to join him in the mourning. One day he gave the reciter five Qurʾāns and would feed the poor bread and *ābgūsh* (a basic meat

³⁷ Masʿūd Tālībī, "Introduction", in: Ḥādī Sabzavārī, *Sharḥ al-manẓūma*, 4.

³⁸ Riḍā-Nizhād, *Hakīm-i Sabzavārī*, 96–97. Ḥamza Fanārī, *Miṣbāḥ al-uns sharḥ Miftāḥ al-ghayb*, Muḥammad Khājavi, ed., Tehran: Intishārāt-i Mawlā 1996; Dāwūd Qaysārī, *Maṭlaʿ khusūṣ al-kalām fī maʿānī Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, Muḥammad Ḥusayn Saʿidī, ed., 2 vols., Tehran: Anwār al-hudā 1995; Ṣāʾin al-Dīn Turka, *Tamhīd al-qawāʿid*, Sayyid Jalāl Āshtiyānī, ed., Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy 1976. On Ṣāʾin al-Dīn, see Leonard Lewisohn, "Sufism and Theology in the Confessions of Ṣāʾin al-Dīn Turka Iṣfahānī", in: *Sufism and Theology*, Ayman Shihadeh, ed., Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2007, 63–82, and Sayyid ʿAlī Mūsawī Biḥbahānī, "Ahvāl va āthār-i Ṣāʾin al-Dīn Turka Iṣfahānī", in: *Collected Papers in Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism*, Hermann Landolt & Mehdi Mohaghegh, eds., Tehran: Tehran University Press 1971, 97–132.

broth or stew)... Every year he would fulfil his duty of paying the *zakāt* and *khums* directly into the hands of the *sayyid* and the needy.³⁹

For those more mystically and spiritually inclined, accounts sound more akin to the “life of a saint” and one who wrought miracles and unusual feats (*ṣāhib-i karāmāt va maqāmāt*). Accounts are given of his miracles: Riḍā-Nizhād mentions eleven such extraordinary events in his life and significantly after his death (a sure sign of sanctity and spiritual power).⁴⁰ These incidents cover the normal range of Sufi miracles: supernatural knowledge, telekinesis, and spiritual healing. Some commentators have described him as a Sufi master and he certainly sought the company of Sufis.⁴¹ One controversial Sufi Mullā ‘Abbās ‘Alī Kayvān Qazvinī (d. 1938) claimed that he was close to the Ni‘matullāhī Gunābādī shaykh Sa‘ādat ‘Alī Shāh (d. 1289/1872) and that Sabzavārī was the true Sufi pole (*qutb*) of his time.⁴²

First, it is worth stressing that no one had the signs of being the *qutb* other than Hājī Mullā Hādī. In knowledge, wisdom and piety he had no peer and no one was deep in knowledge like him. He lived frugally and owned little. He was so liked that if he ever wanted people to prostrate to him they would have done. He did not seek any leadership and would even shun leading the prayer. He would not seek the company of the elites but instead lived in seclusion, was ascetic, would constantly beseech his Lord...

He presents a life without pretence and with simplicity and he would not draw attention to his own distinction and bring people towards him, he would not privilege his children nor squander wealth. Thus his disciples of all sorts were free to follow spiritual masters as they wished.⁴³

It was through his association that he introduced his student Muḥammad Ibn Ḥaydar to Sa‘ādat ‘Alī Shāh; the student later succeeded him in the Ni‘matullāhī order as Sulṭān ‘Alī Shāh Gūnābādī (d. 1327/1909) and was famed for his commentary on the Qur‘ān *Bayān al-sa‘āda fī maqāmāt al-‘ibāda* and his *Vilāyat-*

³⁹ I‘timād al-Saltāna, *Maṭla‘ al-shams*, Tehran: Sāzmān-i Shāhanshāhi-yi khadamāt-i ijtimā‘i 2535shāhanshāhi/1976-77, vol. 3, 197–201; Suhā, *Tārīkh-i ḥukamā’*, 111–113.

⁴⁰ Riḍā-Nizhād, *Ḥakīm-i Sabzavārī*, 244–249.

⁴¹ Nasr, “Sabziwārī”, 1544.

⁴² On the Ni‘matullāhī order and its branches and developments, see Leonard Lewisohn, “An Introduction to the History of Modern Persian Sufism I: the Ni‘matullāhī Order, Persecution, Revival and Schism”, *BSOAS* 61 (1998), 437–464; Matthijs van den Bos, *Mystic Regimes: Sufism and the State in Iran from the late Qajar Era to the Islamic Republic*, Leiden: Brill 2002; Mas‘ūd Humāyūnī, *Tārīkh-i silsila-hā-yi tariqat-i Ni‘matullāhiyya dar Irān*, London: Bunyād-i ‘irfān-i Mawlānā 1992; Richard Gramlich, *Die schiitischen Derwischorden Persiens*, Wiesbaden: Steiner Verlag 1965, vol. 1, 27–69. For an internal account of the Gunābādī branch based on the biography of one of its masters, see Maḥbūb ‘Alī Shāh (‘Alī Tābanda), *Khūrshid-i tābanda: sharb-i aḥwāl va āthār-i ‘ālim-i rabbānī va ‘arīf-i šamadānī Ḥadrat Aqā Hājī Sulṭān-Ḥusayn Gunābādī Riḍā ‘Alī Shāh*, Tehran: Intishārāt-i Ḥaqīqat 1373sh./1994-95.

⁴³ Kayvān Qazvinī, *Rāzgushā: Bihīn sukhan, ustuwār*, Tehran: n.p. n.d., 24.

nāma.⁴⁴ It is difficult to verify Sabzavārī's position in this Sufi order; while it is undeniable that he had a close relationship to these Sufis that does not entail his affiliation to their spiritual lineage.⁴⁵ Sufism can, of course, in a Shi'i context be seen rather negatively and it may be that he wanted to keep his distance. 'Irfān was acceptable (and remains so) in the *ḥawza*; *taṣawwuf* is, however, more problematic.⁴⁶

Sabzavārī wrote around forty works in Arabic and Persian. They can be divided into four categories: *marginalia* on the works of Mullā Ṣadrā, original works in philosophy, commentaries on supplications and Persian literature, and works on theology. He also composed verse under the pen-name *Asrār*.⁴⁷ His commentaries are on the whole based on his teaching at the Madrasa-yi Faṣḥiyya and included other philosophical, theological, grammatical and legal texts such as *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq* of Suhrawardī (d. 586/1191), *Shawāriq al-ilhām* of Lāhijī (d. 1072/1661), *Zubdat al-uṣūl* of Shaykh Baḥā' al-Dīn 'Āmilī (d. 1030/1621), *Sharḥ alfiyyat Ibn Mālik* of Jalāl al-Dīn Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), and *al-Abḥāth al-mufida* of 'Allāma al-Ḥillī (d. 725/1325). None of these works has been published. However, most of the works from the four categories have been published.

Among the *marginalia* on the works on Mullā Ṣadrā, Sabzavārī wrote the following:

- 1) *Ḥawāshī* on *al-Asfār al-arba'a*, the *magnum opus* of Mullā Ṣadrā – this was placed in the first lithographic printing of the *Asfār* in 1282/1865.⁴⁸
- 2) *Ḥawāshī* on *al-Mabda' wa-l-ma'ād* – this was lithographed in 1314/1896–97.⁴⁹
- 3) *Ḥawāshī* on *al-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyya* – this *marginalia* on the epitome of Sadrian philosophy was lithographed in 1286/1869.
- 4) *Ḥawāshī* on *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* – these glosses on the Qur'anic and philosophical hermeneutics of Mullā Ṣadrā have never been published.⁵⁰ The *marginalia*

⁴⁴ Sulṭān 'Alī Shāh Gunābādī, *Bayān al-sa'āda*, 4 vols., Tehran: Tehran University Press 1344sh./1965–66; idem., *Vilāyat-nāma*, Tehran: Intishārāt-i Ḥaqīqat 1380sh./2001-02; cf. Lewisohn, "An Introduction", 450–452.

⁴⁵ Hādī Sabzavārī also met the dhahabī master Rāz-i Shīrāzī (d. 1286/1869). See Leonard Lewisohn, "The *Qawā'im al-Anwār* of Rāz-i Shīrāzī and Shi'i Sufism in Qajar Persia", in: *Muslim Cultures in the Indo-Iranian World during the Early-Modern and Modern Periods*, Denis Hermann & Fabrizio Speziale, eds., Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag – Institut Français de Recherche en Iran 2010, 250–251.

⁴⁶ Cf. Aḥmad Aḥmadi, "Irfān and taṣawwuf", *al-Tawḥīd* 1 (1984), 63–76; Nasrollah Pourjavady, "The Opposition to Sufism in Twelver Shiism", in: *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*, Frederick de Jong and Bernd Radtke, eds., Leiden: Brill 1999, 614–623.

⁴⁷ Hādī Sabzavārī, *Dirvān-i asrār*, Sayyid Ḥasan Amīn, ed., Tehran: Intishārāt-i Vaḥīd 1993.

⁴⁸ Ridā-Nizhād, *Ḥakīm-i Sabzavārī*, 140.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 145.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 146.

of Sabzavārī's teacher 'Alī Nūrī are better known and have been published in the edition of the work.⁵¹

- 5) *Ḥawāshī* on *Asrār al-āyāt* – Āshtiyānī claims that he saw a manuscript of this but it is not mentioned by other sources and I have not managed to find any other reference to it.⁵² Since the work is often associated with *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*, it would not be surprising to find Sabzavārī writing glosses upon it.

Among his original works, three stand out:

- 1) *al-La'ālī l-muntazima* (on logic) and *Ghurur al-farā'id* (on philosophy) upon both of which he later wrote a commentary and gloss (*ta'liqā*) – this is his famous *sharḥ-i manzūma*, a major didactic work (hence versified) and its explanation that since its publication in 1298/1881 until well into the 1980s was the major introduction to philosophy in the *ḥawza*.⁵³ The work is divided mainly into three parts: a section on logic, semantics and proof theory; *metaphysica generalis* (*al-Ilāhiyyāt bi-l-ma'nā l-'āmm*) covering basic issues of ontology; and *metaphysica specialis* (*al-Ilāhiyyāt bi-l-ma'nā l-khāṣṣ*) on philosophical theology.⁵⁴ I discuss this work in more detail below.
- 2) *Asrār al-ḥikam fī l-mufattataḥ wa-l-mukhaṭṭatam* – this Persian work on philosophy was commissioned by Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh and completed in 1286/1869.⁵⁵ There are two sections: metaphysics or theoretical philosophy (*ḥikmat-i nazārī*) and ethics or practical philosophy (*ḥikmat-i 'amalī*). The former analyses philosophical theology from discussions on the nature of being and the oneness of God to the nature of the imamate. The latter provides spiritual explanations of prayer, fasting and other ritual practices. The style of the text is consistent with Sabzavārī's mystical and poetic taste and the work is replete with poetic quotations from the Persian classics. This text played a pivotal role in

⁵¹ Mullā Ṣadrā, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb ma' ta'liqāt Mullā 'Alī Nūrī*, Muḥammad Khājavi, ed., Tehran: Mu'assasa-yi muṭāla'āt va taḥqīqāt-i farhangī 1984.

⁵² Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī, "Muqaddima", to: Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyya fī l-manāḥij al-sulūkīyya*, Mashhad: Chāpkhāna-yi Khurāsān 1967, cliv.

⁵³ Riḍā-Nizhād, *Ḥakim-i Sabzavārī*, 150-155; Ḥirz al-Dīn, *Ma'ārif al-rijāl*, 222-223; Chahār-dahī, *Sabzavārī*, 63; Suhā, *Tārīkh-i ḥukamā'*, 115. The text was supplanted by 'Allāma Ṭabāṭabā'i's *Bidāyat al-ḥikma* and *Nihāyat al-ḥikma*, both published in Qum: Mu'assasat al-nashr al-islāmī 1984. The former is available in an excellent translation: *The Elements of Islamic Metaphysics*, 'Alī-Qulī Qarā'i, tr., London: ICAS Press 2003.

⁵⁴ Hādī Sabzavārī: *Sharḥ Ghurur al-farā'id ma'rūf biḥ Sharḥ-i Manzūma-yi ḥikmat: Qismat-i umūr-i 'amma va jawāhar va 'araḍ*, Toshihiko Izutsu and Mahdī Muḥaqqiq, eds., Tehran: McGill Institute of Islamic Studies 1969; trs. Toshihiko Izutsu and Mehdi Mohaghegh as *The Metaphysics of Sabzavari*, Tehran: Iran University Press 1983; Hādī Sabzavārī, *Sharḥ Ghurur al-farā'id, maqṣad-i sirrūm fī l-ilāhiyyāt bi-l-ma'nā l-akḥaṣṣ*, ed. Mahdī Muḥaqqiq, Tehran: McGill Institute of Islamic Studies 1999.

⁵⁵ Hādī Sabzavārī, *Asrār al-ḥikam*, Ḥasan Farzād, ed., Tehran: Intishārāt-i Mawlā 1982. This work is the basis of the assessment of Sabzavārī's contribution to philosophy in Muhammad Iqbal's doctoral dissertation at Heidelberg, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*, London: Luzac & Co. 1908, 176-179.

the vernacular popularisation of the thought of Mullā Ṣadrā in the Qajar period.⁵⁶ It was distributed to ulama by royal decree and perhaps signalled an official recognition of the need to disseminate the school of Mullā Ṣadrā.

- 3) *Hādī l-muḍillīn* – a Persian epitome of philosophical theology that is attributed to Sabzavārī.⁵⁷ According to the modern editor, ‘Alī Awjabī, the work was probably written by a student of Sabzavārī and completed in 1290/1874. It examines the basic elements of Shi‘i theological doctrine.

The third category also yields three important works:

- 1) *Sharḥ al-asmā’* – a commentary on the famous supplication of the divine names known as *Jawshan kabīr*.⁵⁸ The supplication itself is transmitted by the third Shi‘i Imam al-Ḥusayn and became quite popular under the Safavids, quoted in the prayer and supplication manual *al-Balad al-amīn* of Ibrāhīm al-Ka‘fāmī (d. 904/1499) and the encyclopaedia of Shi‘i tradition *Biḥār al-anwār* of Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī (d. 1110/1699).⁵⁹ Sabzavārī completed the commentary in 1260/1844. It is an extensive philosophical and mystical meditation upon the supplication drawing upon the school of Mullā Ṣadrā, Neoplatonic traditions in Islam and the rational mysticism of Ibn ‘Arabī.
- 2) *Sharḥ du‘ā’ al-ṣabāḥ* of Imam ‘Alī also known as *Miftāḥ al-falāḥ wa-miṣbāḥ al-najāt fī sharḥ du‘ā’ al-ṣabāḥ* was originally composed in 1267/1851.⁶⁰
- 3) *Sharḥ-i asrār* – a commentary on some one hundred or so “difficult” verses of the *Mathnavī* of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 673/1274) commissioned by the Qajar prince Sulṭān Murād Mirzā Ḥusām al-Saltāna, the governor of Khorasan.⁶¹ The commentary once again allows Sabzavārī to relate his learning in the philosophical and mystical traditions to an explanation of the poetry.⁶²

Sabzavārī’s legacy did not reside merely in his works that were lithographed, copied and distributed. More significant for the dissemination of the school of Mullā Ṣadrā were his students who flocked to Sabzavār from all over the Islamic

⁵⁶ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “The Metaphysics of Ṣadr al-Dīn Shirāzī and Islamic Philosophy in Qajar Persia”, in: *Qajar Iran: Political, Social and Cultural Change 1800-1925*, Edmund Bosworth & Carole Hillenbrand, eds., Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 1983, 190.

⁵⁷ Hādī Sabzavārī, *Hādī l-muḍillīn mansūb biḥ Hājī Mullā Hādī Sabzavārī*, ‘Alī Awjabī, ed., Tehran: Anjuman-i āthār va mafākhir-i farhangī 1383sh./2004-05.

⁵⁸ Hādī Sabzavārī, *Sharḥ al-asmā’*, Najaf Qulī Ḥabībī, ed., Tehran: Dānishgāh-i Tihirān 1375sh./1996-97.

⁵⁹ Ibrāhīm al-Ka‘fāmī, *al-Balad al-amīn*, Tehran: Maktabat al-Ṣādiq 1963, 402; Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, Beirut: Dār al-wafā’ 1982, vol. 91, 382-397.

⁶⁰ Hādī Sabzavārī, *Sharḥ du‘ā’ al-ṣabāḥ*, Beirut: Dār al-maḥajja al-bayḍā’ 1997.

⁶¹ It has been recently published: Hādī Sabzavārī, *Sharḥ-i mathnavī*, Muṣṭafā Burūjirdī, ed., 3 vols., Tehran: Vizārat-i irshād 1374-77sh./1995-98.

⁶² For a study of this text, see John Cooper, “Rūmī and *hikmat*: Towards a Reading of Sabzavārī’s commentary on the *Mathnavī*”, in: *The Heritage of Persian Sufism I: Classical Persian Sufism from its Origins to Rūmī*, Leonard Lewisohn, ed., Oxford: Oneworld Publications 1999, 409-433.

East. Various sources mention between sixty-five and a hundred students, and another twenty-five spiritual disciples (who seemed to treat Sabzavārī like a Sufi master). Alongside the general body of *hawza* students, there are three important groups influenced by Sabzavārī. The first group were his students who were cultural figures of the time. One example was Sayyid Aḥmad Riḍavī “Adīb” Pishāvarī (d. 1349/1930), a Suhrawardī Sufi from India who had fled the British repression after the revolt of 1857 to Afghanistan and then Iran and who studied in Sabzavār for the last two years of Sabzavārī’s life.⁶³

The second group were important jurists whose years of study ushered in a paradigm shift in jurisprudence. Perhaps the most important *uṣūlī* jurist of the middle Qajar period, Shaykh Murtaḍā Anṣārī (d. 1281/1864), generally considered to be the first modern *marjaʿ-i taqlīd*, studied philosophy and theology with Sabzavārī for two years before he emigrated to Najaf in 1250/1834.⁶⁴ The other outstanding jurist of the Qajar period, Ākhūnd Muḥammad Kāzīm Khurāsānī (d. 1329/1911), a prominent constitutionalist and author of the main *hawza* text in legal theory and jurisprudence of the modern period *Kifāyat al-uṣūl*, studied in Sabzavār for two years before he transferred to Najaf in 1861.⁶⁵ *Uṣūl al-fiqh* had always been influenced by epistemology and logic from the mediaeval period, especially in what was known as the Shāfiʿī method (*al-ṭarīqa al-shāfiʿiyya*) exemplified in *al-Mustasfā* of Ghazālī (d. 505/1111). But the metaphysical shift, particularly noticeable in the procedural principles in jurisprudence (*uṣūl ʿamaliyya*), was influenced by Sabzavārī which made the teaching of philosophy more acceptable in Najaf, a centre of learning traditionally hostile to philosophy.⁶⁶ Shiʿī jurisprudence broadly comprises two sets of discussions: semantic theory (*mabāḥith al-alfāz*) and procedural principles (*uṣūl ʿamaliyya*). The latter has seen a considerable growth, complication and sophistication that can be traced to the work of Anṣārī and especially Khurāsānī. For most of the mediaeval period, the main textbook in jurisprudence and legal theory was *Mabādīʾ al-wuṣūl ilā ʿilm al-uṣūl*, a short work by ʿAllāma al-Ḥilli.⁶⁷ It is almost exclusively concerned with semantics and hermeneutics and engages in two areas of concern in Sunni jurisprudence: the nature of scholarly consensus (*ijmāʿ*) and evaluation and adjudication of contradictory *ḥadīth* reports (*tarjīb*). The structure and contents of Khurāsānī’s *Kifāyat al-uṣūl* are quite distinct. The text begins with an epistemological introduction and considers categorisation and its metaphysical implication. It then progresses to discuss semantics and hermeneutics and the nature of legal commands and prohibitions.

⁶³ Suhā, *Tārīkh-i ḥukamāʾ*, 121-122; Munibur Rahman, “Adīb Pīshāvarī”, in: *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 1, New York: Biblioteca Persica Press 1985, 460.

⁶⁴ Chahārdahī, *Sabzavārī*, 44.

⁶⁵ Riḍā-Nizhād, *Ḥakīm-i Sabzavārī*, 123; Abdol-Hadi Haʿirī, “Ākūnd Korāsānī”, in: *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 1, New York: Biblioteca Persica Press 1985, 732-734.

⁶⁶ Mervin, “La quête”, 181.

⁶⁷ Ibn Muṭahhar al-Ḥilli, *Mabādīʾ al-wuṣūl ilā ʿilm al-uṣūl*, ʿAbd al-Ḥusayn al-Baqqāl, ed., Qum: Maktab al-ʿilām al-islāmī 1983.

Even in this section, there is a more systematic appreciation that linguistic analysis involves a consideration of the relationship between three metaphysical realities: ideas and concepts, speech and communication, and objective reality. There is also a final section on the nature of legal reasoning (*ijtihād*) and the necessity of following (*taqlīd*) and emulating a model jurist.

Before that comes the crucial section on procedural principles, namely exemption (*al-barāʿa al-aṣliyya*), presumption of continuity (*istiṣḥāb*), precaution (*iḥtiyāt*), and optional choice (*takhyīr*).⁶⁸ These principles pertain to issues in the absence of scriptural evidence and the inability to formulate clear rational judgments in a case. It is in the exposition of these principles and their grounding in the metaphysics of Mullā Ṣadrā that one can discern the influence of Sabzavārī.

The third group, and most central to the perpetuation of the Sadrian legacy, were those students who comprised the next generation of philosophers. Luminaries included the philosopher known for his proclivity to *ʿirfān*, Ḥusayn-Qulī Hamadānī (d. 1311/1893) who later taught in Karbala and whose own disciples included Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī (d. 1314/1897), Sayyid Aḥmad Ṭīhrānī Karbalāʾī (d. 1332/1914) and Sayyid ʿAlī Qāḍī Ṭabāṭabāʾī (d. 1365/1947).⁶⁹ Another prominent student was Mīrzā Javād Malakī Tabrizī (d. 1343/1924), author of *Asrār al-ṣalāt* and teacher of ethics in Qum where his disciples included Aya-tollah Khomeini (d. 1989).⁷⁰ A student of Sabzavārī prominent in Tehran later was Mīrzā Ḥusayn Sabzavārī, who taught at the Madrasa-yi ʿAbd Allāh Khān – he was a critical link to the “school of Tehran”.⁷¹

Establishing Mullā Ṣadrā in the Curriculum

Alongside the glosses on the works of the Shirazi philosopher that were printed in the margins of the Qajar lithographs produced in Tehran (and hence it was with the aid and guidance of Sabzavārī that students read and understood Mullā Ṣadrā), it was through the *Asrār al-ḥikam* and the *Sharḥ-i manẓūma* that the thought of Mullā Ṣadrā was simplified, vernacularised and disseminated.

Let us consider the *Sharḥ-i manẓūma* first. Chahārdahī advocates that “the *sharḥ-i manẓūma* from its composition to the present has been the central text for students of the intellectual disciplines (*maʿqūlāt*)”.⁷² Through some commentaries,

⁶⁸ Ākhūnd Muḥammad Kāẓim Khurāsānī, *Kifāyat al-uṣūl*, Qum: Muʾassasat al-nashr al-islāmī 2001, 384–495. Similarly, roughly half of Anṣārī’s text concerns these procedural principles.

⁶⁹ Suhā, *Tārīkh-i ḥukamāʾ*, 132–133. There is now an extensive literature of Shiʿi mystics of recent past: e.g. Ṣādiq Ḥasanẓāda & Ḥasan Ṭayyār, *Uswat al-ʿurafāʾ*, Beirut: Dār al-Amīra 2002.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 133–134.

⁷¹ Suhā, *Tārīkh-i ḥukamāʾ*, 121; Nasr, *Islamic Philosophy*, 246; Riḍā-Nizhād, *Ḥakīm-i Sabzavārī*, 112.

⁷² Chahārdahī, *Sabzavārī*, 28.

it functions as a touchstone and inspiration for the development of the “new theology” (*kalām-i jadīd*) pioneered by Muṭahharī among others.

The text is made up of three layers. The first level is the poetic form, the dense collection of words demanding explanation and commentary. The mediaeval tradition of the *madrasa* often privileged short versified texts designed for memorisation as a vehicle for teaching ideas; it was a popular genre particularly in the study of Arabic grammar and morphology as well as jurisprudence and creedal theology. While Sabzavārī was a decent poet in Persian, the Arabic of these verses is not exactly the most elegant, inspired or exciting. But given that the function of the verse was ease of memorisation, the often forced rhyme, unnatural metre and other weak stylistic and structural features may perhaps be forgiven. The second level is the commentary that expounds the sense of the words and their connotation and significations. This was based on his own classes and the definitive explanation of the poem expounding on some obscurities. The third level comprises the later glosses that Sabzavārī himself wrote on the poem and in it he expands on some issues unresolved in the commentary. Already in his lifetime, it was used as a textbook in philosophy and soon after his death with the appearance of the lithograph it was taught in Tehran. The first part (*maqṣad*) on general ontology reads like a more systematic summary of the first *safar* of Mullā Ṣadrā's *Asfār* and is divided into the following “gems” (*farīda*): properties of being and non-being (*al-wujūd wa-l-'adam*), necessity and possibility (*al-wujūb wa-l-imkān*), eternity and incipience (*al-ḥudūth wa-l-qidam*), actuality and potentiality (*al-fi'l wa-l-quwwa*), essence and its properties (*al-māhiyya wa-lawāḥiqihā*), unity and multiplicity (*al-waḥda wa-l-kathra*), and cause and effect (*al-'illah wa-l-ma'lūl*). The *Asfār* actually has three further sections on mental being, on the intellect and on motion that are not covered separately in the *Sharḥ-i manzūma*, but that is partly because aspects of the discussions are subsumed in the existing sections; for example, the discussion of mental being is found in the first gem on the properties of being.⁷³

The comprehensive character of the text mirrors earlier encyclopaedic works such as *al-Shifā'* of Avicenna and the *Asfār* of Mullā Ṣadrā. The preliminary part concerns logic. But it is more than the Aristotelian or even Avicennan *organon*. Rather, it draws upon semantic theory, hermeneutics, and category theory. It is divided into seven “dives” (*ghawṣ*) evoking the image of divide for pearls (*la'ālī*): on universals and particulars, on the isagogic predicables, on definition (*ta'rīf*), on propositional logic, on opposition and contradiction, on the syllogistic (*qiyās*), and on types of demonstration (*burhān*).

The philosophical work also comprises seven parts that cover the totality of issues in metaphysics and philosophical theology, culminating in ethics which is a

⁷³ Cf. Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Hikma al-muta'āliya fī l-asfār al-'aqliyya al-arba'a*, Ghulām-Riḍā A'vānī and Maqṣūd Muḥammadi, eds., 3 volumes of the first *safar*, Tehran: Sadra Islamic Philosophy Research Institute 1380–83sh./2001–2005.

distinguishing feature often absent from such works in the mediaeval period. The first section on *metaphysica generalis* deals with core issues around the question of being and its properties and constitutes the sort of speculative metaphysics that was starting to be disapproved in Europe of his time. The second section on substance and accident deals with the Avicennan modification of Aristotelian category theory. In this he follows Mullā Ṣadrā. But it is worth bearing in mind that, in effect, the metaphysical shift in Sadrian philosophy towards focusing upon events and “acts of being-becoming” instead of Aristotelian immutable substances made category theory redundant. Sabzavārī did not, however, reflect upon this processual turn in philosophy. The third section on *metaphysica specialis* concerns the nature of God and the God-human relationship and includes a discussion of determinism and will. It is only these first three sections that have ever been published. Section four concerns natural philosophy or mediaeval physics and includes some of his stranger ideas such as the cause of earthquakes lying with subterranean monsters. Not surprising, this is the section of the text made wholly obsolete by modern science and consequently has not been taught for some time. The fifth section moves onto prophecy and the features of it such as miracles and oneiromancy. He also raises the question of why and how God communicates to humans. A corollary of this discussion and its extension is the exposition of the imamate since we are dealing with a Shi‘i philosophy. The sixth section is difficult but critical on the nature of resurrection and the afterlife. Sabzavārī extends Mullā Ṣadrā’s desire to prove the elusive or what had been hitherto indemonstrable, namely, the orthodox position of corporeal resurrection. Since the section on the afterlife in the *Asfār* was criticised for failing to adhere closely to Shi‘i doctrine, this text provides a more grounded Shi‘i disquisition on the question. The final and in some ways rather unique aspect of the text is a section on the “science of character traits” (*akhlāq*) better known as ethics, remarkable given that by this point in the intellectual history ethics had been broadly expunged from the philosophical tradition and was confined to *fiqh*, belles-lettres, mirrors-for-princes, the *akhlāq-andarz* literature and poetry.

A number of later students and scholars in the line of Sabzavārī have commented, expanded upon and translated the text.⁷⁴ Over forty such works have been written. This number attests to the significance of the work given that it was written only 150 years ago. The earliest commentaries (which have never been published) were composed by his direct students who had benefited from directly reading the text and they are often closer in style and taste to the original work. Probably the first among these were the brief *marginalia* of the jurist Ākhūnd Khurāsānī. More extensive was an Arabic commentary by Sayyid Muḥammad ‘Aṣṣār Ṭihrānī (d. 1356/1937). This work is entitled *Isbrāqāt al-raḍawīyya*.

⁷⁴ Riḍā-Nizhād, *Hakīm-i Sabzavārī*, 208-225.



Another category of commentaries are glosses by teachers of philosophy in the *ḥawza*. One set of *scholia* are written by the 20th century *ḥakīm* Mīrzā Aḥmad Āshtiyānī. The glosses of Mullā Muḥammad Ṭīhrānī, known as Ākhūnd Ḥīdajī, were completed in 1346/1927.⁷⁵ It is a sophisticated Avicennan commentary that is one of the few to deal systematically with the section on logic. Perhaps the best one volume introduction for students is *Durar al-fawā'id fī sharḥ ghurar al-farā'id* of Shaykh Muḥammad Taqī Āmulī.⁷⁶ The final category of commentary I would like to mention is mystical or *irfānī*, in which the outstanding example is the *Ta'liqāt* of Mīrzā Mahdī Āshtiyānī (d. 1952).⁷⁷

Beyond the *ḥawza*, the role of the *Asrār al-ḥikam* in disseminating the philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā is perhaps more critical. The style of the text is worthy of mention: it is written in accessible prose and the demonstrative nature of the argument set forth clearly with discursive explanations of the premises of each syllogistic argument, corroborated and supplemented by poetic citations and allusions to famous scriptural sources. On numerous points, he follows the method of Mullā Ṣadrā in the *Asfār*: he first sets forth the argument in a demonstrative manner, and follows it with a discussion of the scriptural sources that corroborate it. I would like to consider two examples that represent the Shi'ī philosophy that Sabzavārī and his mentor espoused. The first section of the ontology is concerned with knowledge of the origins of being, addressing the famed question in philosophy: why is there something rather than nothing? The first chapter of this broaches a central issue in Islamic metaphysics: the proof for the existence of a Creator, God, and Principle. Sabzavārī presents five ways of establishing the existence of God: the way of the metaphysicians (*ḥukamā'-yi ilāhiyyīn*) and their Avicennan ontological proof for the Necessary Being (*wājib al-wujūd*), the way of the natural philosophers (*ḥukamā'-yi ṭabī'īyyīn*) who infer from motion the existence of an Unmoved Mover (the argument originates in Aristotle's *Physics VIII*), the psychological way of the metaphysicians which is a form of teleological proof based on the analysis of the human soul, the way of the theologians (*mutakallimīn*), and finally his preferred method that derives from Mullā Ṣadrā, namely, the way of the veracious (*ṭarīqat-i šiddīqīn*).⁷⁸ This final mode of proving the exis-

⁷⁵ Muḥammad Hīdajī Ṭīhrānī, *Ta'liqāt al-Hīdajī 'alā l-Manzūma*, Tehran: Mu'assasat al-A'lāmī 1363sh./1984-85.

⁷⁶ Shaykh Muḥammad Taqī Āmulī, *Durar al-fawā'id fī sharḥ ghurar al-farā'id*, Tehran: Chāpkhāna-yi Abū Zar Jahrumī 1960.

⁷⁷ Mahdī Āshtiyānī, *Ta'liqā bar Sharḥ-i manzūma-yi ḥikmat-i Sabzavārī*, Javād Falātūri and Mahdī Muḥaqqiq, eds., Tehran: McGill Institute of Islamic Studies 1352sh./1973-74.

⁷⁸ Sabzavārī, *Asrār al-ḥikam*, 36–57. The Avicennan tradition held to the three-fold division of the ontological (philosophers), cosmological (theologians) and from motion (natural philosophers) proofs for the existence of God that one finds mentioned in Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, Maḥmūd Shihābī, ed., Qum: Nashr al-balāgha 1375sh./1996-97, vol. 3, 66. Sabzavārī is faithful to Ṣadrā's language: he describes the argument as a "way" and not as a demonstration (*burhān*), which is the common mode of referring to it in modern secondary discussions.

tence of God is preferable but also difficult to comprehend. Sabzavārī uses poetic citations to explain it, drawing upon Rūmī and Firdawsī. He also cites the famous *ḥadīth man ʿarafa nafsahu fa-ʿarafa rabbahu* (whosoever knows his soul, knows his Lord) and the language of monism that considers the cosmos to be a series of manifestations and disclosures of divine being at whose pinnacle is the perfect man (*insān kāmil*), exemplified in the person of ʿAlī Ibn Abī Ṭālib.

The second case occurs in the sixth chapter on prophecy and the imamate. A central Shiʿi concept is *vilāyat*, the intimacy, sanctity and spiritual and ontological authority that the Prophets and Imams possess.⁷⁹ This reality arises from the divine truths hidden within the essence and from proper recognition of the divine essence, attributes and acts through vision. Being is hidden and it is only through sanctity that it is manifest in the cosmos and then only through the transcendent contemplation. Concomitantly, it is only those with vision who truly recognise the saints and Imams. It is the perfect man who is the summation and loftiest degree of humanity, of intellect, and of being after the One. Below the saint and Imam is a spiritual hierarchy, comprising worshippers (*ʿābid*), ascetics (*zāhid*) and gnostics (*ʿārīf*). These insights and the affirmation of horizontal and vertical hierarchies in existence and within the category of sanctity is an expression of the concept of the singular but graded reality of being (*tashkīk al-wujūd*) articulated by Mullā Ṣadrā; this is arguably the central doctrine of Sadrian metaphysics.⁸⁰

Philosophers in the Qajar Period

Sabzavārī was one of the four axial philosophers of the Qajar period who represented the major tendencies in philosophical and rational mystical speculation.⁸¹ The other three are often cited as the pillars of the “school of Tehran”: Āqā ʿAlī “mudarris” Zunūzī (d. 1307/1890), son of ʿAbd Allāh Zunūzī (d. 1257/1841) who was a teacher of Mullā Ṣadrā’s work in Isfahan, Āqā Muḥammad Riḍā Qumshihī (d. 1306/1889), and Mīrzā Sayyid Abū l-Ḥasan Jilva (d. 1314/1896).⁸² Like Sabzavārī, these three thinkers had taught in Isfahan either with ʿAlī Nūrī or with his

⁷⁹ Sabzavārī, *Asrār al-ḥikam*, 372.

⁸⁰ As I argue in *Mullā Ṣadrā and Metaphysics: The Modulation of Being*, London: Routledge 2009.

⁸¹ Suhā, *Tārīkh-i ḥukamāʾ*, 45–174; Nasr, *Islamic Philosophy*, 239–246; ʿAlī-Qulī Qarāʾī, “Post-Ibn Rushd Islamic philosophy in Iran”, *al-Tawḥīd* 3/3 (1985), 24–55. For a useful sketch of the history of philosophy from the circle of Nūrī to the later Qajar period, see Sayyid Jalāl Āshṭiyānī, “Muqaddima”, in: Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyya*, 124–144.

⁸² Another thinker who was a student of Nūrī and who later taught Qumshihī and moved to Tehran was Sayyid Raḍī Lārijānī (d. 1270/1853–4). The Nūrī circle and the study of Mullā Ṣadrā did not die in Isfahan after the middle of the 19th century but continued with Jahāngīr Khān Qashqāʾī (d. 1328/1910) and Mīrzā Raḥīm Arbāb – see Suhā, *Tārīkh-i ḥukamāʾ*, 84–90.

circle of students: Zunūzī and Qumshihī had studied with Mullā Muḥammad Ja'far Lāhijī (d. after 1255/1839), a commentator on the philosophical epitome *Kitāb al-mashā'ir* of Mullā Ṣadrā; Qumshihī had also read with Mīrzā Ḥasan (d. 1306/1888), son of Nūrī, as had Jilva. From Isfahan, Sabzavārī had returned to his hometown while the other three went to Tehran in response to the royal request: Zunūzī taught at the new Madrasa-yi Mādār-i Shāh and Madrasa-yi Sipahsālār, Qumshihī was an instructor at Madrasa-yi Ṣadr-i A'zam (which was near the Sipahsālār in the Nāṣir-i Khusraw district), and Jilva resided for around 40 years at the Madrasa-yi Dār al-Shifā'. They were all recipients of the Shāh's patronage in different ways and responded to request to write in defence of Iranian Shi'ī philosophical culture. We have already seen how Sabzavārī reciprocated through his writings; Zunūzī, too, at the request of the Shah, wrote *Badāyī' al-ḥikam*, a defence of Sadrian philosophy against the new ideas emanating from Europe and being disseminated at the Dār al-Funūn.⁸³

Their students in Tehran perpetuated the legacy of Mullā Ṣadrā up to the present. Qumshihī's student Mīrzā Hāshim Ashkivarī Lāhijī (d. 1332/1914) taught at the Sipahsālār. His students there included two of the most significant teachers of philosophy and *irfān* in the 20th century. Mīrzā Mahdī Āshtiyānī (d. 1372/1952, who had also studied with Jilva) wrote an illuminating and mystically inclined *marginalia* on the *Sharḥ-i manzūma* as well as an independent metaphysical treatise *Asās al-tawḥīd*.⁸⁴ He had also studied with another important student of Qumshihī and conduit for the school of Tehran in the 20th century: Mīrzā Ḥasan Kirmānshāhī (d. 1336/1917). Zunūzī had a number of significant students, such as Āqā Muḥammad Bāqir Iṣṭahbānātī, who taught in Najaf and later in Shiraz.⁸⁵ Jilva's students included Sayyid Ḥusayn Bādkūbihī (d. 1358/1939), who taught philosophy in Najaf (and was one of the teachers of 'Allāma Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī, the famous philosopher and exegete who died in 1981, Āqā Muḥammad 'Alī Shāhābādī (d. 1950), the preceptor of Ayatollah Khomeini in philosophy, and Ākhūnd Muḥammad Hīdajī (d. 1314sh./1935), commentator on the *Sharḥ-i manzūma* of Sabzavārī.⁸⁶

Zunūzī was famed as a teacher of Sadrian philosophy, Jilva was best known for his espousal of Avicennism and critique of Mullā Ṣadrā, while Qumshihī was primarily a teacher of *irfān*, rational mysticism based on the texts of the school

⁸³ 'Alī Zunūzī, *Badāyī' al-ḥikam*, Aḥmad Vā'izī, ed., Tehran: Intishārāt-i Mawlā 1376sh./1997-98. The collected works of Zunūzī have been published: *Majmū'a-yi muṣannafāt-i ḥakīm-i mu'assis Āqā 'Alī Zunūzī Ṭibrānī*, Muhsin Kadivar, ed., 3 vols., Tehran: Intishārāt-i iṭṭilā'āt 1378sh./1999-2000. Concerning the Dār al-Funūn see Maryam Ekhtiar, "Nasir al-Din Shah and the Dar al-Fonun: The Evolution of an Institution", *Iranian Studies* 34/1-4 (2001), 153-163; idem, *The Dar al-Funun: Educational and Cultural Development in Qajar Iran*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, New York University 1994.

⁸⁴ Āshtiyānī, *Tā'liq*; idem, *Asās al-tawḥīd*, Tehran: Tehran University Library 1952.

⁸⁵ Suhā, *Tārīkh-i ḥukamā'*, 157.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 167-169.

of Ibn ʿArabī. However, Sabzavārī dwarfed the others by his reputation and fame as well as the depth of his learning and teaching encompassing the core curriculum of the *madrasa*, the work of Mullā Ṣadrā, Avicennism and *ʿirfān*.

All of the four philosophers pursued this goal by analysing the relationship between Being (*wujūd*) and its perfect manifestation in *vilāyat* or the being of the Perfect Man (*shīʿa-yi kāmīl*) who encompasses and discloses the totality of the perfection of the One.⁸⁷ *Vilāyat* is the hermeneutics of being and the *parousia* of Being. As the pivot of reality, the Imam as *valī* discloses the divine realities (*al-ḥaqāʾiq al-ilāhiyya*).⁸⁸ Just as Mullā Ṣadrā's theory of the modulated but singular reality of being (*tashkīk al-wujūd*) offers an account reconciling our desire for a unifying discourse with our phenomenal experience of multiplicity, so too does the modulated manner in which being is manifest in *vilāyat* provide a spiritual hierarchy guiding humanity towards the One, at the apex of which is the pole, the perfect man, the Imam of the Twelver Shiʿa.⁸⁹

Ultimately, contemporary Shiʿi philosophy in Iran and the hegemony of Mullā Ṣadrā can be traced back to the Qajar period and the pivotal role played by Sabzavārī in commenting upon his works, disseminating and popularising his ideas, and training a generation of students who established institutions of learning and spread Sadrian philosophy in Iran, Iraq and the Indian subcontinent. Sabzavārī remained the colossal figure around and below whom all others gravitated and were given meaning. In his thought, there is little that is either original or unique – he merely critically presents and defends positions of Mullā Ṣadrā. Yet that is enough to ensure his significance. Pre-modern pedagogy and the pursuit of knowledge were far less concerned than we are with imagination, creativity and originality and our notion of art and its function are quite distinct. For his time and for his successors, it was enough that he was the Mullā Ṣadrā of his age.

⁸⁷ I examine this further in "Being (*wujūd*) and Sanctity (*vilāya*): Two Poles of Intellectual and Mystical Inquiry in Qajar Iran", in: *Religion and Society in Qajar Iran*, Robert Gleave, ed., London: Routledge 2005, 113–126.

⁸⁸ Sabzavārī, *Sharḥ al-asmāʾ*, 552.

⁸⁹ Zunūzī, *Badāʾiy al-ḥikam*, 173–183.

Continuity and Originality in Shi'i Thought: The Relationship between the *Akhbāriyya* and the *Maktab-i Taḥkīk*

Robert Gleave

The recurrent debate over whether Islamic dogmatic discourse should be informed by philosophical and mystical concerns has been given a particular and interesting twist in the emergence of the Iranian Shi'i school known as the *Maktab-i Taḥkīk* ("the School of Separation"). The debate is, of course, not new, and the employment of both peripatetic philosophy of Greek provenance and direct personal experience of divine presence as heuristic devices in the course of textual (revelatory) exegesis was controversial from the point of its inception. Modern Iranian Shi'i discussions of politics, theology and law, both within the seminary and outside of it, have generally incorporated such insights as legitimate sources of religious knowledge which can usefully inform the delineation of Muslim belief. The license to do this has, for many thinkers, been provided by the Shi'i Imams themselves in well-attested reports (*akhbār*). Such revelatory devices are hardly decisive in themselves, since the dynamics of exegesis prevent any single invariable application of a text's presumed message to a modern context. Neither are they necessarily compelling when taken in the context of alternative citations which might be marshalled to cast doubt upon the inevitability of a license for philosophical and mystical speculation within the exegetical process. Harmonising such apparently contradictory revelatory snippets is one of the tasks of those wishing to enunciate a particular religious vision whilst maintaining an (at least superficial) commitment to the authority of formative texts.

Within this context the *Maktab-i Taḥkīk* provides an interesting example of a reform school which claims a version of Shi'i heritage in which the sciences of philosophy (*falsafā*), mysticism (*taṣawwuf*), or more precisely philosophical informed mystical contemplation (*irfān*), are subjected to an enforced separation (*taḥkīk*) from any exploration of religious truth. The extent to which the ideas propounded by the school might be considered novel is one of the concerns of this article. In particular, I am concerned with whether the *Maktab-i Taḥkīk* is best seen as a continuation (or re-emergence) of certain notions of the restricted role of philosophy and mysticism which had gradually receded in importance amongst Iranian Shi'i religious scholars, beginning in the early 19th century with the demise of the Akhbārī school. Establishing (or denying) continuity is necessarily speculative, and relies (in no small measure) on the manner in which the ideas of both the Akhbārī and Taḥkīkī schools are conceived. Indeed, the question of whether the doctrines of the *Maktab-i Taḥkīk* are related to Akhbarism (in its various Safavid and early Qa-

jar forms) is a point of polemic exchange between the Tāfīkīs and their opponents. Hence any discussion of continuity and originality within the *Maktab-i Tāfīk* must take account of, but not be determined by, the Tāfīkī and anti-Tāfīkī conceptions of the *Maktab*'s place within Shī'ī intellectual history.

The Maktab-i Tāfīk

Mīrzā Mahdī Iṣfahānī (d. 1365/1946) can be identified as the principal impetus behind the establishment of the *Maktab-i Tāfīk* as an independent movement. Iṣfahānī was born in Isfahan, but travelled to Najaf at the age of 12, staying there 18 years, and studying with Muḥammad Kāzīm “Ākhūnd Khurāsānī” (d. 1329/1911, author of the famous work of *uṣūl al-fiqh*, *Kifāyat al-uṣūl*), Muḥammad Kāzīm Ṭabāṭabā'ī (d. 1337/1919, author of the famous *fiqh* work *al-Urwa al-wuthqā*) and later Muḥammad Ḥusayn Nā'inī (d. 1355/1936, a highly politically active scholar, and author of the famous religio-political tract *Tanbīh al-umma*).¹ He returned to Iran in around 1333/1914-15, spending time in Khorasan eventually settling in Mashhad in 1340/1921-22. He remained there, teaching in various Mashhad seminaries until his death in 1365/1946. It was in Mashhad that his major writings on separation of philosophy and mysticism from the practice of exegesis were composed, and a number of students were attracted to his classes, including Shaykh Maḥmūd al-Ḥalabī (d. 1377sh./1998-99). Ḥalabī is, of course, more famous outside of ulama circles for his political activities, in particular his famous attempt to reconcile Mossadeq and Ayatollah Kāshānī (d. 1339sh./1961) before the *coup d'état* and his anti-Bahā'ī activities with the *Anjuman-i ḥujjatiyya*.² In general, he is marginalised in later accounts of the *Maktab*'s development, but this may be for political reasons, as after the Iranian Revolution in 1979, he fell out of favour with Ayatollah Khomeini (d. 1989).

Muḥammad Riḍā Ḥakīmī, perhaps the best known modern defendant of the *Maktab-i Tāfīk*, identifies an additional founder of the school: Sayyid Mūsā Zarābādī (d. 1353/1932).³ In this he has been followed by Mu'ini.⁴ Whilst Iṣfahānī's role is universally acknowledged, it is doubtful that Zarābādī played as significant a role as that indicated by these writers. Concerning Zarābādī, intimate knowledge of his theological leaning is restricted to secondary accounts. To my knowledge, none of his authored works has been published. His incorporation into the

¹ A copy of the *ijāza* from Nā'inī can be seen in “Ustād-i Duktur-i Sayyid Jawād Muṣṭafā va kāri buzūrg dar kalām-i Ma'sūm”, *Kayhān-i Farhangī* 24 (1364/1986), 6.

² See Mahmoud Sadri, “Ḥalabī, Shaykh Maḥmūd”, in: *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 11, New York: Bibliotheca Persica Press 1999, 581-583.

³ Muḥammad Riḍā Ḥakīmī, *Maktab-i Tāfīk*, Tehran: Daftar-i Nashr-i Farhang-i Islāmī, 1375sh./1996-97.

⁴ Muḥsin Mu'ini, “Tāfīk”, in: *Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif-i Buzurg-i Islāmī*, ed. Kāzīm Mūsavi Buj-nūrdī, vol. 5, Tehran: Markaz-i Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif-i Buzurg-i Islāmī 1367sh./1988, 9.

story of the founding of the *Maktab-i Tafkik* clearly serves a purpose: Zarābādī's association with some of the major scholars of the constitutional period gives the school a respectable foundation myth, and spreads its inception beyond the narrow (and potentially controversial) base of Iṣfahānī. Zarābādī was born into a Qazvīnī religious family (his father, Sayyid 'Alī Zarābādī Qazvīnī was supposedly a scholar of Ḥujjat al-Islām rank) and received his training locally and in Tehran. He counts amongst his teachers Shaykh Faḍl Allāh Nūrī (d. 1328/1909, the famous anti-constitutionalist cleric). He seems to have spent most of his life teaching in Qazvin in the Madrasa Iltifātiyya, dying in 1353/1932 and being buried within the major Qazvin shrine, the Ārāmghāh Imāmzāda Ḥusayn. It seems that he and Mīrzā Mahdī Iṣfahānī, the other so-called founder of the *Maktab-i Tafkik* never met, and it may be that Zarābādī is best seen as a forerunner to the *Maktab-i Tafkik*, rather than a fully fledged Tafkikī himself.⁵

The incorporation of Zarābādī into the foundation story serves an additional purpose within Ḥakīmī's account of the foundation of the *Maktab*. It establishes Muḥtabā' al-Qazvīnī as the great synthesiser of the school, since he is reported to have been a pupil first of Zarābādī, and later of Iṣfahānī. Qazvīnī was born in 1318/1900 in Qazvin into a religious family, and travelled to Najaf at an early age with his father for his seminary education. Ayatollah Abū l-Qāsim al-Khū'ī (d. 1413/1992) may have been one of his class mates, studying under Muḥammad Ḥusayn Nā'īnī, though this is not certain. In any case, Qazvīnī certainly made an impression on the great Ayatollah Nā'īnī, and he is mentioned in positive terms in a letter from Nā'īnī to Iṣfahānī.⁶ On his return to Iran, Qazvīnī spent two years studying with Mūsā Zarābādī (who was, in fact, Qazvīnī's brother-in-law) in Qazvin. Then he spent two years in Qum and finally moved to Mashhad, studying under Mahdī Iṣfahānī. He spent from 1347/1928 until his death in 1386/1966 teaching and studying in Mashhad, and it is perhaps to Qazvīnī's intellectual vitality that the Mashhad Tafkikī school owes its true origin.⁷ Since his death, the Mashhad school has been maintained by a number of scholars, including Abū l-Ḥasan Ḥāfizīyān (d. 1360sh./1981), Jawād Āqā Ṭīhrānī (d. 1368sh./1989), Ayatollah Ḥasan 'Alī Murvārīd (d. 1425/2004) and most recently by Ayatollah Muḥammad Bāqir Malakī Miyānājī.⁸

⁵ For a fuller treatment of Zarābādī, see Muḥammad Ridā Ḥakīmī, "Ālim-i Rabbānī Sayyid Mūsā Zarābādī", *Ḥawza* 53 (1371sh./1993).

⁶ Ḥakīmī, *Maktab*, 243.

⁷ See Muḥammad 'Alī Raḥīmīyān, *Muta'allih-yi Qur'ān – Shaykh Muḥtabā' Qazvīnī Khurāsānī*, Qum: Dalil-i Mā 1383/2005.

⁸ Miyānājī continues to have a large following within Mashhad, see the panegyric assessments of his contributions in 'Abd al-Raḥīm Abādharī, "Āyat Allāh Ḥājj Shaykh Muḥammad Bāqir Malakī Miyānājī", *Farhang-i Kawthar* 27 (1378sh./1999-2000) and in Ḥakīmī, *Maktab*, 309-317.

The school's name, *Maktab-i Tafkik*, was a rather late institution. Ḥakīmī claims to have invented the term himself.⁹ Earlier scholars from within the school usually do not recognise themselves as belonging to a school as such. However, on those occasions they feel it necessary to describe their position through a common term, they have preferred to use the more orthodox sounding name *Maktab-i Ma'ārifi Abl-i Bayt* ("The School for Understanding the People of The House").¹⁰ The principal scholars of the school (Miyānājī, Ḥāfiziyān and Ṭihriyān, for example) prefer this appellation, as it is viewed as less divisive, enabling them to argue for their version of Shi'ī dogmatics to be incorporated into the mainstream. *Maktab-i Tafkik* has, however, become the commonplace name for the school, and both opponents and Tafkikīs themselves now use it regularly. This is particularly the case since Ḥakīmī popularised the name, through his general summary of the school's history and doctrines.¹¹ The nature of the distinctive doctrines of particular Tafkikī scholars has not yet been fully explored. The differences between, say, Iṣfahānī and Zarābādī are unclear from the presently available sources. Most of the major works remain in manuscript form, and have hardly been subjected to academic analysis by either scholars inside or outside of Iran, though they have received polemic refutation.

The principal doctrine of the school is that there is a category distinction between human concepts and ideas on the one hand, and the pure divine knowledge on the other. By this, they mean that ideas derived from the former category cannot be used to inform or explicate notions contained within the latter. In the former category one finds philosophical truths and inner, mystical truth (*falsafa* and *irfān*) and in the latter, one finds revelation (*wahy*). The three means of gaining knowledge (philosophy, intuition and revelation) are quite distinct (or separate, *tafkik*). Any attempt to mix them, or to achieve an equivalence between philosophical and intuitive understandings of basic religious concepts (such as the oneness of God or the nature of prophecy) is fundamentally misguided. This position sets

⁹ Ḥakīmī, *Maktab*, 44. "For many years, and in most of my writings, I have used, and recommended that others use the term '*Maktab-i Tafkik*' to describe this epistemological position and the Khurāsānī school of knowledge [more generally]." See also Ḥakīmī's "Āfāq-i Fikrī birūnhawza'i-yi Shahīd-i Muṭahharī", *Ḥawza* 91 (1378sh./2000).

¹⁰ Muḥammad Bāqir al-Malākī l-Miyānājī, *Tawḥīd al-Imāma*, Tehran: Mu'assasat al-Ṭibā'a wa-l-Nashr 1415/1994, 15.

¹¹ Entitled *Maktab-i Tafkik* and published in 1996 (with 8 reprints to date), this book led to quite a reaction both within the Iranian ulama and outside of it. Apart from the various webforums, where there was much chatter about the re-issue of the book in 2004, there have been more scholarly responses: Muḥsin Āl-Ghāfūr, "Aqlgirā'i va naqlgirā'i dar fiqh-i siyāsi-yi shī'a", *Bāztāb-i andīsha* 18 (Shahrivar 1380/September 2001, also found in abbreviated form in *Faṣṭnāma-yi 'Ulūm-i Siyāsi* 14 (1380sh./2001)); Sayyid Muḥammad Ismā'il Ḥāshimī, "Naqd va barrāsī naẓariyya-yi ma'rifat dar Maktab-i Tafkik", *Qabāsāt* (Bahār 1382/Spring 2003); Ibrāhīm Khusrāwshāhī, "Maktab-i Tafkik-i dastkhūsh-i tafkikī-yi digar", *Kitāb-i naqd* 2 and 3 (Bahār/Spring and Tabistān/Summer 1382sh./2003). There is also a special issue of *Pāyigah-yi ḥawza* 223 (1386sh./2008) on the *Maktab-i Tafkik*.

the *Maktab-i Taḥkik* in fundamental opposition to the dominant mode of religious enquiry within the Iranian Shi'ī intellectual tradition. That tradition trumpets the confluence of philosophy, mysticism and revelation. An example of how this view impacts upon a particular doctrine can be found in the discussions around bodily resurrection (*ma'ād*). This was a central element of anti-philosophical polemic within the Sunni tradition, famously developed by al-Ghazālī as one of the heresy charges levelled against the philosophers in his *Tahāfut al-falsafa*.¹² For the Taḥkikīs, the notion of resurrection found within revelation cannot be supplemented or enhanced by philosophical or mystical understandings of the process. In this, they set themselves against the most common modern Shi'ī understanding of resurrection, which is normally traced back to Mullā Ṣadrā Shirāzī (d. 1050/1640). Mullā Ṣadrā is credited with providing for bodily resurrection a set of rational proofs, by which the religious doctrine might be justified. Within the *Maktab-i Taḥkik*, the question was whether philosophical argumentation might be used to demonstrate the truth (or at least the coherence) of the Qur'anic doctrine of bodily resurrection. Ḥakīmī in his book length study of bodily resurrection attempts to demonstrate that Mullā Ṣadrā ultimately considered it impossible to demonstrate the truth of bodily resurrection through philosophical reasoning:

The reality is this – after extensive research in the lesser and more important works of Mullā Ṣadrā, and with attention to the context of his words, we have reached this conclusion: he may have managed to include the discussion of bodily resurrection within the discussions and principles of philosophy. However, after this philosophical-mystical (*falsafī-irfānī*) plan for bodily resurrection, he accepts that the fundamental, original, Islamic resurrection is the Qur'anic one. In truth, between the philosophical discussions of resurrection and the Qur'anic understanding of the concept there, he argues there is a separation (*taḥkik*). He does not consider the imaginal resurrection as being the same as the total resurrection (*'awd al-kull*). He lays out the elemental Qur'anic resurrection, and it is this he emphatically and explicitly supports on numerous occasions.¹³

Leaving aside the question of whether this is a correct understanding of Mullā Ṣadrā's views on the proofs or otherwise for bodily resurrection, the passage is an instructive example of how Ḥakīmī, who here is presenting one of the tactics of the *Maktab-i Taḥkik*, understands the history of Islamic, and in particular Shi'ī philosophy. Ḥakīmī clearly recognises that the universal respect for Mullā Ṣadrā amongst the Shi'ī seminarians makes it necessary to requisition him as a possible supporter of the *Maktab-i Taḥkik*. This he does by positing the idea that Mullā Ṣadrā ultimately was dissatisfied with the notions of bodily resurrection he had developed from either a philosophical or an intuitive-mystical perspective. Mullā Ṣadrā was, then, practically speaking, a Taḥkikī, and the *Maktab* is no longer bereft

¹² On this, see Oliver Leaman, *Introduction to Medieval Islamic Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1985, 87-107.

¹³ Muḥammad Riḍā Ḥakīmī, *Ma'ād-i jismānī va ḥikmat-i muta'ālīya*, Qum: n.p. 1381sh./2002, 105.

of the support of the dominating figure of Mullā Ṣadrā. Whilst Mullā Ṣadrā is acquired for the Taḥkikīs, the mixing of philosophical and intuitive terminology and argumentation with theological discourse is blamed squarely on his (so-called) followers.

This attempt to portray Mullā Ṣadrā as one of their own is not universal amongst the scholars of the *Maktab-i Taḥkik*. For many Taḥkikīs, the correct response to Mullā Ṣadrā's *ḥikmat* is refutation and rejection. For example, Miyānājī quotes from Mullā Ṣadrā's *al-Mabūd' wa-l-ma'ād* in which Mullā Ṣadrā criticises the Ash'arī position concerning the prerequisites for an action's performance. The debate occurs within the context of the question of God's creative power, in particular his ability to bring into, and maintain the world in, existence, and the ability of human beings to act independently of God's power. The Ash'arīs (according to Mullā Ṣadrā) argue that an action (*fi'l*) emerges from an individual who is able to act (*qādir*), but there is nothing within the individual, such as a preference (or preponderance – *tarjīḥ*) for the existence of an action over its non-existence which compels the individual to act. The notion of a preference here should not necessarily be linked to the personal will of the individual, but is instead a factor present within the individual which makes one state of affairs (brought about by an individual's actions) more likely to come into being than another. To illustrate this point, Mullā Ṣadrā cites the examples of the thirsty man and the fugitive. In the former example, when a thirsty man is faced with two cups of water, he simply drinks from one without any preference as to which he might choose. Similarly, the fugitive faced with two indistinguishable routes of escape simply takes one without a preference. In both cases, there is no preference within the individual which wills one action to come into being over another – it simply happens. The reasons why the thirsty man drinks from one cup rather than another, or the fugitive takes one route over another are hidden (*khafīyya*) from us. These are cited as example of the Ash'arī denial of natural causality and the ensuing occasionalism. Now Mullā Ṣadrā is, of course, arguing against the Ash'arī position and likens the decision of the thirsty man and fugitive to the unintentional actions of the clumsy person, the one who is asleep or the compulsive sinner. In all these cases, the individual acts, though the actions they produce are not rationally intended or the subject of contemplation. However, Mullā Ṣadrā argues, these actions are not entirely separable from a presumptive outcome. The clumsy person intends to do one thing, but actually achieves another. The sleeping man, whilst not consciously acting, moves in order to gain a more comfortable position. The compulsive sinner may not rationally consider his actions before their performance, but he does have a desired outcome from his actions. This desired outcome (i.e. the intended result) is "an imagined pleasure or [an imagined] elimination of an unpleasant state" (*takhayyul lidhdha aw zawāl ḥāla mumilla*). The imagination of this preferred state can be identified as the cause of the action and is real (i.e. it is not merely a feeling of an imagination – it is a real existent in the individual). The fact that it is

not a permanent characteristic of the individual (i.e. the imagination of the preferred state can disappear at a moment's notice and is not preserved in the mind of the agent) is not, in itself, proof of its non-existence. In short, then Mullā Ṣadrā says that even though the causal element which compels an individual to act may be hidden, or at least not obvious, this does not mean that it is non-existent, and therefore Ash'arī occasionalism is not an inevitable consequence of these examples.¹⁴

Miyānājī's gloss on Mullā Ṣadrā's argument runs as follows:

His words are confused and the issue has become unclear for him. He rules that the agent who is capable and rational proceeds to act in accordance with his preference [or preponderance], but that his preference is concealed from him. This is nothing more than saying that the agent acts *without* a concern for preference in examples such as these. [Mullā Ṣadrā] has ignored the fact that the preference in the case of "the two cups and the thirsty man", and in the case of "the two routes and the fugitive" is to flee from death, to desire life and to survive. This is a matter which compels [the individual to act] – he does not desire anything else, and he senses this with the strongest of feelings.¹⁵

Now, Miyānājī's point here is that Mullā Ṣadrā has, in effect, given too much ground to the Ash'arīs. By admitting that the thing within the mind of the individual (the "prompt" or "motive", *dā'i*) is, in fact, hidden in the cases of the thirsty man and the fugitive, he has conceded a crucial point to the Ash'arīs – namely that the element which leads an agent to act in a particular manner is not hidden, even if the individual is unable or unwilling to recognise it himself. In fact, the motive behind their actions (in grabbing one cup, or taking one route) is their desire to survive. This is the element which makes their course of action more likely and thereby forces them to act in the manner they do, and this preference is not hidden at all, but clearly discernable even to the agent himself. Miyānājī continues:

It is also amazing that [Mullā Ṣadrā] compares these [cases] to the actions of one who is asleep, or is a compulsive sinner, or is clumsy. The one asleep has had his senses and feelings taken away from him. He senses neither the action, nor the things which makes a particular action preponderant [or "preferred", *murajjih*]. [Similarly] the sinner shows no concern for the "preferred" action – he simply sins and performs an evil act. He is condemned and rebuked for his [action] and for his lack of regard for the "preferred" action. The sinner's action is not more likely, neither in reality, nor within the sinner himself. So, where is the "preference" which is hidden to the sinner who pays no regard whatsoever to the "preferred" action?¹⁶

¹⁴ The passage quoted is Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Mabdā' wa-l-ma'ād*, Qum: Markaz-i Intishārāt-i Dātar-i Tablighāt-i Islāmī 1380sh./2001-02, 137. For a detailed analysis of causality in the various schools discussed here, see Khalīl Tūsi, "Illiyat az nigāh-i Ash'arā va Maktab-i Taffik va Hikmat-i Muta'aliya", *Hawza* 93 (1378sh./2000).

¹⁵ Miyānājī, *Tawhīd al-Imāma*, 345-346.

¹⁶ Miyānājī, *Tawhīd*, 345-346.

Here Miyānājī is playing on the ambiguity within the use of the term *tarjīḥ* within Mullā Ṣadrā's passage. The term can be seen as the process whereby the factor which tips the balance in favour of one set of circumstances rather than another (preponderance); but it also is a reference to a preference – that is, an approval of one action rather than another. In the case of the sleeping man, he has no sense of one action being preponderant (or indeed preferred), though this does not mean that there is not a process of preponderance occurring (which is available for inspection by the observer). In the case of the compulsive sinner, his actions go against the “preferred” (or preponderant) action, and therefore the process of preference/preponderance is present, but ignored by the individual. In other words, the fact that the sinner ignores the preferred/preponderant course of action is proof that it is not hidden, but manifest. The logico-philosophical notion of *tarjīḥ* as preponderance is devoid of moral implications, and this, Miyānājī appears to be saying, is an inadequate (and inappropriate) tool through which to analyse human action.¹⁷ Rather, Miyānājī assumes a notion of *tarjīḥ* as a preference on the basis of a prior conception of the good (“the preferred/preponderant is the good, wise objective which the agent intends and because of which the action comes about”¹⁸). Miyānājī's ability of to use a single term (*tarjīḥ*) for two different processes (one logical and one normative) most likely has its origin in a rather optimistic view that the natural tendency of human beings is towards the good, and therefore the scales of preponderance are always weighted in its favour. The minutiae of this debate may appear irrelevant to the larger thrust of the *Maktab-i Taḥkīk*, but it is not. The promotion of a normative/religious discourse when explaining the actions of individuals (and the concomitant reduction of the purely logico-philosophical depiction of Mullā Ṣadrā) stems from a desire to separate (*taḥkīk*) the concerns of religion (including the assessment of actions within a *sharʿī* framework) from the competing (and ultimately, confusing) discourse of *falsafa* and *ʿirfān*.

The Taḥkīkī writers, then, react in different ways to the almost universal acceptance within the current Iranian religious structure of Mullā Ṣadrā's “transcendent philosophy” (*ḥikmat-i mutaʿālīya*). There are attempts to incorporate Mullā Ṣadrā into the tradition, though exclude his followers attempts at integrating his thought into mainstream religious discourse (as one can see in Ḥakīmī's attempt outlined above). Alternatively, there is an open and honest rejection of Mullā Ṣadrā's thought when applied to doctrinal matters and an assertion of the separateness of the disciplines of *dīn*, *falsafa* and *ʿirfān*. This account does not exhaust the doctrines of the *Maktab-i Taḥkīk* by any means, and there remains much de-

¹⁷ See Daniel Gimaret, *Théories de l'acte humain en théologie musulmane*, Paris: J. Vrin 1980, 140; Binyamin Abrahamov, “Necessary Knowledge in Islamic Theology”, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 20/1 (1993), 28.

¹⁸ “*al-murajjih huwa al-ghāya al-ḥasana al-ḥakima yaqsiduhā l-fāʿil wa-yaʿfī l-fīʿl li-ajlibā*”, Miyānājī, *Tawḥīd*, 346.

tailed work to be done in understanding (let alone evaluating) the central notions of the school. The school's doctrines have been summarised by Islāmī as:

1. There is a distinction between *falsafa*, *ʿirfān* and *dīn*
2. Of these three, religious knowledge (*maʿrifat-i dīniyya*) is both fundamental and superior.
3. Religious knowledge is restricted to the Qurʾān and the *ḥadīth* – no other sources are acceptable.
4. One should rely on the clear/manifest (*zāhir*) meanings of verses in the Qurʾān and the transmitted *akhbār*.
5. Any form of interpretation (*taʾwīl*) of these revelatory texts is forbidden.¹⁹

Now this account is not free of a polemic impulse, as Islāmī has the more general aim of refuting the *Maktab-i Taḥkīk*. In particular, it could be argued that points 3. and 5. are not universally-held Taḥkīkī doctrines, considering the importance given to *ʿaql* within the religious ideas of the major scholars of the school. Having said this, the overall scripturalist tenor of the movement is clear. The promotion of religious knowledge based on the Qurʾān and *ḥadīth* are characteristic of Muslim scripturalist movements more generally, and the restricted use (and even all out prohibition) of the use of alternative sources of knowledge is often coupled with a commitment to a simple (and simplistic) understanding of the potential meaning of revelatory texts. If religious knowledge is superior to other forms of knowledge, and this is to be based squarely on revelatory texts, the interpretation of those texts also needs (at least formally) to be a highly controlled activity, and this is normally achieved through narrowing the hermeneutic possibilities within any act of exegesis to the (purported) simple, obvious and clear meaning.

It is, of course, debateable whether the *Maktab-i Taḥkīk* is, in fact, anti-philosophical and anti-mystical. A number of Taḥkīkī writers have rejected this accusation, saying that they are not against the practice of philosophy or even the philosophical-mystical discipline of *ʿirfān*. Rather, they are critical of the mixing of the terminology and intellectual procedures found within the various disciplines. For the *Maktab-i Taḥkīk*, apart from self-evident rational truths (reached through the correct employment of *ʿaql-i mustaqill*), the disciplinary boundaries must be maintained and it is the importation of philosophy or *ʿirfānī* ideas and exegetical procedures into the acquisition of religious understanding (*maʿrifat-i dīniyya*) which is problematic, and not the disciplines *per se*. The two sets of sciences (human/*bashariyya* and divine/*ilāhiyya*) simply use words in distinct and separate ways, and hence the Taḥkīkī argument is that it is the mixing of these categories which leads to confusion (as seen in the example taken from Mullā Ṣadrā described above) and not the

¹⁹ Sayyid Ḥasan Islāmī Ardikānī, "al-Madrasa al-Taḥkīkiyya: 'Arḍ wa-dirāsa", *al-Ḥayāt al-ṭayyiba* 4 (2005), 1.

actual practice of these alternative disciplines and their attendant epistemologies. Take for example the following passage from Mirzā Mahdī's *Abwāb al-hudā*:

The true meaning of *‘ilm* (“knowledge”) in the divine sciences is a light which is clear by its essence within someone who knows a thing and finds it, even if he be ignorant of the essence of that thing. This is because knowledge of a thing has levels and the reins of its power are in God’s hands. He provides it, or restricts it at his own will.²⁰

As for *‘ilm* in the human sciences, this is the form acquired by the self of the thing, or the presence of [this form] within the self, and hence for [those involved in these sciences] knowledge is divided into acquired and intuitive.²¹

The point Iṣfahānī is making here is that within the two sets of sciences (divine and human), the term *‘ilm* is used to refer to quite different things. Hence the presumption that the term *‘ilm* can somehow slip, unmodified, from one discipline to the other, is mistaken. It is not that the use of these terms by the human sciences is somehow illegitimate – rather it is restricted to its proper domain. Now, undoubtedly, there is a sense, implicit within the policing of these boundaries, in which the religious sciences are given priority, considered of greater merit and viewed as more fundamental than their poor cousins. The occasional Tāfiki attempts to maintain the validity of *falsafa* and *‘irfān* as “equal but different” to *al-‘ulūm al-ilāhiyya* have the disingenuous flavour of apartheid justifications. Ḥakīmī, for example, argues that despite his call for a separation of religious and human sciences, he does believe that *falsafa* and *‘irfān* must be taught:

So, let me emphasise once again. Reading and studying the history of philosophy and *‘irfān*, and the development of philosophical and *‘irfānī* questions is particularly necessary – especially for teachers and professors of an open mind, and students and seminarians who are free of the need to merely follow the opinions of others. This history must be laid out, as must the development of these questions, from before Islam, bit by bit until the period of Islam, until today. In the course of this, the changing natures of the questions, and the development in the terminologies, and the adjustment in concepts must be given ample and sufficient attention.²²

Anyone who says that the *Maktab-i Tāfiki* is opposed to reason, and does not discuss or study ideas, has no understanding of the great scholars and the particular nature of the ideas and concepts of this [school]... The Tāfikis are not opposed to philosophy... rather it is the mixing and excessive interpretation of religious truths through the perspectives of philosophy – whatever philosophy it may be – which they do not accept.²³

²⁰ The development of terminology within the *Maktab-i Tāfiki* is interesting in itself. The modern Tāfiki jurist, Muḥammad Bāqir Miyānaji, expresses the same idea “*al-‘ilm nūr mu-jarrad khārij ‘an ḥaqīqat al-naḥs – ka-l-‘aql – yufiduhu ta‘ālā ‘alā ‘ibādihī*.” Miyānaji, *Tawḥīd*, 14.

²¹ Mirzā Mahdī I-Ṣfahānī, *Abwāb al-hudā*, Mashhad: Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir Najafī Yazdī ibn al-Ḥājī Sayyid ‘Abd al-Ḥayy, 1363sh./1984-85, 14-15.

²² Ḥakīmī, *Maktab*, 77.

²³ Muḥammad Riḍā Ḥakīmī, “Aql-i Khūd bunyād-i dinī”, *Hamshahrī* 9 (1380sh./2001-02), 41.

Ḥakīmī in particular is keen not to appear anti-intellectual, and undoubtedly an element in this is his wish to dissociate the *Maktab-i Tafkik* from the image of the *Akhbāriyya*.

Maktab-i Tafkik and the Akhbārī school

Some commentators have recognised in the Tafkikī rejection of the mixture of these scientific disciplines and the emphasis on scriptural knowledge, a re-emergence of some of the intellectual trends which had been central to the Safavid and early Qajar Akhbārī school. At first blush, it would seem quite plausible that there was some intellectual (if not pedagogical) connection here. The *Maktab-i Tafkik* insists that discussions of revelatory meaning should properly take place within the context of Qurʾān and *akhbār* citation. This would seem to chime somewhat with the Akhbārī opinion that much of the legal interpretive methodology established by the *mujtahids* was based not on revelatory sources, but on the *mujtahids'* own rational conclusions (and expectations) concerning what it was and was not reasonable to expect of God. The Tafkikī repositioning of the revelatory texts, making them the central adjudicator in religious discussions, and the concomitant belief in the unproblematic discovery of textual meaning similarly has echoes of certain Akhbārī themes.

The evidence for this association from within Tafkikī writings is equivocal. Iṣfahānī's assessment of Akhbarism, for example, is not entirely negative. On the rare occasions that the Akhbāriyya are explicitly mentioned by Iṣfahānī, he displays a respect beyond the usual anti-Akhbārī views of the Uṣūlīs. An example of this occurs during Iṣfahānī's discussion of whether a just God would punish someone who committed a sin which had not been subject to an explanation (*bayān*) supplied through revelation. As in most Shi'ī discussions, the argument shifts from this discussion to the more fundamental issue of whether or not the sinner has searched the sources for an answer. For the *mujtahids* (generally speaking), the sinner should be punished if he does not exercise caution (*iḥtiyāt*) before investigating the sources. Caution would dictate that an act without a known assessment should be avoided until investigation of the sources has been carried out. Failure to exercise caution in such circumstances is a punishable transgression of God's law. The Akhbārīs (generally speaking) agreed, but extended the obligation to act with caution to after the investigation. For the *mujtahids*, if investigation of the sources produces no explicit assessment of an act, certain practical principles (such as *al-barā'a al-aṣliyya*) can lead to a presumptive assessment. This assessment may not be identical with the *sharī'at*, but it is a justified basis on which to act. For the Akhbārīs, the legal position of the individual is not changed by a fruitless investigation of the sources: God's assessment of the act is still unknown, and hence caution (and avoidance) is still obligatory. Iṣfahānī's comment seeks to avoid this difference leading to a fissure within the ulama. After summarising the position of the Akhbārīs he writes:

This is a summary of what our great jurists, the Akhbārīs have proposed – may God be pleased within them all. It is an explanation of the way in which they reached their noble views. This [Akhbārī] way, as you know, is the clearest of the two ways on this issue, and the more obviously [correct]. However, the more accurate of the two ways, and the more agreeable and acceptable is the way to which our *muṣṭabid* jurists cling – may God be pleased with them. The truth is with the *muṣṭabids*, even though the way of the Akhbārī is also noble. However, discernment is with the *muṣṭabids*, and the Akhbārī position is not free of problems.²⁴

Now, whilst Iṣfahānī's position here is that of the *muṣṭabids*, his respect for the Akhbārī opinion is obvious and his discourse is not characterised by the usual anti-Akhbārī polemic.

Ḥakīmī is probably the Taḥkikīs most vocal and popular modern advocate (even if, as noted above, his version of the *Maktab*'s doctrines is not adhered to by all Taḥkikīs). He argues that it is not possible to apply the term Akhbārī (as opposed to Uṣūlī) to the *Maktab-i Taḥkik*. His argument is that the term Akhbārī is restricted in its application to a movement concerned only with jurisprudence (*fiqh* and *uṣūl al-fiqh*). This movement was motivated by a rejection of *ijtihād* (personal juristic reasoning). The *Maktab-i Taḥkik* is restricted to matters of belief (not jurisprudence) and:

Ijtihād in the sense we use the term in *Uṣūl-i fiqh*, has no place in matters of knowledge of matters of religious belief (*ma'ārif-i i'tiqādī*).... In *fiqh*, we have two types of ruling – the rulings in reality (*aḥkām-i vāqī'i*) and apparent rulings (*aḥkām-i zāhiri*). When we cannot reach the ruling in reality we employ *ijtihād* and the principles of interpretation in order for us to reach the apparent ruling. However, in matters of dogma (*'aqā'id*), it is not the case that there are two types of dogma, the apparent and the real... in matters of belief we must reach dogma “in reality”. We have committed ourselves to these dogmas... so that our conception of God the most high, his attributes, revelation, prophethood, succession, guardianship, humanity, predestination and resurrection are all in accordance with reality. It is true that each person, to the extent that he is able and capable, must investigate the truths of religious belief, and these are a duty accepted personally by the individual, and there is no imitation (*taqlīd*) of others in these matters. However, this process – as much as it is known – is not Uṣūlī *ijtihād* as it is applied to legal rulings. The reports from the Imams in which *ijtihād* is permitted – both rationally and legally – restrict [the permission] to the areas of legal rulings. An “Akhbārī” is someone who denies *ijtihād* in legal rulings. So anyone who is against the introduction [of philosophical and *'irfānī* procedures] into the sciences is not an Akhbārī. We have tens of *Muṣṭabids* who were great Uṣūlīs, but were opposed to the principles of *falsafa* and *'irfān*.²⁵

This interpretation of the Akhbārī school (as primarily associated with legal matters) is one which accords, to an extent, with the general understanding of the Akhbārī school gained from the sources. I have argued elsewhere that the Akhbārī school is best seen as founded by Muḥammad Amīn al-Astarābādī (d. 1036/1626-7) and its

²⁴ Ḥalabī's *Taqrīrāt fi uṣūl al-fiqh* (notes from Iṣfahānī's lecture on *Uṣūl al-fiqh* reviewed and correct by Iṣfahānī himself), MS#12454, Library of Āstān-i Quds-i Raḍavī, 303.

²⁵ Ḥakīmī, *Maktab*, 366-367.

fundamental doctrine as being the rejection of *ijtihād* as a legitimate legal mechanism for the production of legal rulings.²⁶ In its place, the Akhbārīs argued for the almost total acceptance of the historical accuracy (and legal applicability) of the reports (*akhbār*) of the Imams. In areas that the *akhbār* were silent, caution (*iḥtiyāt*) should be given extended remit, cancelling out speculative individual juristic reasoning (*ijtihād*), operating in such a way that fulfilment of the law was maximised through the obligatory performance of possibility superogatory and superfluous acts. Akhbarism was, then, a legal movement first and foremost. This is not to say that certain Akhbārīs did not take the movement's general doctrinal positions and apply them to other religious sciences. However, the results of this extra-legal application were not predictable. Fayḍ al-Kāshānī (d. 1091/1680) and al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī (d. 1097/1692) both argued vehemently for the Akhbārī position in their legal works, but their distinct application of these principles to areas outside of *fiqh* led to divergent and competing theologies and philosophies.²⁷ Al-Ḥurr was famously critical of *taṣawwuf* and philosophy, considering them worthless and dangerous pursuits, whilst Fayḍ promoted and developed the transcendent philosophy of his master Mullā Ṣadrā. Both scholars were able to justify their divergent paths through a commitment to Akhbārī hermeneutic principles. In short, my view is that it was in the legal sciences that Akhbarism held distinctive doctrines, and when Akhbārī scholars moved outside of the law, they held divergent and contradictory opinions in philosophy and theology.

Now Ḥakīmī's interpretation of Akhbarism as a purely legal movement (which coincidentally chimes with my own assessment) enables him to dissociate the Tāfīkīs from it. This is because the *Maktab-i Tāfīkī* is (he claims) primarily a movement of theology. Muʿīnī nicely sums up the Tāfīkī position:

The Tāfīkīs, in order to repel the accusation of Akhbarism, argue: first, the Akhbārīs, who were opposed to the Uṣūlīs, were concerned with issues of jurisprudence and legal rulings – not with matters of ethics and belief; second, the personal histories and the methodologies of the founders and great scholars of this school [the *Maktab-i Tāfīkī*] indicate this – they all believed in the necessity of *uṣūl* [*al-fiqh*] and the principles upon which *ijtihād* is based. They transcribed the lessons and books of great Uṣūlī scholars. They themselves are a true testimony to the invalidity of the accusation and association of [the Tāfīkīs and the Akhbārīs].²⁸

²⁶ Robert Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam: The History and Doctrines of the Akhbārī Shīʿī School*, Leiden: Brill 2007 generally, and particularly 10-31.

²⁷ For further on this see Robert Gleave, "Scripturalist Sufism and Scripturalist Anti-Sufism: Theology and Mysticism amongst the Shīʿī Akhbārīyya", in: *Sufism and Theology*, Ayman Shihadeh, ed., Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2007, 158-176.

²⁸ Muʿīnī, "Tāfīkī", 9.

Now this argument has clearly failed to convince the Tafkikis' opponents. As Islamī-Ardikānī²⁹ puts it:

This school... is a modern example of the Akhbārī trend, opposing reason and philosophy. Meanwhile, its supporters reject this accusation and claim that by their demand for distinction [between the sciences], they are serving philosophy from one perspective and religion from another.³⁰

Islamī-Ardikānī is clearly not impressed by these attempts at disassociation from the *Akhbārīyya*. He sees in the *Maktab-i Tafkik* an attempt to limit and restrict the operations of philosophical reasoning, and make Muslim doctrine somehow immune from rational investigation, a trait he identifies as Akhbārī in emphasis.

Now both the criticism of the *Maktab-i Tafkik* and the Tafkikī defence rely on a rather one-dimensional portrayal of Akhbarism. Both view it as anti-rationalist and rather simplistic in its legal methodology. This is certainly the popular image of the Akhbārīs within certain scholarly circles. It is no surprise, then, that the Tafkikīs wish to deflect the accusation, and their opponents wish to ensure it sticks. I have argued that such depictions stem from a stereotype of the Akhbārī school. In fact, within Akhbārī texts, one finds an intricate and detailed set of arguments relating to the authenticity of the revelatory sources, their internal interaction and the means whereby their message might be known (and be made known).³¹ Reason (*ʿaql*) is not rejected entirely, but modified in its remit and limited in its powers. When this is combined with the tendency of some Akhbārīs to indulge in *ʿirfān* and *falsafa*, one has a quite different movement from the stereotypical literalist which lies behind the Tafkikīs' arguments with their opponents. The internal polemic between Tafkikīs and their opponents around Akhbarism and its nature hinders, but does not prevent, our ability to identify the originality and continuity of the *Maktab*. Through such a preliminary analysis, one can identify the continuities and discontinuities between the *Akhbārīyya* and the *Maktab-i Tafkik*, and thereby make an assessment concerning the originality of the *Tafkik* school. The following analysis does not claim to be a comprehensive assessment of the relationship between the two movements. However, if an assessment is to be made, it needs to be done on the basis not only of the larger doctrinal direction of the two movements (scripturalist, anti-rational etc), but also in specific doctrinal areas. Pursuant to the latter of these methods, I concentrate below on two doctrinal issues where the continuities and discontinuities between the two schools can be drawn in sharp relief: the notion of *ʿaql* as a source of (religious) knowledge and the nature of revelatory language.

²⁹ Ardikānī's name is transliterated by his publishers as Sayed Hassan Eslami (as in his *Dream of Purity Re-examining [sic] the separation [sic] school*, Qum: Ṣaḥīfah-i Khirad 1383sh./2004 backcover).

³⁰ Ardikānī-Islāmī, "al-Madrasa", 1.

³¹ See Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam*, 268-296.

Akhbārī and Taḥkīkī notions of ʿaql as a Source of Religious Knowledge

The Akhbārī school is regularly described as anti-rationalist in the sense that Akhbārīs (supposedly) rejected not only the incorporation of Muʿtazilī ideas into Shiʿī theology, but also the juristic implications of this incorporation (namely the rationalist principles of rule derivation ubiquitously evident in Uṣūlī works of jurisprudence). Now it is not clear whether there was a definable school given the term Akhbārī before the activities of al-Astarābādī. There are scattered references to the *Akhbārīyya* in pre-Astarābādī texts, but (as I have argued) they do not add up to a school as such.³² The Akhbārīs themselves, of course, are keen to establish a pedigree for their line of thought and hence they amplify the importance of these references in an attempt to make a link with certain early Shiʿī luminaries, including Muḥammad b. Yaʿqūb al-Kulaynī (d. 329/941) and al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq Ibn Bābūya (d. 381/991). This forms an element within the Akhbārī argument that they are the original Shiʿism and Usulism is a deviant innovation. The validity of this claim need not concern us here, as its primary importance is located in its role within the Akhbārī-Uṣūlī polemic. However, there is within the claim an indication that the role of ʿaql as a source of knowledge was a point of conflict between Akhbārīs and Uṣūlīs.

Even a cursory glance at Akhbārī works indicates that the school's conception of ʿaql and its role in the religious sciences is more complex than simple rejection. Astarābādī's extant (but unpublished) theological writings clearly demonstrate that his approach to questions of philosophy and theology was grounded in Muʿtazilī notions of reason and its abilities. Rather than being anti-Muʿtazilī, it is more specifically critical of certain conclusions of the Baghdad Muʿtazilī school. Instead, Astarābādī's theological position is more clearly associated with the Basran Muʿtazilī school, though he usually claims that his theology is nothing more than a systematisation of the theology of the Imams themselves. For Astarābādī, the ʿaql has the ability to recognise good and evil (*al-tahṣīn wa-l-taqbīḥ*), and in this, of course, he is in accord with standard Muʿtazilī dogma.³³ He does make a distinction between the ability of the ʿaql to recognise good and evil as inherent properties of actions (a position he supports) and the *sharʿī* categorisation of these actions (*ṭawājīb*, *muṣṭaḥabb*, *mubāḥ*, *makrūḥ* and *ḥarām*). These latter are "brought about by the action of God" (*aḥkām-i khamsa... dhāt-i afʿāl nīst balka bi-jaʿl-i shāʿrī ḥāṣil shud*).³⁴ The later Akhbārīs developed and refined Astarābādī's position on ʿaql. For some (such as Muḥsin Fayḍ), ʿaql's ability to discover religious truth can be broadened beyond morality and the law. For others, such as the late Akhbārī

³² Ibid., 10-29.

³³ Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam*, 115-116.

³⁴ Muḥammad Amin al-Astarābādī, *Dānishnāma-yi shābī* (unpublished manuscript #3071/1, Majlis Library, Tehran), f.43b.12-13. See Muḥammad Amin al-Astarābādī, *al-Fawāʿid al-Madaniyya*, Qum: Muʾassasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī 1424/2004-05, 228.



writer Yūsuf al-Baḥrānī (d.1186/1772), *‘aql*’s ability was weakened to simply the ability of the individual to accept God’s message, obey it and submit to him. Once *‘aql* has established these duties for the individual, then the revelatory texts take over as the tutors of the law. For Baḥrānī, the *‘aql* can have no role in determining legal rulings independent of the revelation of those rulings through the Qur’ān, or more commonly, the *akhbār* of the Imams. As I have intimated previously, Baḥrānī is not against *‘aql per se*.³⁵ Indeed “pure natural” *‘aql* can, according to him, play an important role in the discovery of religious truth. The *‘aql* is a faculty which has been placed in human beings by God (it is one of God’s proofs – *min ḥujaj Allāh*). Through it, the individual can recognise a raft of moral categories and be able, at least at a rudimentary level, to assess certain actions. However, Baḥrānī is pessimistic about the ability of human beings to operate this “pure natural” *‘aql*. For Baḥrānī, human beings cannot be trusted to use *‘aql* correctly which necessitates reliance on the texts of revelation in the deduction of legal rulings – this is not a deficiency in *‘aql* itself. True *‘aql* for Baḥrānī is in perfect agreement with the *sharī‘at*. Human beings, however, are rarely (perhaps never, excluding Prophets and Imams) able to use *‘aql* in this unsullied manner.

When one turns to the role of *‘aql* in the religious sciences outlined by writers of the *Maktab-i Taḥkik*, one finds that here too, *‘aql* is not rejected, but redefined. The *‘aql* is no longer independent, objective reason and logic which operates separate from the individual. Instead it is clearly something placed within the individual by God. Mīrzā Mahdī I-Isfahānī sets this position out clearly in his *Abwāb al-hudā*:

Know that *‘aql*, as indicated by this word in the divine sciences, is a light which is clear by its essence (*al-nūr al-zāhir bi-dhātihī*)... whereby a human being knows the good and bad of actions, and through which he knows particulars also...[three relevant reports from the Imams cited here].

In the human sciences (*al-‘ulūm al-bashariyya*), however, *‘aql* is a faculty of the soul whereby necessary truths might be distinguished from debated truths, and hence for those [involved in these sciences] the only things which are comprehended by *‘aql* are universals (*kullīyyāt*).³⁶

This conception of *‘aql* has been maintained consistently by the Taḥkikīs, though it may have been expressed through increasingly technical vocabulary. This is exemplified by the following passage by Miyānājī:

‘Aql, in both the Book and the Sunna is an explicit light (*al-nūr al-sarīh*) which God pours out onto the spirits of humankind. It is manifest by its essence and the illuminator of things other than it. It is a divine proof (*ḥujja ilāhiyya*), immune from sin essentially and prevented from any error.³⁷

³⁵ Robert Gleave, *Inevitable Doubt: Two Theories of Shī‘ī Jurisprudence*, Leiden: Brill 2000, 188-204.

³⁶ Isfahānī, *Abwāb*, 14-15. See also Muḥammad Ḥasan Ṭūsī, “‘Ilm va ‘aql az dīdgāh-i Maktab-i Taḥkik”, *Pazhūbish* 17 (1381sh./2003-04).

³⁷ Miyānājī, *Tawhīd*, 21.

Miyānaji goes on to list the things which *‘aql* can recognise:

By it, good and evil, and beautiful and ugly are known, as are those things which are necessarily and rationally obligatory and forbidden by their essence, the blessings of good morals and their just desserts, and the assessment of actions and their despicable characteristics.³⁸

Now within this Tāfīkī conception of *‘aql*, one finds echoes of the Akhbārī position, but not exclusively – there are also elements of Uṣūlī legal theory present. The notion that *‘aql* is an inbuilt faculty within human beings, placed there by God and ultimately under God’s control (“poured out onto the spirits of humankind”) is clearly a point of similarity. Describing the *‘aql* as a proof of God has its roots, of course, within the wording of a number of reports from the Imams, and therefore is not necessarily unique or distinctive for either the Akhbārīs or the Tāfīkīs. However, it cannot always be said to accord with the notion of *‘aql* as found within most Uṣūlī works (where reason is depersonalised and objectified). Having said this, the Tāfīkīs (or at least, Miyānaji) seem more willing to allow this faculty of *‘aql* to recognise “the obligatory and the forbidden” – that is legal categories. These are, admittedly, circumscribed by Miyānaji – only those which are necessarily (*ḍarūrī*) rational can be recognised by the *‘aql*. However, it is an extension of the *‘aql*’s ability into areas which were, for Akhbārīs, the domain of the lawgiver and are ultimately inscrutable (*tawqīfī*). So, on this doctrinal point, one can recognise some continuity of the conceptions of *‘aql* between the two schools, and to an extent these might be seen as distinctive doctrines. However, the Tāfīkīs are much more eager to demonstrate their conformity to the theological mainstream (by, for example, the inclusion of the recognition of some *shar‘ī* classifications as within the *‘aql*’s capabilities). These doctrinal differences may be accounted for by the differing circumstances in which the two schools were operating. The Akhbārīs held a position of, if not dominance, then at least intellectual equality with the Uṣūliyya for much of the Safavid period. The Tāfīkīs, in the modern context, are attempting to secure for themselves a place within the spectrum of acceptable intellectual opinion, and in this they are more willing to allow the introduction of more orthodox shibboleths into their dogmatic assertions.

Akhbārī and Tāfīkī Conceptions of Language and Qur’anic Interpretation

The importance of a theory of how language communicates ideas is as pressing for a scripturalist movement as it is for their opponents. Muslim juristic conceptions of language’s operation generally rely on a notion that individual words (and through their combination, phrases, sentences and whole utterances) have (at least)

³⁸ Ibid.

two possible meanings. First there is the designated meaning (*ḥaqīqa*), which was placed (*wuḍiʿa*) upon a word or a grammatical construction in the past. Exactly who performed this placing is a matter of some dispute amongst Muslim scholars, the two main contenders being God himself and the primordial human community.³⁹ The precise mechanism of this “placing” was less important (so it seems) than the undeniable fact of its existence. For example, the word “touch” (*mulāsama*) is found in an extract from the Qurʾānic verse (IV: 43): “[if] you have touched (*lāmastum*) women, and you find not water, then go to clean, high soil and rub your faces and your hands therewith.” Its designated meaning refers to skin on skin contact, and indeed many jurists (in particular the Sunni Shāfiʿiyya) considered a man touching a woman required ritual ablution with water (*wuḍuʿ*) – and if water is not to be found, this is replaced with a mimicking of the water ablution with soil (*tayammum*). Other jurists considered *mulāsama* to mean touching in its designated meaning, but that here God is using it in a “diverted” (*majāz*) sense, and he is referring here to sexual intercourse (*al-jimāʿ*). This view, normally associated with the Sunni Ḥanafīyya, should be distinguished from a distinct argument, which was also proffered by some Ḥanafīs, which actually questioned whether the designated meaning of *mulāsama* was, in fact, touch. That is, for some Ḥanafīs, the term *mulāsama* had (at least) two designated meanings: “to touch” and “to have sexual intercourse” (i.e. it is a homonym – *mushtarak*). Hence the verse is, in itself, ambiguous, and which of the two designated meanings is intended by God in Qurʾān (IV: 43) is only clear when other factors (outside of this specific text) are taken into account (including the manner in which the regulation fits into the general regulations of ritual purity – *ṭahāra*). Whether this additional designated meaning came about primordially, or was added by God at a date after the original designation (i.e. in the process of revelation) was, yet again, a matter of dispute. Whichever was the case, those who argued that *mulāsama* meant, through designation or inherently, both touching and sexual intercourse, were actually arguing that when God uses *mulāsama* to refer to sexual intercourse, he is not using it in a “diverted” way but in a designated manner. These (new) meanings designated by God were termed *al-ḥaqāʾiq al-sharʿiyya*, and the point of arguing that these were not diverted but designated meanings was to avoid the accusation that the interpretation of (say) *lāmastum* in this verse as “sexual intercourse” (and not “touching”) was arbitrary and personal on the part of the interpreter.

It was against this background of debate and discussion that the Akhbārīs developed their theory of language. I have analysed the development of Akhbārī conceptions of language elsewhere, though a summary here is appropriate. For Akhbārīs generally, pre-revelatory language consisted of (amongst other things) a

³⁹ See Bernard Weiss, “Medieval Muslim Discussions on the Origin of Language”, *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 125 (1974), 33–41.

set of meanings attached (or designated) to words. These were the manner in which words were commonly used before revelation, and continued to be so after revelation, and were termed *al-ḥaqā'iq al-urfiyya*. At the point of revelation, God instituted new meanings for words, and these were similarly designated, and are termed *al-ḥaqā'iq al-shar'īyya*. How are we to know, then, when these words are used in revelatory texts, which of these two designated meanings (*ḥaqā'iq*) is intended? The Akhbārī answer is that it is through the Imams that we know which is intended. The Imams, through their statements (*akhbār*) interpreted the Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet in such a way that the post-revelatory community can understand the intended meaning of revelation. Without them, we are “blind” (*ta'miya*) to the meaning of the Qur'ānic text. The Imams, then, are the only interpreters (*mufasssīrīn*) of the Qur'ān. There were variants of this position within the Akhbārī school. Some Akhbārīs (the founder Astarābādī amongst them) claimed that direct interpretation of the Qur'ān was impossible; others (such as Muḥsin Fayḍ al-Kāshānī) allowed direct interpretation of certain verses (for which he borrowed the Qur'ānic term *muḥkamāt*), but not others. However, even those who allowed direct interpretation of the *muḥkamāt* normally stipulated that the only way to distinguish these *muḥkamāt* from non-interpretable verses (i.e. the *mutashābihāt*) was through the Imams informing us that a verse was *muḥkam* or *mutashābih*. The words of the Imams can be understood “literally” (*zāhiran*) because if it were otherwise all revelatory meaning would be lost to us. The Qur'ān (and for most Akhbārīs, the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet also) requires interpretation even when it may appear as if a verse or phrase has a clear undisputed meaning.⁴⁰

When one sets these views alongside those of the Tāfiki school, the first impression is of a quite radical dissimilarity. Mīrẓā Mahdī l-Ṣfahānī established the standard Tāfiki position that words within the *sharī'at* are used with their linguistic meaning and not with any technical, legal (*shar'ī*) meaning. He composed a short *risāla* entitled *fī wujūb ḥaml al-alfāz al-wārida fī l-shar'īyya 'alā ma'āniyhā l-lughawīyya wa-ibtāl al-ḥaqīqa al-shar'īyya wa-l-mutasharri'a* (“On the obligation to interpret the words present within the *sharī'at* according to their linguistic meanings and the invalidity of legal and juristic literal meaning”). In this, he argues that the term *ṣalāt* in the revelatory texts is to be interpreted simply as prayer, and not the obligatory ritual referred to as *ṣalāt* in the legal texts books:

⁴⁰ A more expansive discussion of these Akhbārī positions can be found in Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam*, 216-245 and 275-296 (particularly, 275-280), and with respect to Yūsuf al-Baḥrānī specifically, Gleave, *Inevitable Doubt*, 48-55 and 147-164.

Ṣalāt, in our opinion has no special meaning. It existed for the nations of the past, like the Arab Jews and Christians (*al-yahūd wa-l-naṣāra min al-ʿarab*). ... There is no legal literal meaning for the *ṣalāt* as used by the Prophet.⁴¹

Iṣfahānī next cites a number of Qurʾanic verses in which the term *ṣalāt* (or its derivative forms) is used to describe the prayers of the Jews, Christians and others (including Satan's own acts of worship). His position, then, is that the notion of additional legal-literal meanings through revelation (a central element in the Akhbārī position) is incorrect, and that the default position of any interpreter must be that the word is used in its linguistic meaning. This position forms part of the more general Tāfkiḱī position of "Qurʾanic understanding" (*taʿaqqul al-Qurʾān*) in which revelation produces for itself a discourse which is not subject to the structures arrived at through *falsafa* and *ʿirfān*. The individual has access to this Qurʾanic understanding through the ordinary use of words within the revelatory documents. This is not to say that Iṣfahānī and his followers were simple literalists (he has an extended section on the occasions when words are not used in their *ḥaqīqī* ways, but in a *majāz* manner, and crucially how to recognise them).⁴² However, Iṣfahānī's position (and that of subsequent Tāfkiḱīs) is that the Qurʾanic text is approachable directly (or at least more directly than within the Akhbārī methodology) because the words used within it can be assumed to carry linguistic meanings. No new and impenetrable designated meanings (*al-ḥaqāʾiq al-sharʿiyya*) are instituted in the revelatory process, and there is certainly no privileging of the *akhbār* as the sole legitimate interpretive tool (as was the case for the Akhbārīs). This position is expressed in later Tāfkiḱī writings in the fundamental doctrines of the *Maktab-i Tāfkiḱ* as laid out by Ḥakīmī and mentioned above): "One should rely on the clear/manifest (*zāhir*) meanings of verses in the Qurʾān and the transmitted *akhbār*" and "Any form of interpretation (*taʾwīl*) of these revelatory texts is forbidden". In an interview with Ḥakīmī he laid out the Tāfkiḱī prohibition on interpretation in the clearest terms:

The Qurʾān came down in "clear Arabic" so that all may understand it, and act upon it. For the same reason, the phrases "Oh People", or "Oh those who believe", or "Oh people of the book" all indicate that God wishes to speak in this language to the people...in the area of understanding and the legal regulations, the probative force of the obvious meaning [of verses, *ḥujjiyyat-i zāvahir*] is given the greatest importance. No one can let go of the *zāhir*, unless there is an immediate proof (*burbān-i badihī*)... considering what we have said concerning the probative force of obvious meanings, there is no place for interpretation.⁴³

⁴¹ Mīrzā Mahdī Iṣfahānī, *Risāla fī wujūb ḥaml al-alfāz al-wārīda fī l-sharʿiyya ʿalā maʿāniyhā l-lughawiyya wa-ibtāl al-ḥaqīqa al-sharʿiyya wa-l-mutasharriʿa*, (unpublished manuscript #14053/2, Āstān-i Quds-i Raḍavī Library, Mashhad), f.2b.10-12.

⁴² Iṣfahānī, *Risāla*, f.4a.18-4b.5.

⁴³ Ḥakīmī, "Aql", 41.

Now Ḥakīmī's interpretation of the availability of Qur'anic understanding is populist (in the sense that all can understand it). This may be a deviation from Iṣfahānī's notion of the linguistic meaning, which Iṣfahānī distinguishes it from the meaning which is understood through usage (*fi l-isti'māl*). Whether this signals a greater emphasis on anti-elitism within the later Tāfkiḳīs is not clear. Whichever is the case though, the understanding here is quite distinct from the conceptions of language's operation amongst the Akhbārī scholars of the Safavid period. This is, at least, the impression gained from the available texts. However, there is a reference in Yūsuf al-Baḥrānī's *al-Ḥadā'iq al-nāḍira* to an Akhbārī opinion (which he rejects) in which the exegetes claim to be "equal" to the Imams in "interpreting the difficult parts [of the Qur'ān] and clarifying the ambiguities within it" (*ta'wīl mushkilātihi wa-ḥall muḥammātīhi*).⁴⁴ I have always considered this to be a straw-man argument, constructed by al-Baḥrānī to make his position appear more moderate.⁴⁵ My reasoning was that I am yet to find an Akhbārī writer who supported such a direct hermeneutic. However, even within the brief description provided by al-Baḥrānī, one can see elements of similarity with the Tāfkiḳī position. If such an Akhbārī position did exist in the Safavid period (and it is far from clear that it did), then in this sense the Tāfkiḳīs can be considered to maintain this element of the Akhbārī intellectual legacy.

Conclusions

How is one to assess the originality of a movement within Muslim intellectual history? Muslim religious sciences generally display a suspicion of originality, associating it with *bid'at* ("innovation"). The claim to originality is rarely employed by authors within these traditions, as it opens the door to accusations of human invention of knowledge rather than the discovery of pre-existent religious truth. This is not to deny the almost trite statement that Muslim religious ideas were subject to development and embellishment. It is to say that novelty was not always flagged either by the author or by subsequent commentators. One sees this in the attempts of the Akhbārīs to claim historical precedence through enrolling the names of early *ḥadīth* commentators. One also sees it in the Tāfkiḳī criticism of the introduction of philosophical terminology into theological exploration. It is also an element in Ḥakīmī's attempt to acquire Mullā Ṣadrā for the Tāfkiḳī cause, as it represents an acceptance (reluctant or otherwise) that Mullā Ṣadrā's ideas had become the new orthodoxy from which no deviation was possible. Against such a backdrop, the identification of continuity and originality becomes less straightforward, since the primary motivation of a school within its polemic is to establish its posi-

⁴⁴ Yūsuf al-Baḥrānī, *al-Ḥadā'iq al-nāḍira fi ahkām al-'itra al-tāhira*, Qum 1363sh./1985-86), vol. 1, 169.

⁴⁵ Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam*, 222-223.



tion as not only convincing within a modern context, but also ancient. The task here, then, is to attempt to eschew the temptation to utilise polemic.

With respect to the problematic relationship between Akhbarism and the *Maktab-i Taḥkīk*, the above (emphatically preliminary) observations indicate that the Taḥkīkī method of argumentation can, in certain areas, be seen as a continuation of previous, Akhbārī, explorations. However, a persistent ambiguity remains over the extent to which this relationship can be characterised as exclusive, and whether or not there are other elements of the Shiʿī tradition upon which the Taḥkīkīs might equally be drawing. If they are in debt to the Akhbārīs, it is not obvious from the Taḥkīkīs own analysis of Akhbarism, which is, broadly speaking, an attempt to dissociate themselves from this thoroughly defeated and marginal trend, and a concomitant desire to establish their legal orthodoxy within the (Uṣūlī) Shiʿī religious hierarchy. It is possible that a more nuanced picture of this relationship will emerge as both Akhbārī and Taḥkīkī texts, currently in manuscript form, are made more widely available. For the moment, one must be content with the conclusion that the two movements represent the most successful explorations of the scripturalist impetus within post-classical/modern Shiʿī Islam. That the scripturalist label is apt for both movements implies that it is in this minimal sense that the *Maktab-i Taḥkīk* might be considered a continuation of certain elements within Akhbarism. Such an assessment, however, should not lead to the inevitable conclusions either that there is a lack of originality within the *Maktab*, or that there is a clear line of influence between the two.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ I would like to thank ʿAlī Akbar Nāṣirī, of the University of Sistan and Baluchestan, for his comments on an earlier draft of this article, and for providing me with the sources on the *Maktab-i Taḥkīk*.

Part Two

Shi'i Jurisprudence



La quête du savoir à Najaf. Les études religieuses chez les chiites imâmites de la fin du 19^e siècle à 1960*

Sabrina Mervin

Voici une cité de science, la porte du secret des mondes
Pour la science elle fut édiflée, alors calcule la mine de la science:
Kāzim¹

La quête du savoir est l'expression que nous proposons pour traduire l'expression arabe *ṭalab al-ʿilm*, même si, au fil de cet article, nous utiliserons des termes plus simples, pour la facilité et la légèreté du texte. Car il s'agit tout simplement de poursuivre des études.

Cependant, le mot *ṭalab* suggère fort bien l'idée de quête, jusque dans l'équivocité du terme: il y a à la fois une demande, une recherche et l'attente que cette demande soit exaucée. On pense à la posture du fidèle lors de la prière. Tout cela se retrouve dans les représentations que se font les intéressés de la quête dans laquelle l'étudiant s'engage: une voie fort longue, parsemée d'embûches et de difficultés, qui nécessite un don de soi total et permanent. Elle ne doit avoir d'autre fin que la science pour la science, et l'étudiant aucune autre ambition que de devenir chaque jour plus savant, plus juste et plus pieux.

C'est aussi une quête sacrée. D'une part, parce qu'elle reproduit la méthode de transmission du savoir qui avait cours au moment de l'âge d'or de l'islam: quitter sa région natale pour aller étudier dans les centres de savoir, puis revenir y enseigner ce qu'on a appris. La différence fondamentale entre les sunnites et les chiites étant que, pour les premiers, la source du savoir est constituée par les Compagnons et les *tābiʿūn* alors que, pour les seconds, cette source est constituée par les Imams infaillibles.

D'autre part, c'est une quête sacrée parce qu'elle est préconisée dans le hadith. On connaît les célèbres dits du Prophète incitant à la poursuite du savoir « même jusqu'en Chine ». Les chiites ont, en plus de ceux des hadiths sunnites qu'ils re-

* Ce chapitre est une réédition mise à jour d'un article publié dans *Studia Islamica* 81/1 (1995), 165-185. Nous remercions la rédaction de la revue et, particulièrement, Houari Touati, de nous avoir accordé l'autorisation de le reproduire ici.

¹ Traduction d'un poème écrit au-dessus de la porte d'une école de Najaf, fondée par Muḥammad Kāzim Khurāsānī. Il s'agit d'un chronogramme qui indique la date de la création de l'école, soit 1326/1908, lorsqu'on additionne les valeurs numériques des consonnes à partir de « calcule » (*arrikh*). Cité par Jaʿfar Āl Maḥbūba, *Māḍī l-Najaf wa-ḥāḍiruhā*, tome 1, Saīda: Matbaʿat al-ʿIrfān 1353/1934, 94.

connaissent comme authentiques, de nombreuses traditions à la gloire du savoir et des savants². Là encore, notons que les hadiths chiïtes sont attribués aux Imams; l'*isnād*, la chaîne de transmission, s'arrête donc dès que l'on parvient au nom de l'un des douze Imams, fût-il le onzième ou le douzième: entre lui et le Prophète, la transmission va de soi.

Ainsi, le savoir, qui est le but ultime de cette quête, est-il celui que le Prophète a légué aux Imams, c'est-à-dire le savoir divin³.

Tout commence par l'alphabet, dont on apprend les lettres, par cœur, avant de les réciter en ajoutant leurs signes diacritiques: « alif ne prend rien, bā prend un point au-dessous, tā prend deux points au-dessus, etc. ». Les voyelles brèves sont à leur tour ajoutées aux consonnes, et l'alphabet est récité de cette manière. Puis, ce sont les flexions casuelles⁴.

L'élève entame l'apprentissage du Coran. Cela se passe au *kuttāb* du village, dans la mosquée, chez un parent – souvent, un oncle – ou bien dans la maison familiale, lorsque le père enseigne lui-même à son enfant. Les étapes de la mémorisation du Coran sont ponctuées par des cadeaux que la famille de l'élève offre au maître: la nature de ces dons (des œufs, ou des tripes par exemple) se fonde sur des jeux de mots à partir du texte coranique. Lorsque l'élève l'a entièrement terminé, le maître est invité à manger des douceurs chez les parents⁵.

Après avoir acquis les rudiments de l'écriture, on s'initie à l'art de bien écrire. Art constitué, d'un côté, par la calligraphie à laquelle on s'exercera, pour s'y parfaire, jusqu'à un âge avancé et, de l'autre, par la grammaire: *ṣarf* et *nahw*. Puis vient la rhétorique: le manuel le plus couramment utilisé est *al-Muṭawwal*, de Taf-tāzānī. Les ouvrages étudiés en grammaires sont les mêmes que chez les sunnites⁶ à un détail près: les chiïtes choisissent comme commentaire de la *Alfiyya* d'Ibn Mālik celui d'Ibn Nāẓim, connu également sous le nom de Badr al-Dīn, alors que les sunnites ne semblent pas l'étudier⁷.

² al-Kulaynī y consacre une partie de son recueil de hadiths, *Uṣūl al-Kāfi: Kitāb faḍl al-ʿilm*, al-Muʿassasa al-ʿālamīyya li-l-khadamāt al-islāmīyya: Téhéran, 1398/1978.

³ Dans le chiïsme originel, le savoir légué aux Imams englobait « les sciences religieuses mais aussi et surtout l'ésotérique de ces sciences et d'autres sciences secrètes ». Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin dans le shi'isme originel*, Paris: Verdier 1992, 174.

⁴ Cette méthode traditionnelle d'apprentissage de la lecture est décrite par Muḥsin al-Amin (m. 1952) dans la notice autobiographique qu'il a insérée dans son ouvrage de *ṭabaqāt*, *Aʿyān al-shiʿa*. Cf. Muḥsin al-Amin, *Autobiographie d'un clerc chiite du Jabal ʿAmil*, traduction Sabrina Mervin et Haitham al-Amin, Damas: IFPO 1998, 47.

⁵ Muḥsin al-Amin, *ibid.*, 48.

⁶ Nous nous référons entre autres, pour les manuels utilisés par les sunnites, à l'ouvrage de James Heyworth-Dunne, *An Introduction to the History of Education in Modern Egypt*, Londres: Luzac 1938. Les manuels de base couramment cités dans les sources chiïtes sont: *al-Ajrumīyya*; *Qatr al-nadā wa-ball al-sadā*, *Mughnī l-labīb*, trois ouvrages d'Ibn Hishām; *al-Alfiyya* d'Ibn Mālik et ses commentaires par Suyūṭi et Ibn Nāẓim.

⁷ Ḥasan al-Amin, *Dāʾirat al-maʿārif al-islāmīyya al-shiʿīyya*, article « Najaf al-ashraf », Beyrouth: Dār al-taʾāruf 1975, tome 3, 331. Heyworth-Dunne ne mentionne pas de commentaire dans sa liste. Cf. *ibid.*, 58.

Cette étape des études est appelée *muqaddimāt*: elle a pour but d'apporter les bases de l'enseignement, de faire acquérir à l'élève une certaine culture générale et de le préparer aux phases suivantes, où il va se spécialiser dans le droit. Pour ce faire, il lui faut, dans le système chiite, un solide bagage en matière de *manṭiq* (logique) dont il restera très imprégné par la suite. Il travaille cette matière avec la *Hāshiya* de Mullā 'Abd Allāh et *Sharḥ al-Shamsiyya* de Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī. Il étudie également un peu de mathématiques, les belles lettres, lit de la poésie classique, s'initie aux sciences du *tafsīr* (l'exégèse), du hadith et du *kalām* (la théologie scolastique), et entame des ouvrages classiques de *fiqh* (droit islamique) comme *Sharā'i' al-islām* d'al-Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥilli (m. 1277). Pour ces sciences, qui ne sont plus seulement arabes (*'ulūm 'arabiyya*) mais religieuses (*'ulūm dīniyya*), les chiites ont leurs propres auteurs. Encore faut-il remarquer que les chiites ont un certain penchant, dans leurs goûts littéraires et poétiques, pour des textes écrits par leurs coreligionnaires. On lit, par exemple, *Nahj al-balāgha*, attribué à 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, des poèmes d'Abū Firās al-Ḥamdānī, d'al-Kumayt al-Asadī, ou d'al-Farazdaq.

Cette phase préparatoire a généralement lieu dans les milieux familiaux ou auprès des cheikhs de la région d'origine de l'élève. Ceux qui passent leur enfance à Najaf, soit parce qu'ils sont issus d'une famille de la ville, soit parce que leur père y est installé pour y achever ses études et enseigner, y accomplissent les *muqaddimāt*.

Les autres se sentent rapidement limités par ce qu'ils peuvent trouver dans leur région et sont attirés par le prestige des écoles de Najaf. Ils ont vu leur maître en revenir, la barbe plus longue et plus grise, signe des années passées à accumuler les connaissances, et portant le turban comme une auréole de savoir⁸. Ils entendent leurs parents raconter leurs séjours dans les villes saintes, la beauté des lieux, la piété qui y règne, les *mujtahid* qui y rivalisent de savoir dans leurs cénacles⁹.

A leur tour, ils aspirent à partir pour cette terre sacrée où se forment les grands hommes.

⁸ La longue barbe et le turban sont les attributs des oulémas chiites et ceux-ci donnent la « mesure » de leur savoir: plus l'homme est savant, plus la barbe est longue et le turban large. On devine aisément comment le caractère ostentatoire de ces caractères distinctifs prête le flanc à la dérision, voire à l'autodérision. Ce dont use, par exemple, Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyya, lui-même *'ālim*, dans son autobiographie: *Tajārib Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyya*, Beyrouth: Dār al-jawād 1980, 37.

⁹ A priori, chacun peut aller à la quête de la science. Pratiquement, ce sont souvent les fils de oulémas qui deviennent eux-mêmes oulémas; les familles s'intermarient et ont des branches dans plusieurs régions (par exemple au Jabal 'Āmil, en Irak, en Iran comme la famille Ṣadr). Les jeunes ont donc forcément des proches qui sont passés par Najaf.

Considérée comme la terre sacrée par excellence¹⁰, puisqu'elle abrite le mausolée de 'Alī, le premier Imam, Najaf est le cœur des mondes chiïtes qui suivent tous ses battements. Karbala sa voisine, arrosée du sang de Ḥusayn et des pleurs des fidèles, est aussi imprégnée de sacrée. Notables et oulémas s'y font enterrer, car l'on dit qu'ils feront ainsi partie de l'armée du Mahdī, lorsque celui-ci réapparaîtra. Comme c'est souvent le cas, au revers de cette dimension spirituelle, le sacré se charge de vertus magico-religieuses: la terre du site, *turbat al-Ḥusayn*, absorbée en petites quantités diluées dans un verre d'eau, est utilisée pour soigner des maladies; et le *mujtahid* d'islamiser la pratique¹¹. Elle est aussi considérée comme « la meilleure chose »¹² pour la prosternation lors de la prière. En effet, dans le rituel chiïte de la prière, le fidèle doit poser son front sur de la terre; c'est pourquoi, à l'entrée des mosquées, on vend de petits blocs de terre compacte, prévus à cet effet. Le hadith du Prophète: « La terre a été constituée pour moi sanctuaire et purification »¹³ se réalise ici pleinement, dans l'espace de la cité et dans la matérialité du sol.

En dehors des projections spirituelles et magico-religieuses, la sacralité de l'espace des villes saintes chiïtes¹⁴ agit sur la transmission du savoir. Najaf s'est distinguée sur ce point. Car elle a le mausolée de 'Alī, le premier des Imams, celui qui a reçu le message divin de la bouche de Muḥammad. « C'est comme si la terre de Najaf, cette terre pure, avait une influence agissante sur l'acquisition des sciences et de la connaissance ». Les sciences sont une « disposition naturelle » (*gharīza*) de la ville¹⁵. A tel point, dit-on, que même les élèves des écoles modernes réussissent dans les sciences profanes!

L'un des facteurs incitant les étudiants à s'y installer est bien « la proximité du tombeau du Commandeur des croyants, substance de la sagesse et source de la vertu... », substance qui éclaire la lanterne de leur savoir, source à laquelle ils puisent leur inspiration¹⁶.

Pour le cheikh Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyya (m. 1979), la spécificité de son enseignement découle de sa mission (*risāla*): « Najaf considère qu'elle porte en

¹⁰ Après La Mecque, Médine et Jérusalem, selon la hiérarchie traditionnelle. Cependant, l'attachement des chiïtes à leur ville sainte contrarie cette préséance canonique, aussi bien dans le cœur des croyants que dans certains ouvrages de *fiqh*. Ainsi, la récompense d'une prière dans le mausolée de 'Alī est égale à celle de deux cent mille prières. Cf. *Le guide du musulman. Abrégé des principaux décrets religieux des juristes musulmans contemporains et notamment de l'Ayatollah A.Q. Kho'i*, Paris: Publications du séminaire islamique 1991, 125.

¹¹ Ibid., 233.

¹² Ibid., 135.

¹³ Cité par Jacques Berque, « Hier à Najaf et Karbalā » *Arabica* 9 (1962), 325-342, 327.

¹⁴ Najaf, Karbala, Kazimiyya, Samarra (Irak), Mashhad (Iran), qui abritent des mausolées d'Imams. Qom a celui de Fāṭima, sœur du huitième imam 'Alī l-Riḍā (Rezā).

¹⁵ Ja'far Āl Maḥbūba, *Mādī l-Najaf*, tome 1, 99.

¹⁶ Ju'ayt Hishām, « Sayr al-'ilm fi l-Najaf », *al-'Irfān* 21 (1931), 498-502, 498. Article repris en partie dans Āl Maḥbūba, *ibid.*, 276.

son sein un dépôt céleste et que Dieu a fait d'elle la gardienne et la protectrice de ce dépôt, qui est la religion et la loi du Prophète »¹⁷.

Depuis quatre cents ans, Najaf est la résidence des plus éminents oulémas des mondes chiïtes et compte les collèges religieux les plus importants. Tout commença avec l'émigration (*hijra*)¹⁸ du cheikh Tūsī dit « Shaykh al-Ṭā'ifa », qui vint s'y installer en 1056, après la prise de Bagdad par les Seldjoukides, la destruction de sa maison et l'incendie de sa bibliothèque. Même si des savants de moindre importance et des étudiants l'avaient précédé,¹⁹ on le considère comme le fondateur de Najaf en tant que « ville de science » (*dār al-ilm*). Ses disciples le suivirent, bien vite rejoints par d'autres, attirés par la renommée du maître, et la tradition d'enseignement s'instaura.

Ibn Baṭṭūṭa mentionne les écoles dans sa description de la ville: « [...] Puis le marché des parfumeurs, ensuite la porte al-Khaḍra, où il y a le tombeau qu'ils prétendent être celui de 'Alī (*sic*) et, en face, les écoles et les caravansérails, construits de la plus belle facture [...]. On entre, par la porte al-Khaḍra, dans une grande école où habitent les étudiants et les soufis chiïtes; chaque visiteur reçoit l'hospitalité pour trois jours, du pain, de la viande et des dattes deux fois par jour [...] »²⁰. Quand Ibn Baṭṭūṭa visita Najaf au début du 14^e siècle, elle était concurrencée par Hilla, Mossoul et Alep, mais ces dernières commencèrent à décliner en tant que centres du savoir chiïte avant la prise de pouvoir des Safavides. Najaf et Karbala prirent de l'importance durant la période safavide et attirèrent des étudiants d'Iran et du Jabal 'Āmil, qui fréquentaient avant cela les écoles d'Ispahan²¹.

Un article paru au début du siècle, signé « Un Mésopotamien »²² recensait alors cinq villes de science: Ispahan, Alep, Hilla, Qom et Najaf²³. Parmi elles, Alep et Hilla n'étaient plus des centres d'enseignement depuis longtemps. En revanche, aux côtés de Najaf et Qom, il eût fallu mentionner Karbala, Samarra et Mashhad comme faisant partie des grands foyers de l'éducation chiïte à la fin de la dynastie qajare.

¹⁷ Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyya, *Ma'a 'ulamā' al-Najaf al-asbraf*, Beyrouth: Dār al-jawād 1992, 196.

¹⁸ C'est le terme généralement employé dans les sources arabes. Voir, par exemple, 'Alī l-Baḥādili, *al-Najaf, jāmi' atubā wa-dawruhā l-qiyādī*, Beyrouth: Mu'assasat al-wafā 1989, 27.

¹⁹ Ces savants sont mentionnés par Ḥasan al-Amīn, *Dā'irat*, 330.

²⁰ Cité par Muḥammad Baḥr al-'Ulūm in Ja'far al-Khalīlī, éd., *Mawsū'at al-'atabāt al-muqaddasa, qism al-Najaf*, Bagdad: Dār al-ta'aruf 1968, tome 2, 117. Le «*sic*» (*hākadhā*) a dû être ajouté au texte original.

²¹ Mojan Moomen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, New Haven et Londres: Yale University Press 1985, 111 et 119. Sur l'histoire des écoles de Karbala, consulter Nūr al-Dīn al-Shahrūdī, *Tārīkh al-ḥaraka al-'ilmiyya fī Karbalā*, Beyrouth: Dār al-'ulūm 1990.

²² Il s'agissait, en fait, du père Anastase-Marie de Saint-Elie (1866-1947), fondateur et éditeur, à Bagdad, de la revue *Lughat al-'arab*; je remercie Werner Ende de m'avoir communiqué cette information. Sur ce personnage, cf. Louis Massignon, *Autour d'une conversion: Lettres de Louis Massignon et de ses parents au père Anastase de Bagdad*, Paris: Cerf 2004.

²³ « Le programme des études chez les chiïtes et principalement ceux de Nedjef », *Revue du monde musulman* 23 (juin 1913), 269.

Ce fut Muḥammad Ḥasan Shīrāzī qui impulsa le mouvement des études religieuses chiïtes à Samarra, en 1874. Il venait juste d'être reconnu comme suprême *marja'* lorsqu'il quitta Najaf pour s'y installer. Avant son arrivée, ce n'était qu'un bourg dont la population était en majorité sunnite. Il y créa des écoles, fit construire une *ḥusayniyya*,²⁴ des bains, et même un pont²⁵. Nombreux furent ceux qui le suivirent pour bénéficier de son enseignement et se joindre aux cénacles des *mujtahid*.

Qom, qui était tombée dans l'oubli, connut un nouvel essor à partir de 1920, lorsque 'Abd al-Karīm Hā'irī Yazdī (m. 1937), répondant à une invitation, vint y enseigner²⁶. A partir de 1945, la présence de l'ayatollah Burūjirdī qui devint *marja' a'lā*²⁷ deux ans plus tard, rehaussa le prestige des études à Qom²⁸. A la mort de Burūjirdī en 1961, l'ayatollah Khomeini insuffla une nouvelle vocation à la ville, la politique. Qom demeura cependant l'un des grands foyers de savoir, la rivale de Najaf – qu'elle allait même supplanter par la suite.

Au début du siècle, beaucoup d'idées étaient brassées dans la *ḥawza 'ilmiyya*²⁹ de Najaf, à la fois en matière de dogme religieux, de questions culturelles et de problèmes politiques. La victoire, à la fin du 18^e siècle, du courant *uṣūlī* représenté à Karbala par le cheikh Bihbahānī sur le courant *akhbārī* redonna de la vigueur à un processus entamé dans les cercles chiïtes entre le 14^e et le 16^e siècle. Ce mouvement avait consisté à approfondir et à systématiser les fondements théoriques du *fiqh*; on se contentait avant cela de suivre les collections de traditions établies au 10^e et 11^e siècles. Alors que les partisans du courant *akhbārī* s'appuyaient, hormis le Coran, exclusivement sur les *akhbār* (traditions), les défenseurs du courant *uṣūlī* se fondaient aussi sur les autres sources du droit chiïte, le consensus (*ijmā'*), et la raison (*'aql*), et affirmaient la nécessité d'exercer l'*ijtihād*³⁰.

²⁴ La *ḥusayniyya* est l'endroit où les chiïtes tiennent des séances de déploration (*majlis*); on y raconte la vie de Ḥusayn, le troisième Imam, et le drame de Karbala, où celui-ci connut le martyre, notamment pendant les célébrations du mois de *muḥarram*.

²⁵ Elie Kedourie, « The Iraqi Shi'is and their Fate », in: *Shi'ism, Resistance and Revolution*, Martin Kramer, éd., Londres: Mansell Publishing 1987, 135-157, 138.

²⁶ Momen, *Introduction*, 247.

²⁷ Le *marja' a'lā* est suivi dans tout le monde chiïte. Sur la *marja'iyya* et le problème de la succession de Burūjirdī, cf. Ann K. S. Lambton, « A Reconsideration of the Position of the *Marja' al-taqlid* and the Religious Institution », *Studia Islamica* 20 (1964), 115-135.

²⁸ Hamid Algar, « The Oppositional Role of the Ulama in Twentieth-Century Iran » in: *Scholars, Saints and Sufis. Muslim Religious Institutions since 1500*, Nikki R. Keddie, éd., Berkeley et Los Angeles: University of California Press 1972, 231-255, 243.

²⁹ C'est le nom donné au cercle formé par des étudiants qui accomplissent leur cursus et forment communauté; par extension, ce mot désigne l'ensemble des étudiants et des maîtres, l'ensemble des écoles sises sur un territoire donné ainsi que le système d'enseignement mis en œuvre.

³⁰ Sur le conflit entre les deux courants, cf. Juan R.I. Cole, « Shi'i Clerics in Iraq and Iran, 1722-1780: The Akhbārī-Usulī Conflict Reconsidered », *Iranian Studies* 18/1 (hiver 1985), 3-33; Gianroberto Scarcia, « Intorno alle controversie tra akhbārī e uṣūlī presso gli imāmiti di Persia », *Revista degli Studi Orientali* 33 (1958), 211-250. Sur le courant *akhbārī*, cf. Ro-

Muḥammad Ḥasan al-Najafī (m. 1850), dit Ṣāhib al-Jawāhir puis Murtaḍā l-Anṣārī (m. 1864) poursuivirent l'œuvre de Bihbahānī dans le sens du développement de l'*ijtihād*; ils apportèrent « force et maturation » au *fiqh* et le firent avancer d'un « pas gigantesque »³¹. Le cheikh Muḥammad Ḥasan est souvent considéré comme le premier à avoir réalisé l'unanimité des mondes chiites autour de lui, c'est-à-dire le premier *marja' a'lā*. Le développement des communications qui s'opérait à ce moment-là permit aux chiites éloignés de Najaf d'entrer plus facilement en contact avec les *mujtahid* réputés. Ṣāhib al-Jawāhir recommanda Murtaḍā l-Anṣārī pour lui succéder³². L'œuvre de ce dernier en matière d'*uṣūl al-fiqh* fut déterminante pour l'évolution du chiisme car il étendit les champs d'application de l'*ijtihād* et, par là, les domaines d'intervention du *mujtahid*, ce qui accrut considérablement son pouvoir. A partir des travaux d'al-Anṣārī qui, lui-même, pratiquait la prudente réserve (*iḥtiyāt*) et ne statuait pas sur les affaires politiques, le rôle du *mujtahid* ne cessera de prendre de l'ampleur pour aboutir à la théorie de la *wilāyat al-faqīh* développée par Khomeini³³.

Najaf, au début du 20^e siècle, était donc animée par les débats des *mujtahid* se réclamant de l'héritage d'al-Anṣārī. Ils explorèrent les horizons qui s'ouvraient devant eux, ce qui ne manqua pas d'attirer les étudiants désireux de marcher sur les pas d'illustres savants comme Muḥammad Ḥasan Shirāzī (m. 1815) ou Mullā Muḥammad Kāẓim Khurāsānī dit « Ākhūnd » (m. 1911). Dans les cénacles, on parlait de sciences religieuses mais aussi des bouleversements que connaissait la région, des tentatives européennes pour s'y implanter économiquement et des dangers que cela représentait pour la communauté islamique. On réfuta les théories matérialistes, comme le darwinisme. On s'agita autour du mouvement consti-

bert Gleave, *Scripturalist Islam: The History and Doctrines of the Akhbārī Shī'ī School*, Leiden: Brill 2007.

³¹ Muḥammad Mahdī l-Āṣifi, *al-Ijtihād wa-l-taqlīd wa-shu'ūn al-faqīh*, Beyrouth: Dār al-ta'arūf 1990, 25.

³² Muḥammad Ḥasan, sur son lit de mort, fit venir le cheikh al-Anṣārī auprès de lui. Il prit sa main, la mit sur sa poitrine et, s'adressant à l'assemblée, dit: « Voici votre *marja'* après moi ». C'est ce que rapporte Muḥammad Kalāntar dans sa préface de l'ouvrage de Murtaḍā l-Anṣārī, *Kitāb al-Makāsib*, tome 1, Beyrouth: Mu'assasat al-nūr li-l-maṭbū'āt 1998, 118. Ce mode de transmission ne s'est pas reproduit; le *marja'* doit « émerger » et non être désigné. En outre, si l'histoire des débuts de la *marja'iyya* reste lacunaire, on considère que le premier *marja'* fut plutôt Murtaḍā l-Anṣārī lui-même. Cf. Ahmad Kazemi Moussavi, « The Institutionalization of the Marja'i Taqlid in the Nineteenth Century Shi'ite Community », *Muslim World* 84/3-4 (juil-oct. 1994), 279-99.

³³ Sur al-Anṣārī, cf. Juan R.I. Cole, « Imami Jurisprudence and the Role of the Ulama: Mortaza Ansari on Emulating the Supreme Exemplar », in: *Religion and Politics in Iran: Shi'ism from Quietism to Revolution*, Nikki Keddie, éd., New Haven-London: Yale University Press 1983, 33-46.

tutionnaliste d'Iran. On fomenta la révolution de 1920 contre les Britanniques, qui fut dirigée par les *marja'* de Najaf³⁴.

Les écoles s'étaient multipliées dans la ville sainte en pleine effervescence, véritable pépinière de *mujtahid*. Les étudiants affluaient de toutes les régions des mondes chiïtes. Le cheikh Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Muẓaffar estimait leur nombre à plus de dix mille à la veille de l'occupation anglaise, en 1914³⁵. Un rapport de l'administration britannique n'en compta pas moins de six mille en 1918³⁶. Lorsque Muḥsin al-Amīn revint à Najaf en 1932, après y avoir lui-même étudié, il recueillit le chiffre de soixante mille âmes pour la population totale de la ville, dont vingt mille Najafites, le reste étant composé d'étudiants étrangers³⁷. L'engouement des étudiants ira cependant en déclinant. Les écoles religieuses ne purent résister à la concurrence des écoles modernes et, à partir des années 1940, de nouveaux courants d'idées, tel le marxisme, pénétrèrent à Najaf. En 1957, les étudiants en sciences religieuses n'étaient plus qu'environ deux mille, répartis comme suit: 896 venus d'Iran; 326, d'Irak; 324, du Pakistan; 270, du Xinjian³⁸; 71, de l'Inde et du Cachemire; 47, de Syrie et du Liban, 20, de Hasa, Qatif et Bahreïn³⁹.

Il n'y a pas d'âge pour entamer le cursus de Najaf. Lorsqu'ils arrivent dans la ville sainte, certains étudiants ont largement dépassé le stade des *muqaddimāt*, ont une expérience d'enseignement un âge avancé, et une famille. Tout ce petit monde se trouve un logement en ville. Il n'est pas rare, pour les étudiants venus d'ailleurs, d'avoir des parents à Najaf chez qui ils peuvent s'installer. Cependant, beaucoup d'étudiants étrangers habitent dans les madrasas, qui sont plus des lieux de résidence et d'étude, des internats, que des écoles au sens où on l'entend communément.

³⁴ Pierre-Jean Luizard, *La formation de l'Irak contemporain: Le rôle politique des ulémas chiïtes à la fin de la domination ottomane et au moment de la création de l'Etat irakien*, Paris: CNRS Editions 2002.

³⁵ *Tārikh al-shī'a*, 103. Cité par al-Bahādili, *al-Najaf*, 31. Pour plus de données chiffrées sur cette période, voir Meir Litvak, « Continuity and change in the 'Ulama' Population of Najaf and Karbala, 1791-1904: A Socio-Demographic Study », *Iranian Studies* 23 (1990), 31-60 ; du même auteur, les tableaux en annexe de: *Shī'i Scholars of Nineteenth-Century Iraq: The Ulama of Najaf and Karbala*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998, 189-193.

³⁶ Great Britain « Annual Administration Report, Shāmiyya division, 1918 », *Reports of Administration for 1918 of Divisions and Districts of the Occupied Territories in Mesopotamia*, tome 1, Bagdad, 87. Cité par Hanna Batatu, « Iraq's Underground Shī'a Movements: Characteristics, Causes and Prospects », *The Middle East Journal* 35/4 (1981), 578-594, 586.

³⁷ Muḥsin al-Amīn, *Rihlāt al-sayyid Muḥsin al-Amīn*, Beyrouth: Dār al-Ghadīr s.d., 96.

³⁸ Appelé alors Turkestan oriental ou chinois ; les auteurs arabes, eux, l'appelaient « Tibet ».

³⁹ Statistiques citées par Fādīl Jamālī, « The Theological Colleges of Najaf », *Muslim World* 50/1 (janv. 1960), 15-22, 15.

Najaf comptait plus d'une vingtaine de madrasas dans les années 1930,⁴⁰ plus ou moins renommées, construites sur le même modèle: une cour carrée ou rectangulaire avec un bassin au milieu; tout autour, des chambres de 4 à 9 m² de superficie, chacune disposant d'un *īwān* donnant sur la cour. Parmi elles, l'école al-Miqdād al-Siyūrī, fondée en 1423, où enseigna Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Nā'īnī (m. 1936), l'école al-Gharawiyya, dite l'école de la cour du mausolée, l'école al-Ṣadr, qui possédait trente chambres, l'école al-Iravānī, qui recevait surtout des étudiants turcs, l'école al-Qazvīnī, un ancien caravansérail transformé en 1906, l'école al-Hindī, établie en 1910 par un notable de Lahore qui acheta cette maison à une illustre famille de savants, les Baḥr al-ʿUlūm, etc. De grands *marja'* avaient fondé leurs propres écoles, comme Muḥammad Kāẓim al-Khurāsānī, qui en avait trois, ou Muḥammad Kāẓim al-Yazdī (m. 1919), dont l'école, créée en 1909, comprenait quatre-vingts chambres, sur deux étages.

Ces écoles étaient indépendantes de toute autorité gouvernementale. Elles relevaient financièrement des donations que les croyants envoyaient aux *marja'*, ou des ressources de biens *waqf* qu'elles géraient, dont une partie était allouée aux étudiants. L'école al-Qawām, par exemple, disposait de nombreux *waqf*; on en distribuait le produit à ceux qui y habitaient, mensuellement ou annuellement. Ces fonds furent aussi utilisés à la distribution de repas, à l'occasion de fêtes religieuses⁴¹. D'autres écoles organisaient des repas communs à leurs frais, selon leurs possibilités, pendant le mois de ramadan ou lors de jours fériés. Certaines n'en avaient cependant pas les moyens⁴².

À Najaf, les enseignants ne touchent aucun salaire, les étudiants ne déboursent rien pour suivre les cours. Le fonctionnement des écoles comme les modestes bourses accordées aux étudiants sont assurés par les oulémas et les grands *marja'*. Toutefois, la fortune de ces derniers soumise aux conditions économiques de l'heure, connaît des aléas. Elle est directement liée à leur notoriété: plus un *marja'* est réputé et respecté pour son savoir et sa piété, plus il a de *muqallid*, c'est-à-dire des adeptes qui suivent ses préceptes et lui envoient des impôts religieux, *khums* et *zakāt*, et des donations. Muḥammad Kāẓim al-Yazdī recevait beaucoup d'argent de toutes les contrées chiites, il pouvait donc faire preuve de largesse, alors que d'autres oulémas, après lui, tel Muḥammad Ḥusayn Āl Kāshif al-Ghiṭā', ne savaient que se plaindre de leur situation pécuniaire⁴³. Hormis les privilégiés recevant des aides substantielles de familles aisées, les étudiants vivent chichement, se

⁴⁰ Āl Maḥbūba, *Māḍī*, 84-98. L'architecture des madrasas est décrite en détails par Muḥammad al-Khalilī in: Ja'far al-Khalilī, éd., *Mawsū'at*, 124-127. Il y eut peu de changements dans ces écoles religieuses jusqu'aux années 1960. 'Abd al-Hādī l-Fāḍilī, dans un guide de Najaf qu'il commença à rédiger pour le millième anniversaire de la naissance du cheikh Tūsī (955), en énumère trente: *Dalīl al-Najaf al-ashraf*, Najaf: Mu'assasat jāmi'at al-Najaf s.d., 70-74. Fāḍil Jamālī en dénombre vingt-quatre; cf. « The Theological Colleges », 15.

⁴¹ Āl Maḥbūba, *Māḍī*, 88.

⁴² Muḥammad al-Khalilī, *Mawsū'at*, 118.

⁴³ Āl Maḥbūba, *Māḍī*, 95; Batatu, « Iraq's Underground Shī'a Movements », 587.

nourrissent de pain, de dattes et de lait caillé. On raconte beaucoup d'histoires sur de grands oulémas qui ont vécu dans ces écoles au pain sec, écrit Muḥammad al-Khalilī⁴⁴. Beaucoup d'entre eux passent patiemment une journée ou deux sans manger, entièrement absorbés par leurs études. Dans son autobiographie, Muḥsin al-Amīn conte ses déboires de jeune *ʿālim* attendant en vain une somme d'argent envoyée par son père du Jabal ʿĀmil... et dépensée en route par l'oncle chargé de lui faire parvenir. On lui indique un boulanger iranien qui fait crédit aux étudiants: à l'instar de bien d'autres, sayyid Muḥsin sera ainsi tiré d'affaire⁴⁵.

Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyya dresse, quant à lui, un tableau bien sombre de Najaf, où il séjourna dans les années 1920: pauvreté, maladies, scorpions et autres insectes, manque d'eau... De grands oulémas, selon lui, ont traversé de dures épreuves pendant leur quête du savoir⁴⁶. Malgré les difficultés de cette existence, Najaf offre, en contrepartie, la solidarité entre étudiants, la présence réconfortante des *marjaʿ*, l'atmosphère de piété et de science, l'accès facile à une abondante littérature religieuse. On trouve une dizaine d'imprimeries à la veille de l'occupation britannique. Des revues y sont publiées, comme *al-ʿIlm*, qui fut la tribune des oulémas au début du siècle. Une presse en arabe, en persan ou en turc est diffusée à Najaf, venant d'Iran, d'Inde, d'Égypte ou d'ailleurs, comme la revue *al-ʿIrfān* de Saīda⁴⁷.

Le jeudi et le vendredi se tient un marché aux livres, où ils sont vendus à la criée. Enfin, Najaf compte de nombreuses bibliothèques, souvent léguées par de grands savants, comme celle de Jaʿfar Āl Kāshif al-Ghiṭāʾ, la plus prestigieuse, celle de Muḥammad al-Samāwī ou de sayyid Baḥr al-Ulūm. Certaines sont réputées détenir de précieux manuscrits, telles les bibliothèques al-Ḥadra al-sharīfa al-ʿalawīyya, la plus ancienne, et al-Ḥaydariyya. La bibliothèque al-Imām Amīr al-Muʿminīn est connue pour ses ouvrages modernes qui permettent aux étudiants de prendre connaissance des découvertes scientifiques et techniques du moment⁴⁸. Tout cela contribue à propager les idées de ce que les auteurs chiites appellent la *nahḍa ʿilmiyya*, la renaissance du savoir.

Les ouvrages composés par les grands *marjaʿ*, les acteurs de cette *nahḍa ʿilmiyya*, figurent au programme des études. L'élève est libre de choisir les livres qu'il va

⁴⁴ Muḥammad al-Khalilī, *Maʿwūʿāt*, 121.

⁴⁵ al-Amīn, *Autobiographie*, 116-117.

⁴⁶ Mughniyya, *Tajārib*, 38.

⁴⁷ Luizard, *La formation*, 158-159. Une liste des imprimeries et des revues est donnée dans Āl Maḥbūba, *Māḍī*, 117. Sur la revue *al-ʿIrfān*, cf. Tarif Khalidī, « Shaykh Ahmad ʿArif al-Zayn and *al-ʿIrfān* », in: *Intellectual Life in the Arab East, 1890-1939*, Marwan Buheiry, éd., Beyrouth: American University of Beyrouth 1981, 110-124. Silvia Naef, « La presse en tant que moteur du renouveau culturel et littéraire: la revue chiite libanaise *al-ʿIrfān* », *Études asiatiques, revue de la société Suisse-Asie*, L.2. (1996), 385-397. Sabrina Mervin, *Un réformisme chiite*, Paris: Karthala 2000, 150-159.

⁴⁸ Āl Maḥbūba, *Māḍī*, 100-117 ; al-Amīn, *Riḥlāt*, 107-110 ; Luizard, *La formation*, 158. Voir aussi l'article de Ḥasan Naṣr Allāh, « al-Najaf al-ḥadāriyya », *al-Gharī* 2 (janvier 1981), 59-66.

étudier dans le cadre de ce programme, et les professeurs qui les enseignent. On se presse pour assister aux cours des grands *marja'*: Muḥammad Kāẓim al-Khurāsānī parvint à capter une audience de douze cents étudiants et *mujtahid*⁴⁹.

Libre encore est le choix du lieu des cours, décidé d'un commun accord entre le maître et le cercle de ses disciples. Les leçons peuvent se dérouler dans une madrasa, chez le maître ou l'élève, mais aussi dans le sanctuaire de l'Imam 'Alī, dans les nombreuses pièces bordant la cour du mausolée ou sous les arcades. La mosquée al-Ṭūsī, où repose Shaykh al-Ṭā'ifa, la mosquée al-Hindī, parmi les plus connues, où la mosquée al-Khaḍra, où enseignera l'ayatollah Khū'ī, abritent aussi des cours⁵⁰. Ils se déroulent souvent dans les grandes mosquées, loin du bruit. Les étudiants s'asseyent par terre, autour du maître. Si leur nombre s'accroît, le cercle s'élargit, sans ordre...⁵¹.

Chaque cours dure entre une demi-heure et une heure. Les étudiants zélés ont largement de quoi remplir leur journée, qui commence après la prière de l'aube et se termine peu après celle du soir. En dehors des nombreuses leçons données par les maîtres, les étudiants d'un même cercle se retrouvent pour débattre les sujets traités ou pour préparer le cours suivant. Par ailleurs, le savoir se transmet lors des *majlis* ou cénacles qui se tiennent chez les oulémas. Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḍlallāh se souvient y avoir passé de longues soirées des jeudis et des vendredis, lorsqu'il étudiait à Najaf⁵². Encore plus informelles, les visites privées chez le maître, où l'on parle de science en buvant du thé, où l'on confie ses soucis quotidiens, à tel point que l'étudiant noue des relations étroites avec son professeur, qu'il connaît « comme le fils connaît son père »⁵³.

Rien d'austère ni d'emprunté n'émane des témoignages des oulémas sur le rapport entre maîtres et disciples, mais de la bienveillance, d'une part, et du respect, de l'autre. On déborde largement du cadre strict et rigide de la science. Avant le début du cours, entre un petit groupe d'élèves et son maître s'engage une conversation où chacun parle de ses affaires, « des amis et des ennemis, du déjeuner et du dîner, des dettes et du loyer de la maison, de la nouvelle *jubba*⁵⁴ achetée par l'un des étudiants, de la lettre qu'il a reçue de son pays, de rêves et de projets remplis de crainte et d'espoir [...] »⁵⁵.

La détente est nécessaire pour se soustraire à l'emprise de ces études qui n'en finissent pas, et à l'atmosphère étouffante de Najaf. Les étudiants vont se prome-

⁴⁹ al-Bahādili, *al-Najaf*, 61.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 50-52 et Muḥammad Baḥr al-'Ulūm in Ja'far al-Khalīlī, *Ma'wū'āt*, 108-110.

⁵¹ Ḥasan al-Amin, *Dā'irat*, 332. Il précise que le seul changement intervenu est l'utilisation de microphones, afin que la voix du professeur soit entendue par les étudiants les plus reculés.

⁵² Récit autobiographique recueilli par 'Alī Ḥasan Surūr, *al-'Allāma Faḍl Allāh wa taḥaddī l-mamnū'*, Beyrouth: al-Sharika al-'āmma li-khadamāt al-inmā'iyya 1992, 44.

⁵³ Mughniyya, *Ma'a 'ulamā'*, 91.

⁵⁴ Vêtement traditionnel, sorte de robe portée avec une ceinture, sous le caftan.

⁵⁵ Mughniyya, *ibid.*

ner dans les jardins des alentours, ils s'y installent pour déclamer des vers, ou bien s'adonnent, loin des regards, à des « jeux innocents »: la course à pied, le saut, la natation. Ils vont prier à la mosquée de Koufa, à neuf kilomètres de là, ou vont visiter les saints tombeaux de Karbala, à deux jours de marche⁵⁶.

Les cours ne s'arrêtent ni au printemps, lorsque Najaf est balayée par de violents vents de sable, ni en été, où le thermomètre atteint 50°, obligeant les étudiants à se réfugier dans les galeries souterraines⁵⁷ des écoles pour y trouver un peu de fraîcheur. Toutefois, les congés sont nombreux: le jeudi et le vendredi de chaque semaine, plus les périodes de célébrations religieuses, c'est-à-dire le mois de *ramadān* et une bonne partie des mois de *muḥarram*, de *rajab*, et de *shaʿbān*. Muḥsin al-Amin évoque l'importance des jours chômés non sans ironie. Ayant expliqué qu'il est courant de considérer l'étude entre deux jours fériés comme non recommandable, il ajoute: « Ainsi, certains esprits fins interrogés sur le cours de leurs études répondent: un jour je suis au hammam, un jour mon maître est au hammam; un jour je suis souffrant, un jour mon maître est souffrant; puis viennent le jeudi et le vendredi, enfin un jour d'étude entre deux jours fériés, et ainsi s'achève la semaine »⁵⁸.

On l'aura deviné: Najaf a aussi ses cancre et ses imposteurs, qui se laissent d'autant plus aisément aller à la paresse qu'il n'y a ni contrôle ni examen. Le meilleur, le pieux savant, remarque encore Muḥsin, côtoie le pire, car « il en est de la sagesse comme de l'eau de pluie: si elle tombe sur un fruit amer, elle en augmente l'amertume, et si elle tombe sur un fruit doux, elle en augmente la douceur »⁵⁹.

Ayant achevé le cycle des *muqaddimāt*, l'étudiant entame la deuxième étape de son cursus, appelé *al-suṭūḥ*, « les niveaux »⁶⁰. Elle consiste à acquérir le savoir de base en matière de *fiqh* et d'*uṣūl al-fiqh*, culture nécessaire à tout clerc, et qu'il faut totalement maîtriser pour commencer les exercices conduisant à la pratique de l'*ijtihād*.

Dans ces deux matières, trois types d'ouvrages sont étudiés et, ce, dans un ordre de difficulté croissante.

- a) Des manuels classiques qui sont, en *uṣūl al-fiqh*: *al-Maʿālim fi l-uṣūl* et en *fiqh*: *al-Tabṣira*; *al-Mukhtaṣar*; *Sharāʿiʿ al-islām*; *al-Lumʿa al-dimashqīyya*; *Sharḥ al-Lumʿa*;

⁵⁶ Muḥammad al-Khalilī, *Maʿsūʿāt*, 122-123.

⁵⁷ Ces galeries souterraines (*sirdāb*, plur. *sarādīb*) ont parfois deux ou trois étages en sous-sol. Pour plus de détails sur leur architecture, cf. *ibid.*, 124-125. Les oulémas y font souvent allusion dans leurs Mémoires comme à une curiosité de la vie de Najaf, rapportant qu'ils descendaient y prendre leurs repas et y dormir lors de la saison chaude. Voir, par exemple, les souvenirs de Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḍl Allāh dans *Surūr*, *al-ʿAllāma Faḍl Allāh*, 27.

⁵⁸ al-Amin, *Autobiographie*, 111-112.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁶⁰ Fāḍil Jamālī, dans « The Theological Colleges », 18, désigne la première étape sous le nom de *al-suṭūḥ* et la deuxième sous le nom de *al-fuḍalāʾ*. Il omet donc les *muqaddimāt* et divise les *suṭūḥ* en deux parties, ce qui se fait encore aujourd'hui; on appelle d'ailleurs les étudiants en fin de deuxième cycle *al-fuḍalāʾ*.

al-Masālik. Notons que *Sharāʿiʿ al-islām*, ouvrage de base⁶¹, a été traduit en français par Amédée Querry, orientaliste qui fut consul de France à Tabriz⁶².

- b) Les ouvrages des *mujtahid* et des *marjaʿ* de la *nahḍa ʿilmiyya* dont les méthodes ont fait autorité tout au long du 20^e siècle, et qui sont toujours étudiés de nos jours. En *uṣūl al-fiqh*: *al-Qawānīn*; *al-Rasāʾil*; *al-Kifāya*, auxquels s'est plus tard ajouté *Uṣūl al-fiqh*. En *fiqh*: *al-Riyāḍ*; *al-Makāsib*; *al-ʿUrwa al-wuthqā*. Ces deux derniers ouvrages ont été largement commentés⁶³ tout comme *al-Kifāya* qui a supplanté *al-Qawānīn*, et reste aujourd'hui, pour les étudiants et les enseignants, une base de recherche en *uṣūl*⁶⁴.
- c) Les écrits du *marjaʿ* du moment, notamment sa *risāla ʿamaliyya*, traité pratique de *fiqh* que doit composer tout *mujtahid* s'il veut être *muqallad*, c'est-à-dire imité par les croyants. Ces derniers suivront alors les préceptes qu'il énonce dans ce traité.

Notons que, en matière de *fiqh*, on parle, pour certains manuels, de *fiqh istidlālī* (déductif), où le auteurs ne se bornent pas à énoncer des règles de droit, mais expliquent, pour chaque règle, la méthodologie: leur raisonnement et les preuves (*dalīl*, *hujja*) sur lesquelles ils se fondent.

Liste des ouvrages étudiés

Uṣūl al-fiqh:

- *al-Maʿālim fi l-uṣūl* de shaykh Ḥasan dit « Ṣāhib al-Maʿālim » ou Ibn al-Shahīd al-Thānī (m. 1602); c'est l'introduction de son ouvrage: *Maʿālim al-dīn wa-malādh al-mujtahidīn*
- *Qawānīn al-uṣūl*, de Mīrzā l-Qummī (m. 1816)
- *al-Rasāʾil*, aussi intitulé *Farāʾid al-uṣūl*, de Murtaḍā l-Anṣārī (m. 1864)
- *Kifāyat al-uṣūl*, de Muḥammad Kāzīm al-Khurāsānī, dit « al-Ākhūnd » (m. 1911),
- *Uṣūl al-fiqh*, de Muḥammad Riḍā l-Muẓaffar (m. 1961)

⁶¹ Cf. Yves Linant de Bellefonds, « Le droit imāmīte », in: *Le shīʿisme imāmīte*, Toufic Fahd, éd., Paris: PUF 1970, 183-199, 185-186.

⁶² Amédée Querry, *Droit musulman: Recueil de lois concernant les musulmans schyites*, Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1871-1872, 2 tomes. Sur lui, voir Florence Hellot-Bellier, « Amédée Querry, Arthur de Gobineau et la Perse (1855-1872) », *Trésors d'Orient*, P. Gignoux, C. Jullien et F. Jullien, éd., « Cahiers de Studia Iranica », 42, Louvain: Peters 2009, 113-144.

⁶³ Muḥammad Bāḥr al-ʿUlūm in al-Khalīlī, *Mawṣūʿāt*, 89, indique qu'il a enregistré plus de vingt commentaires d'*al-ʿUrwa*, dont celui de Muḥammad Bāqir al-Ṣadr (m. 1980).

⁶⁴ Le Père Anastase écrit en 1913: « Aujourd'hui, l'ouvrage le plus en vogue est *Kitāb al-Kifāyah* du grand Cheikh contemporain Mollā Kāzīm Khorāsānī [...]. Plusieurs l'ont déjà suivi, en mettant de côté *Kitāb al-Kawānīn*. Il vient d'être édité pour la 5^e fois ». « Un Mésopotamien », 277.

Fiqh:

- *Tabṣīrat al-mutaʿallimīn*, de Ibn al-Muṭahhar dit al-ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī (m. 1325)
- *al-Mukhtaṣar al-nāfi fī fiqh al-imāmiyya*, de Jafar b. Ḥasan dit « al-Muḥaqqiq » al-Ḥillī (m. 1277)
- *Sharāʾiʿ al-islām fī masāʾil al-ḥalāl wa al-ḥarām* d'al-Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī
- *al-Lumʿa al-dimashqiyya*, de Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn al-Makkī l-ʿĀmilī dit « al-Shahīd al-Awwal » (1384)
- *al-Rawḍa al-bahīyya fī sharḥ al-Lumʿa al-dimashqiyya*, de Zayn al-Dīn b. ʿAlī dit « al-Shahīd al-Thānī » (m. 1558) (*fiqh istidlālī*)
- *Masālik al-afḥām fī sharḥ Sharāʾiʿ al-islām*, d'al-Shahīd al-Thānī
- *Riyāḍ al-masāʾil fī bayān al-aḥkām bi-l-dalāʾil*, de sayyid ʿAlī Ṭabāṭabāʾī (m. 1815)
- *al-Makāsib*, de Murtaḍā l-Anṣārī (*fiqh istidlālī*)
- *al-ʿUrwa al-wuthqā*, de sayyid Muḥammad Kāẓim Yazdī (m. 1919); on en trouve des éditions commentées par plusieurs *marjaʿ*. Ces ouvrages, pour la plupart, sont toujours étudiés et donc régulièrement réédités.

Durant ce deuxième cycle, l'étudiant lit plusieurs manuels à la fois avec des maîtres différents, qui les expliquent phrase par phrase. L'étude d'un manuel peut s'échelonner sur deux ou trois ans. Par ailleurs, afin de s'en imprégner totalement avant de l'enseigner à son tour, il reprend à plusieurs reprises le même sujet, en changeant de professeur. D'élève, il se transforme en jeune *ʿālim*, et commence à porter le turban,⁶⁵ à enseigner ses cadets, et à défendre ses opinions au sein de son cercle d'étude. Se faisant, il s'initie à l'art de la *khuṭba* (sermon).

L'étape des *suṭūḥ* consiste en une spécialisation en *fiqh* et en *uṣūl*. Le hadith, notamment à travers les « Quatre livres » (*al-kutub al-arbaʿa*)⁶⁶, ne figure pas au programme et semble être délaissé, alors qu'il paraît être un préalable nécessaire à toute étude de *fiqh*. A cette remarque, savants et étudiants répondent qu'on apprend les traditions à force de compulsurer des manuels de *fiqh* et d'*uṣūl* qui s'y réfèrent. Ce problème a cependant été soulevé par des oulémas. Muḥsin al-Amin l'inclut dans la liste des lacunes qu'il dresse du système d'enseignement à Najaf, où il mentionne la négligence de la science du hadith et de la critique des chaînes de transmetteurs⁶⁷.

⁶⁵ Chacun est libre de porter le turban quand bon lui semble. Certains tardent à l'adopter, par humilité. D'autres se montrent précoces, comme Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḍl Allāh, qui raconte être entré à la *ḥawza ʿilmiyya* à onze ans et s'être coiffé d'un turban dès douze ans. Surūr, *al-ʿAllāma Faḍl Allāh*, 43.

⁶⁶ Les « Quatre livres des trois Muḥammad », comme on les appelle, sont les premiers recueils de hadith qui font autorité dans le chiisme: *al-Kāfi fī ʿilm al-dīn*, de Muḥammad al-Kulaynī (m. 939), *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, d'Ibn Bābūya (ou Bābawayh), dit al-Ṣadūq al-Qummi (m. 991); *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām* et *Kitāb al-istibṣār* de Muḥammad al-Ṭūsī, dit « Shaykh al-Ṭāifa » (m. 1068).

⁶⁷ Al-Amin, *Autobiographie*, 111. Muḥsin al-Amin fut l'un des oulémas qui appelèrent à la réforme de l'enseignement à Najaf. Cf. Mervin, *Un réformisme*, 212-228.

Négligence ne signifie pas abandon⁶⁸. Tout comme l'exégèse (*tafsīr*), la théologie scolastique (*kalām*), la morale (*akhlāq*), le hadith fait l'objet de cours qui constituent en quelque sorte des options. L'assiduité y est encore moins obligatoire que ceux de *fiqh* et d'*uṣūl*, mais ils font partie du bagage nécessaire à tout *ālim*. En plus des sciences religieuses, ils poursuivent ce qu'ils avaient commencé dans d'autres matières, au stade des *muqaddimāt* et suivent des cours de médecine et d'astronomie classiques.

A Najaf, la philosophie tient une place importante dans la formation des savants. Le *marja'* Muḥammad Kāzim al-Khurāsānī, réputé pour sa science des *uṣūl*, est aussi, selon Corbin, "un parfait théosophe chiite" professant la nécessité de connaître la philosophie et la métaphysique pour comprendre les traditions des Imams⁶⁹. On étudie les philosophes grecs et les grands auteurs de la philosophie islamique: al-Kindī, Farābī, Ikhwān al-Ṣafā. D'Ibn Sīnā, son œuvre *Kitāb al-shifā'* et *al-Ishārāt*, avec les deux commentaires qu'en firent Nāṣir Dīn al-Ṭūsī et Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. De Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī, on étudie notamment *Kitāb al-asfār al-aqliyya al-arba'a*. On se rapproche du *kalām* avec l'ouvrage de Nāṣir Dīn al-Ṭūsī, *Tajrīd al-i'tiqād* et ses commentaires par al-ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī, al-Qushtchī et ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Lāhijī. Ajoutons le commentaire d'*al-Bāb al-bādī ʿashar*, d'al-ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī, par Miqdād al-Suwīsī, et *Sharḥ al-Manzūma*, qui rassemble le texte en vers et l'énorme commentaire qu'en fit l'auteur lui-même, Mullā Hādī l-Sabzawārī⁷⁰.

Enfin, l'étudiant profite de l'atmosphère cosmopolite de la *hawza*, de la lecture des revues, des débats. Sans oublier la poésie, à laquelle on s'adonne volontiers⁷¹. La dernière étape des études se déroule sans l'appui des manuels, que l'on est supposé avoir assimilés. Elle se situe « en dehors » des textes, c'est pourquoi elle est appelée *al-khārij*. A ce niveau, bon nombre d'étudiants ont abandonné leur quête du savoir. C'est l'élite qui assiste aux cours de *khārij*, ou ceux qui pensent en faire partie. Certains, peut-être, ont brûlé des étapes, échappé à tel ou tel manuel, ou bien manqué de persévérance et peuvent néanmoins suivre les cours des grands *mujtahid* qui, seuls, officient à ce niveau. Cependant, même s'il n'y a aucun examen de contrôle officiel, on connaît déjà les éléments brillants qui se sont manifestés, par leurs questions et leurs remarques, lors des cours précédents.

Il s'agit de mener le *ālim* à l'*ijtihād* en l'entraînant par des exercices répétés. Chaque cours porte sur une question précise de *fiqh*. Le maître présente les opinions des différents auteurs, puis la sienne, invitant son auditoire à la discussion et

⁶⁸ On peut voir dans ce manque d'entrain à l'égard du hadith un effet du processus de rationalisation des doctrines, qui connut un regain après la victoire du courant *uṣūlī* sur le courant *akhbārī*. Cf. Hossein Modarressi Tabātabā'i, *An Introduction to Shī'ī Law*, Londres: Ithaca Press 1984, chap. 4, 23-58.

⁶⁹ Henry Corbin, *Histoire de la philosophie islamique*, Paris: Folio-Gallimard 1986, 494.

⁷⁰ Muḥsin al-Amin, *Rihlāt*, 106 ; ʿAbd al-Hādī l-Fāḍilī, *Dalīl*, 56; Fādīl Jamālī, « The Theological Colleges », 20. Sur cet auteur, voir l'article de Sajjad H. Rizvi dans ce volume.

⁷¹ Berque, « Hier à Najaf », 333-335.

à la dispute (*munāqasha*, *munāzara*). L'étudiant doit prendre la parole pour réfuter l'avis du maître et imposer le sien par la force de ses arguments: on estime qu'il forge ainsi sa personnalité et son jugement. 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Sharaf al-Dīn (m. 1957) raconte son apprentissage auprès du cheikh Ḥasan al-Karbālā'ī, à Samarra: « Il me stimulait dans la discussion, m'incitait à réfuter ce qu'il concluait et à conclure par ce qu'il réfutait, aiguisant ainsi mon caractère à la *munāzara* des oulémas et affûtant mon jugement [...] »⁷². Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḍl Allāh se souvient lui aussi de l'importance de la dispute à Najaf, et de son oncle, Muḥammad Sa'īd, qui y enseignait, l'encourageant vivement à la pratiquer. A tel point qu'il estime plus important pour un 'ālim d'être capable de discuter un hadith plutôt que de le connaître par cœur⁷³.

Il y eut des savants pour s'enorgueillir de la liberté totale prévalant dans ce système d'enseignement, et d'autres pour y voir une cause de désordre (*ḥawḍarwiyya*). De la même façon, certains oulémas ont critiqué l'abus des développements caustiques qui traînent vainement en longueur, lors de ces discussions⁷⁴.

La voie tend vers l'*ijtihād*. L'étudiant développe sa capacité à induire (*instinbāt*) des préceptes légaux à partir des sources du droit, à se forger un avis qui diffère de celui des autres *mujtahid*. Cette faculté doit devenir une seconde nature. On l'appelle *malakat al-ijtihād*.

Après dix ans, quinze ans d'études ou plus, peu d'étudiants sont au niveau requis. Ceux qui y parviennent se distinguent très vite de ceux qui posent des questions injustifiées ou émettent des avis infondés. Ils émergent ainsi du lot⁷⁵. On les remarque, on parle d'eux dans les cénacles, et leur réputation dépasse parfois les frontières. Eux-mêmes se sentent prêts: c'est l'*isti'dād*. Il ne leur reste plus qu'à recevoir de leurs illustres maîtres l'autorisation, la licence (*ijāza*) d'exercer l'*ijtihād*. Les autres, ceux qui n'ont pas la compétence nécessaire, se verront essuyer un refus s'ils en font eux-mêmes la demande ou la font faire par un camarade. Ils devront se contenter d'un certificat (toujours appelé *ijāza*) attestant de leur piété et de leur présence au cours, ce qui leur permettra d'intervenir dans les affaires de droit islamique simples: mariage, répudiations, litiges...⁷⁶

Malgré les formules d'usage, comme le rappel du hadith « les oulémas sont les héritiers des prophètes », ou les louanges des qualités du récipiendaire, les textes des *ijāza* sont courts, voire laconiques. Le maître énonce simplement que son disciple a atteint le degré (*martaba*) de l'*ijtihād*. Il peut aussi signifier, au détour d'une

⁷² 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Sharaf al-Dīn, « Ṣaḥāḥāt min ḥayātī », in : *Bughyat al-ghāribin fī silsilat Āl Sharaf al-Dīn*, Beyrouth: al-Dār al-islāmiyya 1991, tome 2, 68.

⁷³ Surūr, *al-'Allāma Faḍl Allāh*, 44-45.

⁷⁴ Cf. al-Amin, 79.

⁷⁵ Tout le système repose sur cette « émergence » que l'on retrouve ensuite au niveau du *marja'* émergeant, lui, comme le plus savant des *mujtahid*.

⁷⁶ Entretien avec Ḥasan al-Amin, Beyrouth, le 22/11/1992. Je n'ai pas eu l'occasion d'examiner ce type d'*ijāza*, que l'on ne pourrait trouver que dans les archives familiales car seules sont reproduites et publiées celles des grands oulémas.

phrase, qu'il est *mujtahid*⁷⁷; le mot *ijtibād* n'est parfois même pas écrit⁷⁸. En fait, l'*ijāza* ne se présente pas comme une autorisation d'exercer l'*ijtibād*, mais elle reconnaît et entérine le fait que le disciple l'exerce. Par ailleurs, le maître lui conseille la prudente réserve (*iḥtiyāt*).

Il existait un autre type d'*ijāza*, appelé *ijāzat al-rivāya* autorisant le disciple à transmettre l'enseignement qu'il a reçu de son maître. Les ouvrages étudiés peuvent être mentionnés précisément dans le texte, ou seulement les sciences concernées: le hadith, bien sûr, mais aussi toutes les sciences religieuses, et mêmes les études sur la langue arabe. Le maître peut aussi stipuler qu'il autorise son disciple à transmettre le savoir qu'il a lui-même reçu de ses maîtres. L'important, dans cette *ijāzat al-rivāya*, c'est la chaîne de transmission qui permet de relier le disciple aux Imams via son maître, et les maîtres de celui-ci, etc. Cette chaîne est une voie (*ṭarīqa*) remontant aux Imams et chaque *ʿālim* constituant un maillon de la chaîne est un intermédiaire (*wāṣita*)⁷⁹. Puisant ainsi sa science jusqu'aux racines du chiïsme, le *ʿālim* détenteur de l'*ijāza* est digne de confiance, *thiqa*.

Dans la formulation des *ijāza*, on s'arrête, pour chaque chaîne de transmission, aux grands savants classiques; al-Majlisī, al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, al-Shahid al-Awwal, etc. Les chaînes qui les relient aux premiers savants, tels al-Ṭūsī ou al-Kulaynī sont connues et, à partir de ceux-ci, on sait comment remonter jusqu'aux Imams. Notons que certains auteurs d'*ijāza* ne détaillent pas les chaînes de transmission, mais écrivent qu'ils autorisent leur disciple à transmettre un ouvrage « selon toutes les voies ». ⁸⁰ Cette licence de transmission, qui détermine la filiation spirituelle, est parfois accordée par un maître à un étudiant qui n'a pas suivi son cours auprès de lui.

Les savants chiïtes tirent leur légitimité d'une filiation spirituelle remontant aux Imams, qui apparaît clairement à la lecture des *ijāza*. Celle-ci se double d'une filiation naturelle, pour les *sayyid*, qui se revendiquent descendants du Prophète.

Parallèlement à cette distinction, les savants chiïtes recherchent l'excellence (*tafawwūq*), dont ils tirent l'autre face de leur charisme. Les bons éléments se repèrent dès l'enfance et sont encouragés par leurs aînés tout au long de leur quête du

⁷⁷ Voir, par exemple, l'*ijāza* accordée par Muḥammad Kāzim al-Khurāsānī à ʿAbd al-Ḥusayn Sharaf al-Dīn reproduite dans *Bughyat al-ghāribīn* tome 2, 88-89, énonçant qu'il est *mujtahid mutlaq*. Voir aussi, ibid., 89-90, celle que lui accorda Āqā Riḍā l-Hamadānī stipulant qu'il fait partie des oulémas réalisés (*muḥaqqiq*) et des juristes *mujtahid*.

⁷⁸ L'*ijāza* de Muḥammad Ṭāha Najaf à ʿAbd al-Ḥusayn Sharaf al-Dīn est ainsi formulée: « Je l'ai trouvé détenteur de la sainte faculté (*malaka qudsiyya*) d'induire les préceptes ». L'expression désigne l'*ijtibād*. Ibid., 88.

⁷⁹ Il s'agit alors des ouvrages attribués aux Imams et des grands livres d'*akhbār*, c'est-à-dire les « Quatre livres » (cf. note *supra*) plus: *al-Wāfi* de Mullā Muḥsin al-Fayḍ (m. 1680); *Wasā'il al-shī'a*, d'al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī (m. 1692); *Bihār al-anwār* de Bāqir Majlisī (m. 1699). Voir l'*ijāza* accordée par Mullā Aḥmad al-Naraqī à Murtaḍā l-Anṣārī, reproduite dans la préface d'*al-Makāsib*, tome 1, 58-64.

⁸⁰ Explications fournies par sayyid Ḥusayn Ibrāhīm commentant les *ijāza* de son arrière-arrière grand-père ʿAlī Ibrāhīm, Beyrouth, le 27/11/92.

savoir. Nous avons vu comment l'étudiant doit manifester cette excellence pour parvenir à l'*ijtihād*, lors des *munāqasha*. On ne peut s'empêcher de rapprocher ces séances, d'une part, aux ergotages éristiques des exégètes du Talmud dont elles partagent le souci d'érudition et, d'autre part, aux joutes des poètes arabes ou aux confrontations des rhéteurs de la Grèce antique. C'est par la virtuosité à jouer sur ces deux registres que l'étudiant laisse apparaître son excellence et révèle son étoffe de *mujtahid*.

Il en est de même pour les *marja'*, qui doivent se distinguer, par leur savoir, des autres *mujtahid*. On évoque le génie (*nubūgh*) des plus illustres d'entre eux,⁸¹ dont on attend qu'ils apportent du nouveau, qu'ils fassent acte d'innovation louable (*ikhtirā'*)⁸².

On retrouve ainsi l'ancienne notion arabe de *ḥasab wa-nasab* (les mérites accumulés par le lignage et la généalogie), définissant les qualités des grands hommes. Toute notice biographique de savant commence par son *nasab*, qui le place dans une lignée et suggère tous les mérites de ses ancêtres comme autant d'acquis hérités. Puis, elle mentionne ses maîtres et le place ainsi dans une chaîne de savants.

D'avantage qu'un clergé, le corps des oulémas est une aristocratie religieuse; elle se reproduit à Najaf. Là se dispense le savoir, se tissent les liens matrimoniaux, s'amorcent les affinités entre oulémas: tous ces facteurs concourent autant à la pérennité et à l'homogénéité du groupe, dont les éléments vont ensuite se répartir à nouveau dans leur région d'origine, qu'à celle du dogme et du culte chiite.

Le système d'enseignement de Najaf est labile et souple, voir informel. Il repose entièrement sur les *mujtahid*. Najaf diffère en cela radicalement des grands centres d'enseignement sunnites auxquels on la compare: al-Azhar au Caire, al-Qarawiyyīn à Fez ou al-Zaytūna à Tunis. Ces derniers sont des institutions rigides avec bureaucratie, fonctionnariat, organisation pyramidale oligarchique. Alors que Najaf est une institution qui s'incarne en ses *mujtahid*.

⁸¹ Les notices biographiques font souvent état du génie de l'intéressé qui est « prouvé » par sa capacité exceptionnelle à étudier, sa rapidité d'assimilation, et l'importance de ses découvertes. Cf. 'Alī l-Bahādīlī, *Wamḍāt min ḥayāt al-imām al-Khū'ī*, Beyrouth: Dār al-qārī', 1992, 15. L'auteur montre que l'ayatollah Khū'ī a franchi les étapes des *muqaddimāt* et des *suṭūḥ* en six ans (au lieu de dix ou plus) puis il écrit: « Il étudiait si parfaitement ses cours que c'était comme s'il les avait étudiés avant ». Comme si son savoir était infus, soit par inspiration divine, soit parce qu'il aurait été l'ultime maillon de la chaîne des savants qui avaient étudié avant lui la science des Imams.

⁸² Précisons que cette notion est bien distincte de la *bid'a*, tout aussi blâmable chez les chiites que chez les sunnites. Les plus grands *marja'* se sont distingués par leurs innovations.

Fiqh et soufisme à la période qajare : quelques notes sur l'œuvre juridique des maîtres ni'matullāhī gunābādī*

Shahram Pazouki

Shāh Ni'matullāh Wali (m. 834/1430-31) fait pour les fidèles de l'ordre soufi ni'matullāhī – le plus populaire d'Iran depuis l'époque qajare – figure de fondateur¹. Il fut l'un des *qutb* (pôle mystique) de l'ordre des Ma'rūfi dont la fondation est attribuée à Shaykh Ma'rūf Karkhī, considéré par les ni'matullāhī comme un disciple du 8^e imam 'Alī Riḍā². Ainsi, la ni'matullāhiyya apparaît comme l'héritière directe de la confrérie ma'rūfiyya. Après Shāh Ni'matullāh Wali, douze de ses successeurs partirent s'installer au Deccan, en Inde, tandis que certains membres de sa famille restaient en Iran³. Les confréries soufies y furent particulièrement réprimées du milieu de l'ère safavide jusqu'à la fin des Zand⁴.

En 1183/1769-70 ou en 1184/1770-71, à la demande d'Iraniens venus lui rendre visite en Inde, le dernier *qutb* de la confrérie ni'matullāhī installé au Deccan, Shāh Sayyid 'Alī Riḍā Dekkānī, accepta de déléguer en Iran l'un de ses *shaykh*, Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh, pour y travailler à la renaissance du soufisme⁵. Ce dernier fut exécuté vers 1211/1796-97 sur l'ordre d'un juriste influent, Āqā Muḥammad 'Alī Kirmānshāhī (m. 1216/1801-02), surnommé « le tueur de soufis » (*ṣufī-kush*). Le disciple et

* Nous tenons ici à remercier Mr Nozar Aghakhani pour l'aide qu'il nous a apportée.

¹ Sur la vie de Shāh Ni'matullāh Wali voir Terry Graham, « Shāh Ni'matullāh Wali: Founder of the Ni'matullāhī Sufi Order », dans *The Heritage of Sufism, vol. II, The Legacy of Medieval Persian Sufism (1150-1500)*, Leonard Lewisohn, éd., Oxford: Oneworld 1999, 173-190; Hamid Algar, « Ni'mat-allāhiyya. 1. Le fondateur et le développement de son ordre », dans *Encyclopédie de l'Islam*, nouvelle édition, vol. 8, Leiden: Brill 1995, 45-49.

² Voir Ralph E. J. Austin, « Ma'rūf al-Karkhī », dans *Encyclopédie de l'Islam*, nouvelle édition, vol. 6, Leiden: Brill 1991, 598-599.

³ Concernant le départ des ni'matullāhī d'Iran vers l'Inde et leur développement dans le sous-continent voir Jean Aubin, « De Kūhbanān à Bidar. La famille ni'matullāhī », *Studia Iranica* 20/2 (1991), 233-255; Richard M. Eaton, *The Sufis of Bijapur 1300-1700: Social Role of Sufis in Medieval India*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1978, 56 et suivantes; Haroon Khan Sherwani, *The Bahmanis of the Deccan*, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal 1985, 133-134. Pour une biographie plus générale sur l'ensemble des *qutb* de l'ordre des origines à nos jours voir Muḥammad Bāqir Sulṭānī, *Rabbarān-i ṭarīqat va 'irfān*, 5^{ème} éd., Téhéran: Haqiqat, 1383sh./2004-05.

⁴ Sur la répression des confréries soufies en Iran à l'ère safavide, voir Kathryn Babayan, « Sufis, Derviches and Mullas: The Controversy over Spiritual and Temporal Dominion in Seventeenth-Century Iran », dans *Safavid Persia. The History and Politics of an Islamic Society*, Charles Melville, éd., Londres: I. B. Tauris, 1996, 117-39; William Royce, *Mir Ma'sum Ali Shah and the Ni'mat Allahi Revival 1776-77 to 1796-97: A Study of Sufism in Late Eighteenth Century Iran*, thèse de doctorat inédite, Princeton University 1979, 49-53.

⁵ Ibid.



successeur de Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh, Nūr 'Alī Shāh Iṣfahānī, se chargea alors de répandre le soufisme en Iran, mais il décéda moins d'un an plus tard dans la ville de Mossoul⁶. Après la mort de 'Alī Riḍā Dekkānī, survenue aux environs de 1215/1800-01, l'Iran devint le pays de résidence des *qutb* de la ni'matullāhiyya. Ḥusayn 'Alī Shāh Iṣfahānī (m. 1234/1818-19), Majdhūb 'Alī Shāh Hamadānī (m. 1239/1823-24), Mast 'Alī Shāh Shīrvānī (m. 1253/1837-38) et Raḥmat 'Alī Shāh Shīrāzī (m. 1277/1860-61) se succédèrent à ce titre. La répression ne diminuait en intensité que sous le règne du souverain qajar Muḥammad Shāh (m. 1264/1848), qui était très attaché au soufisme⁷.

À la mort de Raḥmat 'Alī Shāh, une querelle de succession entre ses disciples aboutit à la fondation de trois branches: l'une prêche l'allégeance à Ḥājj Āqā Muḥammad Kāzīm Iṣfahānī Sa'ādat 'Alī Shāh [Sa'ādat 'Alī Shāh] (m. 1293/1876-77), une autre à Ḥājj Āqā Muḥammad connu sous le nom de Munavvar 'Alī Shāh (m. 1301/1883-84), oncle de Raḥmat 'Alī Shāh, et, enfin, une troisième à Ḥājj Mīrzā Ḥasan Ṣafī connu sous le nom de Ṣafī 'Alī Shāh (m. 1316/1898-99)⁸. C'est la première des trois qui nous intéresse ici. Elle adopta le nom de Gunābādī⁹, emprunté au successeur de Sa'ādat 'Alī Shāh, Ḥājj Mullā Sulṭān Muḥammad Sulṭān 'Alī Shāh Gunābādī [Sulṭān 'Alī Shāh Gunābādī] (né en 1251/1835-36 à Baydukht; mort en 1327/1909-10 à Baydukht).

L'objectif de cet article est de relever les spécificités de l'ordre ni'matullāhi gunābādī dans sa manière d'envisager le droit musulman (*fiqh*), en s'attachant à la vie et l'œuvre de Sulṭān 'Alī Shāh Gunābādī et de son fils et successeur à la tête de la confrérie, Ḥājj Mullā 'Alī Nūr 'Alī Shāh Gunābādī [Nūr 'Alī Shāh Gunābādī] (né en 1284/1867-68 à Gunābād; mort empoisonné en 1337/1918 à Kasan). Ils dirigèrent l'ordre de 1293/1876 à 1336-7/1918. Si c'est avant tout leur statut de maître spirituel qu'ils mirent en avant, ces deux *qutb* étaient aussi des juristes reconnus et ils rédigèrent plusieurs traités de *fiqh*. Leur argumentation juridique, fondamentalement d'inspiration rationnelle et explicitement rattachée à l'école *uṣūlī*, s'accompagne d'une démarche qui revêt aussi des caractéristiques propres au soufisme. Nous allons le montrer dans cet article.

Sulṭān 'Alī Shāh Gunābādī a d'abord étudié à Biland, à Machhad puis à Sabzavār où il suivit les cours du philosophe Ḥājj Mullā Hādī Sabzavārī (m. 1289/

⁶ Sur le succès rencontré par Nūr 'Alī Shāh Iṣfahānī voir Leonard Lewisohn, « An Introduction to the History of Modern Persian Sufism, Part I: the Ni'matullāhi Order: Persecution, Revival and Schism », *BSOAS* 61/3 (1998), 440-446.

⁷ Voir Hamid Algar, *Religion and State in Iran, 1785-1906: The Role of the Ulama in the Qajar Period*, Los Angeles: Berkeley University Press 1969, 103-20; Lewisohn, « Introduction », 448-449.

⁸ Sur ces scissions voir Robert Gramlich, *Die schiitischen Derwischorden Persiens. Erster Teil: Die Affiliationen*, vol. 1, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner GmbH 1965-1981, 53-59.

⁹ Sur les autres termes utilisés pour désigner cet ordre voir Denis Hermann et Omid Rezaï, « Constitution en *vaqf* d'une "mosquée sanctuaire" ni'matullāhi à Téhéran à l'époque pahlavī », *Iran* 46 (2008), 296.

1873)¹⁰. Il poursuivit ensuite sa formation dans les *‘atabāt* (villes saintes chiïtes d’Irak) auprès de Shaykh Murtaḍā Anṣārī (m. 1276/1860) et obtint la qualification de *mujtahid*¹¹. A son retour d’Irak, Sulṭān ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī s’établit à Téhéran où il enseigna quelque temps avant de retourner à Sabzavār¹². Là, il rencontra Sa‘adat ‘Alī Shāh qui l’initia dans l’ordre quelque mois plus tard à Ispahan. Il lui succéda en 1293/1876-77 en tant que *qutb*.

Sulṭān ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī est l’auteur de nombreux ouvrages en persan et en arabe sur la mystique, la philosophie et le commentaire coranique. *Sa‘adat-nāma*, *Majma‘ al-sa‘adat*, *Vilāyat-nāma*, *Bishārat al-mu‘minīn*, *Tanbīh al-nā‘imīn* et *Tarwḍīḥ* sont en persan et *al-Idāḥ* en arabe. Mais son œuvre la plus importante, composée en arabe, est un commentaire coranique en quatre volumes intitulé *Bayān al-sa‘adat fī maqāmāt al-ibāda*. Il s’agit pour nous de l’une des sources majeures pour l’étude des positions juridiques des ni‘matullāhī gunābādī. Sulṭān ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī demeura à Baydukht où il enseigna jusqu’à son assassinat le 27 rabī‘ al-avval 1327/18 avril 1909. Il était alors âgé de 76 ans¹³.

C’est le fils aîné de Sulṭān ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī, Nūr ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī, qui lui succéda au titre de *qutb* après avoir voyagé dans de nombreux pays dans sa jeunesse¹⁴. Il composa de nombreux traités sur des thèmes variés dont deux spécifiquement consacrés au droit musulman, *Risāla-yi Muḥammadiyya*¹⁵ et *Dhū l-faqār*:

¹⁰ Sur Hādī Sabzavārī voir l’article de Sajjad H. Rizvi dans ce même volume, « *Hikma Muṭa‘āliya* in Qajar Iran: Hājj Mullā Hādī Sabzavārī and the School of Mullā Ṣadrā ».

¹¹ Shaykh Murtaḍā Anṣārī est généralement considéré comme le fondateur de la *marja‘iyya* et le premier *marja‘-i taqlīd* de l’histoire du chiïsme. Voir Juan R. Cole, « Imami Jurisprudence and the Role of the Ulama: Mortaza Ansari on Emulating the the Supreme Exemplar », dans: *Religion and Politics in Iran: Shi‘ism from Quietism to Revolution*, Nikki Keddie, éd., New Haven: Yale University Press 1983. Sur la relation entre Shaykh Murtaḍā Anṣārī et Sulṭān ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī voir Hājj Sulṭān Husayn Tābanda Gunābādī Riḍā ‘Alī Shāh [Riḍā ‘Alī Shāh], *Nābigha-yi ‘ilm va ‘irfān dar qarn-i chahārdahum: sharḥ-i ḥāl-i marḥūm Hājj Mullā Sulṭān Muḥammad Gunābādī Sulṭān ‘Alī Shāh*, 3^e éd., Téhéran: Ḥaqīqat 1384sh./2005-06, 510.

¹² Gramlich, *Derwischorden*, vol. 1, 65.

¹³ Les disciples et les maîtres successifs de l’ordre gunābādī consacrèrent de nombreux ouvrages à sa vie et à son œuvre. Voir Riḍā ‘Alī Shāh, *Nābigha*; Nūr ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī, « Rujūm al-shayātīn », dans *Du risāla dar zindigī va shabādat-i Jināb Sulṭān ‘Alī Shāh*, Shahrām Pāzūkī [Shahram Pazouki], éd., Téhéran: Ḥaqīqat 1387sh./2008-09; Hājj Shaykh ‘Abbās ‘Alī Kayvān Qazvīnī, « Shahīdiyya », dans *Du risāla*.

¹⁴ Pour plus de précisions sur le parcours de Nūr ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī voir Gramlich, *Derwischorden*, vol. 1, 67-68. Ces voyages l’encouragèrent notamment à rédiger un ouvrage d’histoire en sept volumes intitulé *Qulzum*, où il reprend l’histoire de l’humanité depuis Adam jusqu’aux imams. Celui-ci n’a jamais été publié et le manuscrit est dans la bibliothèque du sanctuaire de Baydukht, ville qui se trouve à quelques kilomètres à l’est de Gunābād, dans le sud du Khorasan. C’est à Baydukht qu’ont vécu et enseigné les *qutb* de l’ordre jusqu’à une date récente; au début du XX^e siècle, y fut construit un mausolée qui renferme les dépouilles des *qutb* successifs.

¹⁵ Nūr ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī, *Risāla-yi Muḥammadiyya*, lith, Téhéran: Ramaḍān 1336/1917-18.



Tableau de l'ordre ni‘matullāhī gunābādī

*dar ḥaramat-i kishīdan-i taryāk*¹⁶. Même si l'enseignement juridique de Sulṭān ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī et Nūr ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī demeura marginal comparé aux autres aspects de leur enseignement et qu'ils n'accordèrent aucune *ijāza-yi ijtihād* à leurs disciples, ils insistaient largement sur l'importance de la charia dans l'accomplissement spirituel des mystiques. Sulṭān ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī obtint ainsi le respect de certains des plus grands *marja‘-i taqlīd* de son époque. On peut penser ici à Shaykh Murtaḍā Anṣārī, Mīrzā Ḥasan Shīrāzī (m. 1312/1895)¹⁷ et Ākhūnd Khurāsānī (m. 1329/1911)¹⁸. Certains juristes *uṣūlī* manifestaient ouvertement leur dévotion pour Sulṭān ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī et devinrent ses disciples (*murīd*): ainsi de Ḥājj Mīrzā Ḥabīb Allāh Mashhadī (m. 1327/1909-10), resté célèbre pour son re-

¹⁶ Nūr ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī, *Dhū l-faqr: dar ḥaramat-i kishīdan-i taryāk*, s.l.: s.éd. 1318/1900-01.

¹⁷ Sulṭān ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī rencontra Mīrzā Ḥasan Shīrāzī dans les *‘atabāt* à son retour de la Mecque en 1305/1887-88 et fut chaleureusement accueilli par ce dernier. A ce sujet voir Riḍā ‘Alī Shāh, *Nābigha*, 103-105.

¹⁸ Des opposants au soufisme demandèrent à Ākhūnd Khurāsānī d'excommunier Sulṭān ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī, ce qu'il refusa. Il semble également qu'Ākhūnd Khurāsānī admirait le commentaire coranique du *quṭb* gunābādī. Cette position encouragea certainement les factions les plus opposées au soufisme à une certaine retenue vis-à-vis des ni‘matullāhī gunābādī. Voir Riḍā ‘Alī Shāh, *Nābigha*, 513.

cueil de poésie¹⁹, de Ḥājj Mīrzā Ḥusayn Sabzavārī (m. 1312sh./1933-34)²⁰ ou de Ḥājj Mullā ‘Alī Simnānī (m. 1333/1914-15)²¹. Certains des *shaykh* intronisés par Sulṭān ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī étaient par ailleurs des juristes reconnus. Ce fut le cas de Mullā Muḥammad Ja‘far Barzūkī Kāshānī (m. 1316/1898-89), *mujtahid* à qui Sulṭān ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī attribua le titre de Maḥbūb ‘Alī²², et Shaykh ‘Abd Allāh Ḥā‘irī (m. 1316sh./1937-38), a qui fut octroyé le titre de Raḥmat ‘Alī, puis celui de Raḥmat ‘Alī Shāh²³.

Nūr ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī désigna également plusieurs juristes (*faqīh*) comme *shaykh* de l’ordre: Shaykh Muḥsin Sarvistānī (Šābir ‘Alī), Shaykh ‘Imād al-Dīn Sabzavārī (Hidāyat ‘Alī), Shaykh ‘Abbās ‘Alī Kayvān Qazvīnī (Manšūr ‘Alī) et Mīrzā Yūsuf Ḥā‘irī (Irshād ‘Alī), par exemple²⁴. Ces relations privilégiées entre les maîtres de l’ordre ni‘matullāhī gunābādī et une frange du clergé *uṣūlī* se poursuivirent à la mort de Nūr ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī²⁵.

Après une première partie consacrée aux caractéristiques essentielles des développements juridiques de Sulṭān ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī et Nūr ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī nous étudierons certaines de leurs fatwas.

Les caractéristiques générales de l’argumentation juridique de Sulṭān ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī et Nūr ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī

Les *qutb* ni‘matullāhī gunābādī étudièrent le droit musulman auprès des juristes *uṣūlī* les plus reconnus de leur époque. Aussi, il n’est pas étonnant qu’ils aient développé une argumentation rationnelle et légitimé le recours à l’*ijtihād*. Les maîtres dhahabī, certainement l’ordre soufi chiite possédant le plus grand nombre de dis-

¹⁹ Voir Riḍā ‘Alī Shāh, *Nābigha*, 517-518.

²⁰ Ce dernier était un élève de Mullā Hādī Sabzavārī. A son sujet voir Riḍā ‘Alī Shāh, *Nābigha*, 518.

²¹ Il s’agit d’un autre élève de Mullā Hādī Sabzavārī. A la mort de Sulṭān ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī, il organisa des funérailles majestueuses à la mosquée du vendredi de Semnan.

²² Sur ce dernier voir Riḍā ‘Alī Shāh, *Nābigha*, 394-403.

²³ Sur ce dernier voir l’article de la rédaction de *‘Irfān-i Īrān*, « Sharḥ-i aḥvāl-i marḥūm-i Ḥājj Shaykh ‘Abd Allāh Ḥā‘irī Raḥmat ‘Alī Shāh », *‘Irfān-i Īrān* 11 (1380sh./2001-02), 67-78; Riḍā ‘Alī Shāh, *Nābigha*, 394-403.

²⁴ Sur ces derniers voir Riḍā ‘Alī Shāh, *Nābigha*, 407-415.

²⁵ Le fils et successeur de Nūr ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī, Ḥājj Muḥammad Ḥasan Šāliḥ ‘Alī Shāh [Šāliḥ ‘Alī Shāh] (m. 1345sh./1966-67) étudia à l’école religieuse (*hawza*) d’Ispahan et parvint au rang de *mujtahid*. Lui aussi reçut le soutien de nombreux religieux *uṣūlī* et en intronisa certain comme *shaykh* de l’ordre. Cependant, à l’inverse de ses prédécesseurs, il ne composa pas de traités spécifiquement consacrés au droit. Pour plus d’informations sur ses relations avec le milieu clérical de son époque voir Hiy‘at-i taḥrīriyya-yi kitābkhāna-yi Šāliḥ [le Comité de la rédaction de la bibliothèque Šāliḥ], *Yād-nāma-yi Šāliḥ*, 2^{ème} éd., Téhéran: Ḥaqīqat 1380sh./2001-02, 138-144. Le successeur de Šāliḥ ‘Alī Shāh, Riḍā ‘Alī Shāh, composa un traité de droit intitulé *Nazar-i madhhabī ba i‘lāmīyya-yi ḥuqūq-i bashar*, 2^{ème} éd., Téhéran: s.éd. 1354sh./1975-76. Il s’agit d’une critique de la déclaration des droits de l’homme d’un point de vue islamique.

ciples en Iran après les ni‘matullāhī, firent d’ailleurs de même²⁶. Sultān ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī et Nūr ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī dirigèrent l’ordre à une période justement marquée par la hiérarchisation croissante du clergé *uṣūlī* sur la base des compétences en matière de droit et la formation, sur ce principe, de la *marja‘iyya*. Ainsi, leur définition de l’usage de la raison (*‘aql*) est conforme au dogme *uṣūlī* ce qui leur assura la sympathie d’une frange importante du clergé. La raison est selon les *uṣūlī* l’une des quatre sources de la charia, avec le Coran, la Sunna et le consensus (*ijmā‘*). Les *uṣūlī*, comme les ni‘matullāhī gunābādī, croient en l’existence d’un lien nécessaire entre la raison et la loi religieuse. Ils distinguent également entre deux types de raison, celle d’inspiration « perverse » (*nikrā‘*) et celle guidée par la foi²⁷. Ainsi, ils refusent de considérer tout détenteur de raison comme apte à exercer l’*ijtihād*. Ils rapportent une anecdote à ce sujet: « Un Mollah demanda à Sa‘ādat ‘Alī Shāh si, selon les principes (*uṣūl*) [du droit musulman], la raison est une source [de la charia] qui fait autorité ou non; ce dernier répliqua par une autre question: “Ma raison ou la tienne? S’il s’agit de ma raison, elle fait autorité, mais s’il s’agit de la tienne, elle ne fait pas autorité” »²⁸.

Afin que la raison « perverse » ne devienne pas une source de compréhension des préceptes, les juristes *uṣūlī* comme les soufis ni‘matullāhī gunābādī ont ainsi la conviction que le juriste doit être doté d’une « force sacrée » (*quwwa-yi qudsiyya*)²⁹. Celle-ci s’acquiert grâce à la maîtrise de soi, obstacle à d’éventuelles transgressions de la religion et instrument de lutte contre les passions. Sultān ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī déclara à ce sujet: « Il est interdit de promulguer une fatwa à celui qui ne l’aurait pas sollicitée de Dieu en ayant le cœur pur (*ṣafā-i sarr*) »³⁰. Nūr ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī proposa la même définition de cette force sacrée³¹. Naturellement les *qutb* ni‘matullāhī gunābādī revendiquaient détenir cette force, même s’ils n’émettaient pas de fatwa à l’adresse de l’ensemble des musulmans et ne prétendaient pas au statut de *marja‘-i taqlīd*. Même avec leurs disciples, c’est en tant que maîtres spirituels qu’ils se présentaient. Nūr ‘Alī Shāh Tabanda Majdhūb ‘Alī Shāh [Majdhūb ‘Alī Shāh], l’actuel *qutb* de l’ordre, divisa à ce titre les devoirs religieux de tout musulman en trois catégories distinctes: 1) celles qui sont liées à la charia et pour lesquelles il faut se conformer à l’interprétation d’un *mujtahid* ou *marja‘-i taqlīd*; 2) celles relatives à la voie spirituelle pour lesquelles il faut s’adresser à un dignitaire de l’ordre; 3) les devoirs personnels laissés au discernement de chaque croyant sur la

²⁶ On peut ici penser au maître dhahabī Sayyid Qutb al-Dīn Dhahabī Nayrizī (m. 1173/1759-60) qui était un *mujtahid*. Concernant l’ordre dhahabī voir Leonard Lewisohn, « An Introduction to the History of Modern Persian Sufism, Part II: a Socio-Cultural Profile of Sufism, from the Dhahabī Revival to the Present Day », *BSOAS* 62/1 (1999).

²⁷ Ils se réfèrent également à des hadiths pour établir cette distinction entre les différentes formes de raison.

²⁸ Ridā ‘Alī Shāh, *Nābigha*, 47.

²⁹ Cette expression est tirée d’un hadith du 6^e imam Ja‘far Ṣādiq (m. 765).

³⁰ Ridā ‘Alī Shāh, *Nābigha*, 272.

³¹ Nūr ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī, *Muḥammadiyya*, 3.

base de la logique et de la foi³². Ainsi, les *qutb* ni‘matullāhī gunābādī n’émirent jamais de fatwa à portée juridique générale. Le fait est ancien puisque par exemple Majdhūb ‘Alī Shāh Hamadānī (m. 1238/1822-23), l’un des *qutb* de la confrérie, refusa d’émettre des fatwas malgré l’insistance de Mīrzā Abū l-Qāsim Qummī (m. 1231/1815-16), auprès duquel il avait étudié³³. En général, les maîtres de l’ordre renvoyaient donc leurs disciples, pour le règlement des problèmes relatifs à l’application des préceptes (*ahkām-i far‘ī*) à l’un des *marja’-i taqlīd* de l’époque tout en précisant les conditions que ceux-ci devaient remplir pour pouvoir émettre une fatwa. Bien entendu, il leur arrivait parfois de donner leur sentiment face à des cas particuliers qui leur étaient soumis et cela en utilisant les méthodes courantes des *uṣūl al-fiqh* mais sans jamais appeler les fidèles de l’ordre à s’adresser systématiquement à eux. Ainsi, lorsque, confrontés à quelque problème, ils émettaient une opinion juridique, leur avis était souvent suivi par leurs disciples. Pour autant leur statut demeurerait essentiellement celui de maître spirituel.

En dépit de leur fidélité aux préceptes rationnels *uṣūlī*, Sultān ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī et Nūr ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī marquèrent leur lecture du droit musulman d’une empreinte soufie et mystique évidente. Celle-ci transparaît essentiellement dans l’introduction du *Risāla-yi Muḥammadiyya* de Nūr ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī qui est certainement l’œuvre juridique majeure composée par un *qutb* ni‘matullāhī gunābādī. Le style s’apparente en partie aux traités de droit traditionnels, les *Tawḍīḥ al-masā’il*, mais a des spécificités que son auteur expose et assume en introduction. Nūr ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī indique d’ailleurs qu’il ne s’estime pas tenu d’adopter la terminologie habituelle des juristes ni l’ordonnancement et le plan en usage dans les autres traités juridiques³⁴.

L’ouvrage est composé de quatre chapitres. Le premier traite des actes de dévotion comme la prière; le deuxième des actes pros crits par la religion (*manḥiyyāt*); le troisième des lois civiles (*siyāsāt al-mudun*) et le quatrième de la coutume (*‘urf*)³⁵. Seuls les deux premiers chapitres ont été publiés. La rhétorique se veut d’emblée résolument gnostique. Nūr ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī présente la loi religieuse sous ses aspects ésotériques plus qu’exotériques pour les « frères et les disciples » (*barādarān va sālikān*)³⁶; c’est donc aux musulmans « initiés » qu’il s’adresse essentiellement.

³² Majdhūb ‘Alī Shāh, *Ashinā’ī bā ‘irfān va taṣawvuf*, Téhéran: Haqīqat 1383sh./2004-05, 81.

³³ Muḥammad Ja‘far Qarāguzlū Majdhūb ‘Alī Shāh, *al-‘Aqā’id al-majdhūbiyya*, Hibat Allāh Jadhbi, éd., Téhéran: Rūdakī 1362sh./1983-84, 10. Plus récemment, Ridā ‘Alī Shāh a plusieurs fois rejeté les demandes de l’ayatollah Abū l-Qāsim Khū‘ī (m. 1992) le priant de rédiger un traité juridique et d’assumer un rôle de juriste. A ce sujet voir Hājj ‘Alī Tābanda Maḥbūb ‘Alī Shāh [Maḥbūb ‘Alī Shāh], *Khurshīd-i Tābanda, Sharḥ-i aḥwāl va āthār-i ‘ālim-i rabbānī va ‘arīf-i ṣamadānī-yi ḥadrat-i Āqā-yi Hājj Sultān Ḥusayn Tābanda Gunābādī Ridā ‘Alī Shāh*, Téhéran: Haqīqat 1373sh./1994-95, 154.

³⁴ Nūr ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī, *Muḥammadiyya*, 5.

³⁵ Les traités de *fiqh*, en général, comportent deux grandes parties: les *‘ibādāt* (pratiques cultuelles ou obligations qui lient le croyant à Dieu) et les *mu‘āmalāt* (relations sociales ou obligations qui lient les croyants entre eux).

³⁶ Nūr ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī, *Muḥammadiyya*, 1.

Ces derniers ont selon lui plus d'obligations vis-à-vis de la charia que les musulmans du commun³⁷. Sulṭān 'Alī Shāh Gunābādī avait déjà insisté sur cette question dans son enseignement oral et dans les cours qu'il dispensait sur le Coran, demandant à ses disciples qu'ils se soumettent à certaines règles plus exigeantes: cela faisait partie de leur initiation spirituelle. A ce titre, les maîtres ni'matullāhī gunābādī comparèrent souvent leur position à celle de Jésus vis-à-vis de la loi juive, s'adressant à des croyants juifs initiés³⁸. Ainsi, les maîtres ni'matullāhī gunābādī ont établi que les devoirs religieux étaient liés à l'état de réalisation spirituelle de chacun. C'est ainsi que Sulṭān 'Alī Shāh Gunābādī interpréta la pluralité des préceptes (*aḥkām*) existants dans le Coran comme le talion, la grâce ou le pardon comme un ensemble de propositions à adapter à l'état de réalisation spirituelle de chacun³⁹. Il déclara en outre: « Les questions [de droit musulman], hormis les principes généraux de la charia, dépendent directement de l'état d'esprit et de l'intensité de la foi des croyants »⁴⁰. Nūr 'Alī Shāh Gunābādī, lui, affirme dans sa *Risāla-yi Muḥammadiyya*: « En un lieu et une atmosphère donnés où coule une seule eau, l'ablution (*wuḍū'*) s'impose à une personne et pas à une autre. Si l'ablution peut se révéler nocive pour cette seconde personne, celle-ci est alors illicite (*ḥarām*) »⁴¹.

Conformément à la doctrine soufie, Nūr 'Alī Shāh Gunābādī rappelle à plusieurs reprises que le respect de la charia n'a de sens que dans la perspective d'un cheminement mystique (*ṭarīqat*) vers le but ultime, la vérité (*ḥaqīqat*)⁴². A ma connaissance cette division tripartite n'existe dans aucun autre traité juridique chiite composé à cette époque. C'est ensuite sur le rôle primordial du *quṭb* dans la vie culturelle du musulman « initié » que revient Nūr 'Alī Shāh Gunābādī. Ainsi, si l'intention (*niyyat*) de se rapprocher de Dieu en se soumettant à sa charia est naturellement obligatoire pour Nūr 'Alī Shāh Gunābādī afin que les actes rituels soient valides et agréés par Dieu, il est aussi nécessaire de recevoir les ordres d'un « donateur d'ordres divins » (*āmīr-i ilāhī*), à savoir un savant « autorisé par Dieu » (*mā'dhūn min Allāh*)⁴³. Même s'il est généralement acceptable de suivre un savant religieux dépourvu de cette qualité, selon Nūr 'Alī Shāh Gunābādī, les actes culturels ainsi effectués resteront totalement vains et vides de présence divine. En effet, lorsque l'ordre ne provient pas d'un tel « donateur d'ordres divins », il est

³⁷ Ibid., 2-3.

³⁸ Šāliḥ 'Alī Shāh, *Šāliḥiyya*, 2^e édition, Téhéran: Université de Téhéran 1346sh./1967-68, 165-166.

³⁹ Voir Sulṭān 'Alī Shāh Gunābādī, *Tafsīr-i bayān al-sa'āda fī maqāmāt al-'ibādāt*, 2^e édition, vol. 1, Téhéran: Université de Téhéran 1344sh./1965-66, 299 et Šāliḥ 'Alī Shāh, *Pand-i Šāliḥ*, 56.

⁴⁰ Riḍā 'Alī Shāh, *Nābigha*, 272.

⁴¹ Nūr 'Alī Shāh Gunābādī, *Muḥammadiyya*, 3.

⁴² Ibid., 4.

⁴³ Sulṭān 'Alī Shāh Gunābādī, *Vilāyat-nāma*, Téhéran: Ḥaqīqat 1385sh./2006-07

possible que l'acte de dévotion procède de l'obéissance au *nafs* (l'âme comme siège des sentiments et des passions) et, partant, de la soumission à Satan (*Shayṭān*)⁴⁴.

Les développements sur le caractère indispensable de la *vilāyat* (dévouement, fidélité) – dans tout acte dévotionnel en islam sous peine d'invalidité relèvent de la même logique car c'est uniquement grâce au « pacte initiatique » (*bayʿat*) que le croyant démontre son amour et sa soumission au prophète et à l'imam et que la *vilāyat* devient effective. Nūr ʿAlī Shāh Gunābādī considère donc que la *vilāyat* va au-delà du sentiment dévotionnel pour se cristalliser dans un rituel bien précis: la *bayʿat* envers le *quṭb*, interface du prophète et de l'imam⁴⁵. Voici comment Nūr ʿAlī Shāh Gunābādī définit à ce propos la *vilāyat*: « Nous entendons par *vilāyat* la soumission du croyant au *valī*. Celle-ci se manifeste par un "pacte initiatique" (*bayʿat*) au prophète et à l'imam »⁴⁶. Cette définition reste cependant insuffisante pour le lecteur non familier avec la littérature niʿmatullāhī gunābādī. Il faut préciser que ce « pacte initiatique » au prophète et à l'imam se réalise chez les niʿmatullāhī gunābādī lors de l'initiation du disciple par le *quṭb* de l'ordre qui symbolise l'entrée du disciple dans la voie initiatique⁴⁷. Ainsi, dans le soufisme chiite, le croyant ne peut effectuer la *bayʿat* qu'auprès d'un seul *quṭb*, contrairement au soufisme sunnite où l'initiation au sein de plusieurs ordres est parfois possible⁴⁸.

Quelques fatwas des maîtres niʿmatullāhī gunābādī

Sur la base des informations préliminaires indiquées jusque là, nous analyserons ci-dessous quelques-unes des opinions jurisprudentielles les plus célèbres de Sulṭān ʿAlī Shāh Gunābādī et Nūr ʿAlī Shāh Gunābādī auxquelles, par la suite, ont adhéré leurs successeurs⁴⁹. Il s'agit essentiellement de règles visant à abolir des pratiques que les deux maîtres considéraient comme contraires à la morale et aux mœurs de l'époque. Ils présentèrent à ce titre leurs prescriptions comme des « usages nécessaires à la civilisation »⁵⁰ qui les obligeaient à sortir de leur stricte fonction de maître spirituel, vu l'inertie des juristes, muets sur ces points.

⁴⁴ Nūr ʿAlī Shāh Gunābādī, *Muḥammadiyya*, 3.

⁴⁵ Sulṭān ʿAlī Shāh Gunābādī, *Vilāyat-nāma*.

⁴⁶ Nūr ʿAlī Shāh Gunābādī, *Muḥammadiyya*, 6.

⁴⁷ La source niʿmatullāhī gunābādī la plus complète à ce sujet est certainement l'œuvre de Sulṭān ʿAlī Shāh Gunābādī, *Vilāyat-nāma*. Sur le rituel complexe du pacte initiatique chez les niʿmatullāhī gunābādī voir Hermann et Rezai, « Constitution », 303; Gramlich, *Derwischorden, Dritter Teil: Brauchtum und Riten*, vol. 3, 75-77.

⁴⁸ L'initiation à plusieurs ordres dans le soufisme sunnite fut particulièrement courante dans le sous-continent indien. Voir à ce sujet Fabrizio Speziale, « Istruzioni sullo dhikr nei centri in alcuni trattati in urdu sulla via mistica », *Mediaeval Sophia* 1 (2007), 140.

⁴⁹ Dans l'introduction au *Tafsīr-i Bayān al-saʿāda* de Sulṭān ʿAlī Shāh, Ridā ʿAlī Shāh mentionne que l'on peut retrouver dans ce *tafsīr* essentiellement cinq avis juridiques personnels. Mais selon l'avis du *quṭb* actuel de l'ordre, Majdhūb ʿAlī Shāh, on peut extraire quatorze jugements.

⁵⁰ Nūr ʿAlī Shāh Gunābādī, *Muḥammadiyya*, 22.

La prohibition de l'esclavage (bardihdārī)

Les maîtres ni‘matullāhī gunābādī ont estimé que, si une situation particulière n’a pas cours pendant très longtemps, les lois qui la régissent peuvent être frappées d’abrogation partielle (*naskh-i juz’ī*)⁵¹. C’est notamment à ce titre que Nūr ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī prohiba l’esclavage en islam: « A notre époque, le commerce d’êtres humains est incompatible avec la religion et contraire à la civilisation et s’il y a encore des esclaves, hommes ou femmes, tous doivent être libérés et considérés comme tous les autres fidèles de cette contrée »⁵². Pour démontrer la validité de son raisonnement, Nūr ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī affirme que l’un des actes les plus évidents de la bonté du créateur envers les hommes est l’octroi de la liberté. C’est dans ce sens qu’il cita le verset coranique: « Nous avons ennobli les fils d’Adam »⁵³. Les maîtres ni‘matullāhī gunābādī considérèrent que l’esclavage était une pratique fondamentale dans la culture arabe préislamique et l’un des piliers de la vie socio-économique. Aussi, le prophète ne pouvait pas la supprimer entièrement, mais seulement la limiter et l’encadrer. Toutefois, il était temps, désormais, de l’abroger définitivement⁵⁴. Pour Nūr ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī, les changements historiques et l’évolution des mœurs faisaient de l’esclavage une pratique du passé inadaptée et, de fait, illicite⁵⁵. A ma connaissance aucun autre juriste chiite n’a soutenu de pareille opinion concernant l’esclavage à cette période.

La polygamie

De la même manière, pour les maîtres ni‘matullāhī gunābādī, l’islam eut pour objectif de limiter les excès de la société arabe préislamique en matière de polygamie⁵⁶. Sulṭān ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī interpréta les deux versets du Coran relatifs à ce sujet ce qui le conduisit, d’abord, à souligner le caractère facultatif de la polygamie et, ensuite, à demander à ses disciples de la proscrire totalement. Concernant le premier verset, « Epousez, comme il vous plaira, deux, trois ou quatre femmes. Mais si vous craignez de n’être pas équitable, prenez une seule femme »⁵⁷, Sulṭān ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī insiste sur l’équité, aux plans exotérique et matériel, que doit respecter le mari envers ses épouses et lui intime, au cas où il craindrait de ne pas en être capable, de s’abstenir d’épouser plus d’une femme⁵⁸. Il examina le second

⁵¹ Riḍā ‘Alī Shāh, *Nābigħa*, 272.

⁵² Hibat Allāh Jadhbi, *Majmū‘a-yi dastūr al-‘amālḥā*, s.l.: s.d., article 6, 4.

⁵³ Coran, XVII : 70 (traduction Denis Masson, Paris: Gallimard 1967).

⁵⁴ Voir Majdhūb ‘Alī Shāh, « bardihdārī dar islām », *‘Ifān-i Irān* 19 (1383sh./2004-05), 10-18.

⁵⁵ Cette position fut aussi explicitée par Riḍā ‘Alī Shāh, *Nazar*, 45-51.

⁵⁶ Pour une interprétation générale sur l’usage de la polygamie dans la société arabe préislamique par les ni‘matullāhī gunābādī voir Riḍā ‘Alī Shāh, *Nazar*, 84-99.

⁵⁷ Coran, IV : 3.

⁵⁸ Sulṭān ‘Alī Shāh Gunābādī, *Bayān*, vol. 2, 2.

verset: « Vous ne pouvez être parfaitement équitables à l'égard de chacune de vos femmes même si vous en avez le désir. Ne soyez donc pas trop partiaux et ne laissez pas l'une d'entre elles comme en suspens. Si vous établissez la concorde, si vous craignez Dieu, sachez qu'Il est celui qui pardonne et qu'Il est miséricordieux »⁵⁹. Sultān 'Alī Shāh Gunābādī le commente de la sorte: « Le mot arabe *lan* par lequel débute le verset marque le rejet définitif ainsi que l'impossibilité, ici, de se conduire équitablement à l'égard de plusieurs épouses; la justice réside pourtant dans un comportement juste à l'encontre des femmes. Même si vous désirez fortement vous comporter avec équité cela est dans les faits irréalisable. N'agissez donc pas de sorte que votre attirance pour l'une et votre désintérêt pour l'autre soit manifeste. Si vous vous amendez de manière à réduire, autant que faire se peut, cette inégalité dans l'affection à leur égard et à leur manifester, de manière égale, de la clémence et de la compassion, toutes deux qualités divines, et si vous évitez de ressentir de l'aversion envers les personnes que vous n'aimez pas en fermant les yeux sur leurs défauts, alors vous serez pourvus de morale divine et mériterez Sa miséricorde et Son pardon »⁶⁰. Il ressort ainsi que Sultān 'Alī Shāh Gunābādī imprime au premier verset une portée plutôt juridique tandis qu'il imprime au second un sens moral et spirituel demandant au croyant de reconnaître, dans son for intérieur, qu'il ne peut pas se comporter de façon équitable avec plusieurs femmes et qu'il ne peut donc pas en épouser plusieurs. Pour autant, Sultān 'Alī Shāh Gunābādī n'interdit pas encore formellement la polygamie dans son commentaire coranique.

C'est en réponse à une question adressée par l'un de ses disciples à propos de son second mariage que Sultān 'Alī Shāh Gunābādī interdit explicitement la polygamie: « A notre époque, je ne crois personne capable de se comporter de manière équitable avec deux épouses; ainsi, je considère le fait de prendre deux épouses comme illicite (*ḥarām*) et j'estime obligatoire (*vājib*) de se contenter d'une seule femme ». Il semble cependant que l'homme qui interrogeait le *qutb* avait déjà contracté son second mariage, puisque Sultān 'Alī Shāh Gunābādī poursuivit: « Toutefois, à présent qu'il en est ainsi, un divorce ne serait pas le bienvenu et serait même déconseillé. Demandez une issue à Dieu »⁶¹. A ma connaissance aucun autre juriste chiite ne proposa une telle interprétation de ces versets au cours de la période qajare. Ces positions juridiques adoptées par Sultān 'Alī Shāh Gunābādī ne furent pas pour autant sources de conflits avec d'autres juristes car elles étaient exprimées au sein d'un cercle encore relativement restreint de disciples.

⁵⁹ Coran, IV : 129.

⁶⁰ Sultān 'Alī Shāh Gunābādī, *Bayān*, vol. 2, 57.

⁶¹ Riḍā 'Alī Shāh, *Nābigha*, 327.

La prohibition du divorce (ṭalāq)

Le mariage étant un contrat, sa dissolution sous certaines conditions est en principe possible. Pour autant Sulṭān ʿAlī Shāh Gunābādī considéra le divorce comme une aversion et l'interdit de fait à ses disciples. La possibilité d'annuler le contrat de mariage unissant deux êtres ne pouvait selon lui s'appliquer que dans des cas extrêmes⁶². Il voyait le divorce comme une chose contraire au principe d'amour et d'affection en islam qui contribuait à l'éclatement de la famille, et par conséquent, de la société⁶³. Il eut évidemment recours à ce célèbre hadith du prophète pour étayer ses propos: « Rien n'est plus déplaisant aux yeux de Dieu, parmi les choses qu'il a rendues licites, que le divorce ». Les multiples préceptes et dispositions permettant de faciliter la réconciliation entre les époux étaient également interprétés par Sulṭān ʿAlī Shāh Gunābādī comme autant de signes et d'indications de la dimension quasi interdite du divorce⁶⁴.

Comme pour la polygamie, Sulṭān ʿAlī Shāh Gunābādī distinguait une dimension juridique exotérique et une perspective gnostique. S'il reconnaissait le caractère licite du divorce sur le plan exotérique et légal, il l'interdisait de fait à ses disciples pour des raisons d'ordre spirituel. Il explicita cela dans une réponse à une lettre adressée par l'un de ses *shaykh*, Ḥājj Mullā Muḥammad Jaʿfar Barzūkī, en évoquant la possibilité d'abroger partiellement (*naskh-i juzʿī*) ce droit au divorce: « A propos du divorce, ce problème, tout comme les autres questions, ne souffre d'aucune divergence et n'est sujet qu'à des abrogations partielles. Généraliser un précepte et considérer que celui-ci s'applique de manière uniforme à l'ensemble des hommes est contraire à la tradition du prophète et des imams qui sont nos guides »⁶⁵. On a par ailleurs vu que Sulṭān ʿAlī Shāh Gunābādī refusa le divorce à l'un de ses disciples venant pourtant de contracter un second mariage qu'il désapprouvait.

A ce jour, ceux qui lui ont succédé comme maître de l'ordre ont suivi ce jugement et déconseillent presque systématiquement le divorce⁶⁶.

⁶² A ce sujet voir Majdhūb ʿAlī Shāh, *Majmūʿa-yi ʿIrfān dar zamāna va zindigī-yi mā*, Téhéran: Haqīqat 1384sh./2005-06, 42-43.

⁶³ Riḍā ʿAlī Shāh, *Nazar*, 64.

⁶⁴ Ainsi, il est recommandé (*mustaḥab*) de former un conseil composé de membres des deux familles pour discuter et proposer des solutions afin d'éviter le divorce. Il n'est pas convenable de divorcer sans que cette réunion ait eu lieu. Par ailleurs, dans certains cas, l'époux peut demeurer dans l'obligation de loger la femme répudiée pendant un certain temps. Tout contact physique entre les époux pouvant survenir au cours de cette période est alors considéré comme la reformation du mariage sans pour autant établir à nouveau un contrat (*ʿaqd*).

⁶⁵ Riḍā ʿAlī Shāh, *Nābigha*, 272.

⁶⁶ Voir Sālīh ʿAlī Shāh, *Pand*, 110.

Prohibition de fumer l'opium

A ce sujet, Sulṭān ʿAlī Shāh Gunābādī se référa au verset coranique: « Ils t'interrogent au sujet du vin et du jeu de hasard; dis: "Ils comportent tous deux, pour les hommes, un grand péché et un avantage, mais le péché qui s'y trouve est plus grand que leur utilité" »⁶⁷. Il en induisit le caractère illicite (*ḥarām*) de fumer l'opium ainsi que tout autre stupéfiant, tel le haschich⁶⁸ et interdit d'ailleurs aux opiomanes d'intégrer l'ordre⁶⁹. Son argumentation partait du fait que l'homme est doté de facultés innées qu'il faut protéger, dont la raison; or, l'opium affaiblit la raison. Il semble que ce fut la première fois qu'un juriste chiite interpréta ainsi ce verset et promulgua une fatwa déclarant la consommation d'opium illicite, en 1310/1892-93. Cette décision apparaît aussi comme une critique de certains ordres soufis qui utilisaient l'opium et d'autres drogues, et donc une manière de présenter les niʿmatullāhī gunābādī comme un ordre soufi moral à une époque où l'usage de l'opium se répandait en Iran⁷⁰. Certains *darvīsh* considéraient alors en Iran la consommation d'opium comme partie intégrante des rites soufis. Ils regardaient l'état psychologique résultant de la consommation de drogues comme l'état d'anéantissement mystique en Dieu (*fanā fi llāh*) qui marque le terme de l'initiation mystique et le but final de l'évolution spirituelle du soufi. Les maîtres niʿmatullāhī gunābādī postérieurs ont développé le sujet, déclarant craindre que les hallucinations subséquentes à l'usage d'opium soient confondues par les disciples avec « le dévoilement et le témoignage de secrets mystiques véritables » (*kashf va shuhūd-i ʿirfānī*)⁷¹.

Nūr ʿAlī Shāh Gunābādī confirma l'interprétation coranique de son père dans un traité de plus d'une centaine de pages spécifiquement consacré à ce sujet, *Dhū l-faqr: Dar ḥaramat-i kishīdan-i taryāk*⁷². Il est également revenu à ce sujet dans son *Risāla-yi Muḥammadiyya*⁷³. Depuis, à ma connaissance, aucune monographie n'a été spécifiquement composée sur ce sujet. Dans son introduction, Nūr ʿAlī Shāh

⁶⁷ Coran, II : 219.

⁶⁸ Voir Sulṭān ʿAlī Shāh Gunābādī, *Bayān*, vol. 1, 194.

⁶⁹ Un exemple demeura célèbre, le refus d'accepter dans l'ordre Hājj Shaykh ʿImād al-Dīn Sabzavārī, qui dut s'enfermer chez lui pendant de longues périodes pour se désintoxiquer. Il fut ensuite initié et promu des années plus tard au rang de *shaykh*.

⁷⁰ Sur l'usage des drogues en Iran et en particulier de l'opium voir Rudi Matthee, *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Drugs and Stimulants in Iranian History, 1500-1900*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 2005; Iraj Afshar, « Un document concernant le commerce de l'opium iranien en Chine », dans *Eurasian Studies. Etudes sur l'Iran médiéval et moderne offertes à Jean Calmard*, Michèle Benardini, Masashi Haneda et Maria Szuppe, éd., 5/1-2 (2006), 1-4.

⁷¹ Enseignement oral de Majdhūb ʿAlī Shāh.

⁷² Dans la seconde édition de 1327sh./1948-49 a été ajouté par l'éditeur l'interprétation coranique de Sulṭān ʿAlī Shāh Gunābādī ainsi qu'un article de Riḍā ʿAlī Shāh intitulé *Afiyūn va asarāt-i ān ou Chānd dastūr dar tark-i taryāk*. Dans la quatrième édition, Majdhūb ʿAlī Shāh a ajouté une autre préface relative au même sujet (*Dhū l-faqr: Dar ḥaramat-i kishīdan-i taryāk*, 4^{ème} éd., Téhéran: Ḥaqīqat 1385sh./2006-07).

⁷³ Nūr ʿAlī Shāh Gunābādī, *Muḥammadiyya*, 143.

Gunābādī évoque la propagation de l'opium en Iran: « dans tous les pays et en particulier en Iran, ce phénomène est répandu et cause des dégâts, s'attaquant aux corps et aux religions des gens »⁷⁴. Constatant que, « parmi les oulémas célèbres, bien peu s'élèvent contre cette situation »⁷⁵, il déclara l'opium interdit et conclut son traité sur un ton extrêmement critique à l'égard des gouvernants et des responsables politiques en leur demandant de faire obstacle à la propagation de l'opium en Iran. Ce traité mêle à la fois le style propre à toute argumentation juridique et le langage simple et direct nécessaire à sa compréhension par le plus grand nombre. A la fin de son livre, il insère la demande d'avis juridique (*istiftā'*) qu'il fit sur cette question auprès de cinq oulémas de l'époque, dont Ākhūnd Khurāsānī et l'ayatollah Sayyid Kāzīm Yazdī (m. 1337/1818-19), et relate leurs réponses respectives, toutes confirmant sa position⁷⁶.

Les successeurs de Nūr 'Alī Shāh Gunābādī ont confirmé cette prohibition, si bien que, de nos jours encore, cette position est considérée comme un précepte fondamental de l'ordre. Certes, à l'époque de Sultān 'Alī Shāh Gunābādī, le seul narcotique courant en Iran était l'opium, mais, quand, plus tard, d'autres stupéfiants ont commencé à se répandre, ses successeurs ont prohibé l'usage des drogues en général⁷⁷.

La pureté (tahārat) des gens du Livre

Les conséquences de l'impureté rituelle (*najāsāt*) étaient particulièrement importantes à l'époque qajare où fatwas et décrets (*ḥukm*) limitaient considérablement la vie sociale des minorités non musulmanes. Ces positions étaient en général justifiées sur la base de l'interprétation du verset coranique: « Vous qui croyez! Les polythéistes ne sont qu'impureté: ils ne s'approcheront donc plus de la mosquée sacrée après que cette année ne sera écoulée »⁷⁸. Les juristes chiites associaient les gens du livre au polythéisme en raison de leur interprétation de l'unicité divine ou bien pour leur consommation de substance impure, comme la viande de porc pour les chrétiens⁷⁹. Sultān 'Alī Shāh Gunābādī rejeta cette argumentation dans son commentaire coranique, arguant d'un autre verset: « Aujourd'hui, les bonnes choses vous sont permises. La nourriture de ceux auxquels le Livre a été donné

⁷⁴ Nūr 'Alī Shāh Gunābādī, *Dhū l-faqār*, 4^{ème} éd., 3.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Pour autant, aucun de ces religieux ne prit la responsabilité de rédiger une monographie sur le sujet ou de promulguer une fatwa de portée générale et ce problème demeura largement ignoré des oulémas jusqu'en 1334sh./1955-56. Le ministre iranien de la santé remit un rapport sur la situation alarmante de l'usage de l'opium à l'ayatollah Ḥusayn Burūjirdī (m. 1961), lui demandant s'il acceptait de le prohiber, ce qu'il fit.

⁷⁷ Šāliḥ 'Alī Shāh, *Šāliḥiyya*, 107. Voir également Riḍā 'Alī Shāh, *Raf'*, 129-131; et Majdhūb 'Alī Shāh, *Ashinā'i*, 80-81 et 86.

⁷⁸ Coran, IX : 28.

⁷⁹ Hamid Algar, « Cleansing in Islamic Persia », in: *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 5, 700-702.

vous est permise, et votre nourriture leur est permise »⁸⁰. Ainsi, Sulṭān ʿAlī Shāh Gunābādī considéra que l'impureté des gens du livre n'était pas intrinsèque mais uniquement accidentelle, en raison de la consommation des boissons alcoolisées ou de la viande de porc. Nūr ʿAlī Shāh Gunābādī adopta les mêmes positions dans sa *Risāla-yi Muḥammadiyya*⁸¹ et dans son *Dastūr al-ʿamal-i nuḥgāna*⁸². Il semble, toutefois, que d'autres juristes chiites adoptèrent des positions similaires au cours de l'époque qajare⁸³.

Conclusion

Pour les maîtres niʿmatullāhī gunābādī, la loi religieuse a un esprit et un sens ésotérique qui, étant en accord avec la nature intime de l'homme, reste immuable, mais l'aspect extérieur de cette loi, qui constitue les prescriptions légales, lui, peut changer en fonction de l'époque et du lieu. En outre, ils ont toujours cité ce hadith du prophète pour justifier leurs positions: « J'ai été choisi comme prophète pour conduire à la perfection les mœurs et la morale » et proclamer qu'il est du devoir des religieux de proposer une jurisprudence conforme à la morale.

Sulṭān ʿAlī Shāh Gunābādī et ses successeurs ont aussi revendiqué émettre des avis juridiques fondés sur la complémentarité de la charia et de la *ṭarīqat*. Les maîtres niʿmatullāhī gunābādī considèrent donc leurs décisions juridiques en accord avec les principes ésotériques et immuables de la loi religieuse. A ce titre, l'interprétation du droit que proposaient un grand nombre de clercs leur paraissaient sclérosée. Leur définition du droit musulman peut ainsi être considérée comme une tentative de synthèse entre le rationalisme *uṣūlī* dominant le milieu théologique chiite en cette fin de XIX^e siècle et la mystique soufie.

Malgré leur formation et leur compétence juridique, les maîtres niʿmatullāhī gunābādī ont toujours souligné que les croyants devaient s'adresser aux juristes (*fuqahā*) pour les questions relevant du droit et aux maîtres soufis pour l'initiation et le cheminement spirituel. Ces positions ont certainement permis aux niʿmatullāhī gunābādī d'être mieux tolérés que d'autres confréries, voire respectés par certains membres du clergé à l'époque qajare.

⁸⁰ Coran, V : 5; voir Sulṭān ʿAlī Shāh Gunābādī, *Bayān*, vol. 2, 75.

⁸¹ Nūr ʿAlī Shāh Gunābādī, *Muḥammadiyya*, 16.

⁸² Jadhbi, *Majmūʿa*, 3-4.

⁸³ Voir Denis Hermann, *Aspects de l'histoire sociale et doctrinale de l'école shaykhī, en Iran, au cours de la période qājār (1843-1911)*, Thèse de doctorat inédite, Paris: Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes 2007, 103-106.



Part Three

Doctrinal Debates and
Political Theories



Sunni Ulama's Discourses on Shi'ism in Northern India during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: An Overview

Sajida Sultana Alvi

The relationship of the Sunni majority with the Shi'i minority in the Indian Sub-continent over approximately seven centuries of Muslim rule (592/1196-1217/1803) was shaped by the composite culture of India. During the 16th century, while an ideological Safavid state was taking shape in Iran, the Chaghatā'i Sunni Turks were establishing the foundations of a multi-faith and multi-cultural Mughal Empire in India.

At the pinnacle of the Safavid rule in Iran, a large number of Iranian intellectuals and literates moved from Iran to India in order to escape the increasingly ideological pressure of the Safavid state and bloomed in the Mughal India.¹ The movement of Iranians to India significantly continued up to the 18th century. However, in the period of transition from the Mughal rule to the British marking the end of an era (with the death of Awrangzeb in 1118/1707) and the beginning of another (with the takeover of Delhi by Lord Lake in 1217/1803), the Iranian émigrés' attitudes had also changed, as manifested by Shaykh Muḥammad 'Alī Ḥazīn (d. 1180/1766). He was one of the last notable Iranian scholars and poets in a long chain of Iranians who enriched the political, social and cultural life of Mughal-India. An erudite scholar of the Shi'i theological and philosophical tradition, Ḥazīn was warmly received by the Shi'i Iranian faction of the Mughal nobility as well as by the enthusiastic litterati of Delhi in 1146/1734. In the words of Dargāh Qulī Khān Sālār Jang²:

Hazeen is a guest in the Paradise-like country of *Hindustan*. His good nature and piety has distinguished him among his contemporary poets. A native of Iran, he came to *Delhi* as a mendicant with the longing of a wanderer in his heart. He is worthy of high regard and respect and his presence lends honour to a *mahfil* [festive gathering]...Even

¹ For the Iranian poets, see Aziz Ahmad, "Safavid poets in India", *Iran* 14 (1976), 117-132.

² Sālār Jang was the great-grandson of Dargāh Qulī Khān who was in the service of 'Alī Mardān Khān, the governor of Qandahar during the reign of Shāh Šāfi I (r. 1038-1051/1629-1642). Dargāh Qulī Khān accompanied 'Alī Mardān Khān when he took refuge at the Shāh Jahān's court in 1047/1638. For more details, see Riazul Islam, *Indo-Persian Relations*, Tehran: Iranian Cultural Foundation 1970, 102-105. Dargāh Qulī Khān and his sons, all high-ranking nobles, served the Mughals in Deccan administration. For the details of Dargāh Qulī Khān's descendants, see Dargāh Qulī Khān, *Muraqqa'-i Dīhlī*, introduction by Muẓaffar Ḥusayn, n.d.: n.p., 6-10.

the powerful needs his blessings, and feel honoured in providing [Hazeen with] goods of daily requirement. Although he lives in purity and charm, there is always a large crowd gathered at his house.³

Ḥazīn, nonetheless, surprised the hosts by condemning everything about India, and cursed every one from the emperor to a lowly beggar.⁴ It must be noted, however, that he did not engage himself in sectarian polemical debates, while harshly criticising the Indian scholars' "improper use of the Persian language". Thus, a heated debate on the linguistics of Persian language erupted between Ḥazīn and Sirāj al-Dīn Khān-i Ārzū (d. 1169/1756), an acclaimed scholar of Persian language and literature. Eventually, Ḥazīn settled down in Benares, but not in the state of Avadh, which had replaced the Mughal rule,⁵ and was ruled by Shī'is of Iranian origin. He received a land grant in Benares, led an affluent and productive life, and died in 1179/1766. Some other Iranian intellectuals such as 'Alī Qulī Khān Dāghastānī (pen-name "Vāla"), sought refuge in India during Nādir Shāh's rule (1148-1159/1736-1747), noteworthy for his muddled sectarian and institutional experimentation.⁶ Dāghastānī was Ḥazīn's friend, but quite different from him in many ways.⁷

A careful reading of primary historical chronicles provides ample proof of the fact that sectarian identity was not a major issue in Mughal administration. Observance of both Shī'i and Sunni practices within the Mughal royalty was common. Even the last Mughal ruler in India, Bahādur Shāh Zafar (deposed in 1273/1857 by the British), an accomplished poet and patron of art and literature,

³ Dargah Quli Khan, *Muraqqa'-e-Dehli: The Mughal Capital in Muhammad Shah's Time*, English translation with an introduction and notes by Chander Shekhar and Shama Mitra Chenoy, Delhi: Deputy Publication 1989, 56.

⁴ Sirāj al-Dīn Khān-i Ārzū, *Majma' al-nafā'is: Tadhkira-yi shu'arā-yi fārsī (sada-yi davāzdahum)*, 'Abid Riḍā Baydār, ed., 2nd edition, Delhi: Maktaba-yi Jāmi'a Limited 1992, 41. He called the Persian poets of India as crows of India (*zāghān-i Hind*), blabbers of India (*pūch-gūyān-i Hind*), and termed Sirāj al-Dīn Khān-i Ārzū "bastard of Akbarābād (Agra)" (*ḥarām-zāda-yi Akbarābād*). 'Abd al-Ghanī, "Shu'arā'-yi Fārsī (*mā sawā-yi Ghālib*)," in: *Tārīkh-i adabiyāt-i musalmānān-i Pākistān va Hind*, vol. 5, Lahore: Punjab University Press 1972, 47.

⁵ The first ruler/*navāb* was Mir Muhammad Amin Nishāpurī (d. 1151/1739).

⁶ For details, see Ernest Tucker, "Nadir Shah and the Ja'fari *Madhhab* Reconsidered", *Iranian Studies* 27 (1994), 163-179; idem, *Nadir Shah's Quest for Legitimacy in Post-Safavid Iran*, Gainesville Fl.: University Press of Florida 2006, 36-44, 76-93.

⁷ Dāghastānī was displeased with Ḥazīn's critical attitude and attempted to dissuade him from putting down India and the Indians. Failing in those efforts, he thus wrote in his biographical dictionary, *Riyāḍ al-Shu'arā'*: "At last, in view of my relations with the emperor and the nobles, I ceased to have anything to do with Ḥazīn. All praise is due to the magnanimous nobles that instead of wreaking vengeance on Ḥazīn, they are treating him with utmost kindness. This fact puts the Persian sojourners in this country in an even more awkward position." Manohar Sahai Anwar, *Sirāj-ud-Dīn 'Alī Khān Ārzū: His Life and Works, an Exhaustive Critical Study*. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Lahore n.d., 146.

showed great reverence for the Shi'i rituals and actively participated in the celebration of Muḥarram. He was even alleged to be a Shi'a.⁸

Disputes and conflicts on theological issues and political authority between these two major sects of Islam have a history of more than thirteen hundred years. The establishment of Avadh as a Shi'i state caused concern and nervousness among the Sunni ulama in Avadh and in Delhi. In the 13th/18th and early 14th/19th centuries, the polemical debates intensified and included vehement condemnation of certain beliefs and practices of the Shi'a, refutations of Sunni criticisms by Shi'i jurists, and Sunni counter-attacks.⁹

In this essay, the sectarian debates and dialogues are approached from the perspective of the intellectual history rather than that of law. Instead of surveying polemical works of Sunni ulama in India and discussing the history of theological debates between Shi'i and Sunni ulama in India and beyond, this preliminary study is based on selected writings of Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1032/1623), Shāh Valī Allāh (d. 1175/1762), Qāḍī Thanā' Allāh Pānīpatī (d. 1224/1810), and Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz (d. 1239/1824) against the backdrop of the social, political and intellectual conditions of their time. Although these Sufi scholars lived at different times, they influenced each other by their writings and by their student-teacher or master-disciple connections. It is to highlight the changes that took place from the 12th/17th to 13th/18th centuries that Shaykh Sirhindī has been included in this study. This Naqshbandī master lived in the 12th/17th century at the pinnacle of Mughal rule, and the other three during its twilight in the 13th/18th century.

With a sense of obligation to guide their community and assuming their leadership role therein, the 13th/18th century Sunni ulama in northern India sought to elucidate Islam – its tenets and laws – for their fellow Muslims so as to help them cope with the changing socio-political fabric of the Indo-Islamic society and withstand the polemical debates. This situation is examined in relation to the (i) increased awareness of sectarian identities in the Indo-Islamic society during the 18th century, possibly resulting from the Muslim experience of transition in the social and political order; and (ii) sectarian dialectical arguments that reflect a sense of insecurity amongst the Sunni ulama, caused by the rapid spread of Shi'ism and increasing religious authority of Shi'i clerics in Avadh, and the Sunni ulama's efforts to preserve their identity in the absence of a Sunni Muslim political power.

⁸ For details, see William Dalrymple, *The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty, Delhi, 1857*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing Place 2006, 82, footnote 95; and Sajida Alvi, "Indo-Islamic History: Some Reflections", in: *Perspectives on Mughal India; Rulers, Historians, 'Ulama' and Sufis*, Sajida Alvi, ed., Karachi: Oxford University Press 2010, 1-27; idem, "The Shi'is at Jahāngīr's Court: Profile of Muḥammad Bāqir Najm-i Thānī, A Scholar and Soldier", in: *Perspectives on Mughal India*, 219-231.

⁹ Sayyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz: Puritanism, Sectarian Polemics and Jihād*, Canberra: Ma'rifat Publishing House 1982, 356-470.

Sunni Thinkers and Their Discourses

Religious regeneration (*tajdīd*) and resurgence (*ihyāʾ*) of the Sunni majority was a possible motivating force for the four authors in their discourses on Shiʿism. Two of them, Shaykh Sirhindī and Shāh Valī Allāh, are regarded as the *mujaddid* of 12th/17th and 13th/18th centuries respectively.¹⁰ Thanāʾ Allāh Pānīpatī and Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz’s discourse on Shiʿism is also closely linked to their sense of responsibility in guiding their community.¹¹ Their writings, though critical of some specific Shiʿi practices, were not expressions of bigotry and intolerance.

Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī, a revered master of the Naqshbandiyya Sufi order (*ṭarīqat*), has been a major source of inspiration for the Naqshbandiyya *ṭarīqat* and its scholarship. His disciples today interpret his teachings, refute criticism levered against him, and inspire masses who visit the Naqshbandiyya Sufi complexes

¹⁰ The ulama in the Indian subcontinent have been engaged in a lively discussion about *tajdīd* and the designation of a *mujaddid*. Abū l-Aʿlā Mawdūdī (d. 1979) for example, opined that there could be several simultaneous *mujaddid* in various Islamic lands. In the Indian context, he considered Shaykh Sirhindī, Shāh Valī Allāh, Shāh Ismāʿīl (killed in 1246/1831) and Sayyid Aḥmad Barelwī (killed in 1246/1831) as *mujaddid* of the 11th/16th, 12th/17th, and 13th/18th centuries. He recognized their contributions to the reconstruction and regeneration of Islamic thought. He was, however, critical of Shāh Valī Allāh and his family for their rather narrow vision of the role of religion in the Muslim community’s life and for failing to understand the seriousness of the British threat (see Sayyid Abū l-Aʿlā Mawdūdī, *Tajdīd va ihyāʾ-i dīn*, 9th edition, Lahore: n.p. 1966, 114-130). Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī, in his Introduction to ʿAbd al-Bārī Nadwī’s work *Tajdīd-i dīn-i kāmīl*, Karachi: Nafis Academy 1962, 21, remarked that India assumed a central position in eliminating unlawful innovation (*bidaʾ*) during the 11th/16th, 12th/17th and 13th/18th centuries and repeated the names of Shaykh Sirhindī, Shāh Valī Allāh, Shāh Ismāʿīl and Sayyid Aḥmad Barelwī, while Mawdūdī criticized Shaykh Sirhindī and Shāh Valī Allāh for taking on the title of *mujaddid* and for claiming to have highly developed intuitive powers (*kashf va ilhām*) to justify their views (Mawdūdī, *Tajdīd*, 147). Sulaymān Nadwī did not criticize them. In his Introduction to Waḥīd Aḥmad Masʿūd’s *Sayyid Aḥmad Shāhid kī Saḥīḥ Taṣwīr* (4th ed., Lahore: Ridā Publications 2003, 6-7) Ḥakīm Mūsā Amritsarī, under the pseudonym Muḥammad Saʿīd Nuʿmānī, has questioned the spiritual leadership of Sayyid Aḥmad Barelwī as the Sufi master (*murshid*) of the Ṭarīqat-i Muḥammadiyya. This order, according to Mūsā Amritsarī, did not have a large continuous following. He questioned whether Sayyid Aḥmad Barelwī indeed received divine inspiration for *jihād* in north-west province and tribal areas or he was swayed by the British. The British demonstrated cordiality to Sayyid Aḥmad Barelwī and his followers. Mūsā Amritsarī also raised doubts about Sayyid Aḥmad Barelwī’s spiritual leadership because of the bloodshed of Muslims along with the Sikhs in the north-west province and surrounding tribal territories, and his insistence on the forced marriages of widows (See the Introduction to Waḥīd Aḥmad Masʿūd’s *Sayyid Aḥmad*, 6-7).

¹¹ For further details, see Aharon Layish, ed., *Ha-Mizrah be-Hadash. Special Issue on Renewal (tajdīd) and Reform (islāh) in Islam*, 31 (1986) [in Hebrew]; Ella Landau-Tasseron’s essay on the history of the evolution of *tajdīd* and *islāh*: “The ‘Cyclical Reform’: A Study of the Mujaddid Tradition”, *Studia Islamica* 70 (1989), 79-117; Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, “*Tajdīd al-Dīn*: A Reconsideration of its Meaning, Roots, and Influence in Islam”, in: *Studies in Islamic and Judaic Traditions*, William M. Brinner and Stephen D. Ricks, eds., Atlanta, Ga: Scholars Press 1986, 99-108; and Sajida Alvi, “The *Mujaddid* and *Tajdīd* Traditions in the Indian Subcontinent: An Historical Overview”, in: *Perspectives on Mughal India*, 89-115.

(*khānaqāh*) across the Subcontinent.¹² The biographical dictionaries on this *ṭarīqat* support the continued vitality of the Shaykh's teachings and speak of his lasting impact.¹³ His views on Shi'ism are expressed primarily in his *Radd-i ravāfiḍ*.¹⁴ It was written probably before 1008/1600, during the pre-Sufi phase of his life,¹⁵ and in it he identifies himself as a member of the ulama class.¹⁶ In his refutation of the Shi'i tenets, Shaykh Sirhindī adopted the style of dialectical debate (*jadal* or *munāẓara*) by making frequent references to the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* literature, as he did in some of his letters (*maktūbāt*).¹⁷ It was the era when Shi'i ascendancy in the Mughal power structure was coupled with the Iranian intellectuals' emigration to India.

The *Radd-i ravāfiḍ* was held in high esteem by later thinkers, including Shāh Walī Allāh, who translated it into Arabic for his teacher Shaykh Abū Ṭāhir in Medina.¹⁸ Most of this short epistle is devoted to Shaykh Sirhindī's commentary on the debate between the Shi'i ulama of Mashhad and the Sunni ulama in the camp of Shaybānīd ruler, 'Abd al-Mu'min (d. 1006/1598), son of 'Abd Allāh Khān Uzbek I (r. 964-1006/1557-1598) which took place at the time of the occupation

¹² See, for example, Shāh Abū l-Ḥasan Zayd Farūqī, *Ḥaḍrat Mujaddid avr un kiy nāqīdīn*, Delhi: Shah Abu al-Khayr Academy, 1977; translated into English by Mir Zahid Ali Kamil, *Hazrat Mujaddid and his Critics*, Lahore: Progressive Books 1982. For Sirhindī, see Yohanan Friedmann, *Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindī: An Outline of his Thought and a Study of his Image in the Eyes of Posterity*, Montreal: McGill University Press 1971. Other noteworthy writings on Sirhindī and the Naqshbandiyya *ṭarīqa* are Muhammad Abdul Haq Ansari, *Sufism and Sharī'ah: A Study of Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindī's Efforts to Reform Sufism*, London: The Islamic Foundation 1986; and Arthur F. Buehler, *Sufi Heirs of the Prophet: The Naqshbandiyya and the Rise of the Mediating Sufi Shaykh*, Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina 1998. A massive body of popular Urdu literature on Sirhindī and Naqshbandiyya masters, living or recently deceased, is written by disciples, with special attention to the miracles (*karāmāt*) and spiritual ascendancy of their masters.

¹³ See, for example, Farūqī, *Sawānīh Ḥādī-yi kāmīl Shāh Abū l-Khayr, ma'rūf ba maqāmāt-i khayr*, 2nd ed., Delhi: Shah Abu al-Khayr Academy, 1989; Muḥammad Ṣādiq Quṣūrī, *Tadhkira-yi Naqshbandiyya-yi khayriyya*, Lahore: n.p. 1988; and Muḥammad Nūr Bakhsh Tawakkulī, *Tadhkira-yi mashāyikh-i Naqshbandiyya*, Gujarat: Fazal Nur Academy n.d.. For Sirhindī's contribution to promote the *sharī'at* and *ṭarīqat* as integral parts of Islam see Alberto Ventura, "Une interprétation mystique de la *ṣarī'a* selon Šaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī", in: *Muslim Cultures in the Indo-Iranian World during the Early-Modern and Modern Periods*, Denis Hermann & Fabrizio Speciale, eds., Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag & IFRI 2010, 203-216.

¹⁴ Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī, *Radd-i ravāfiḍ*, Urdu translation by Ghulām Qādir Amritsarī, Lahore: al-Kitāb 1958.

¹⁵ Friedmann, *Aḥmad Sirhindī*, 4, 52.

¹⁶ For Shaykh Sirhindī's views on the crucial role of ulama in an Islamic society, see Sirhindī, *Maktūbāt-i Imām Rabbānī*, vol. 1, part 1, letter no. 33, Lahore: Nur Company n.d., 92-94; and for the types of knowledge the ulama inherited and for Sirhindī's concepts of prophecy (*nubuwwat*) and the esoteric function of interpreting the inner mysteries of the Qur'ān, Islamic law (*sharī'at*) and spiritual sphere (*vilāyat*), see idem., vol. 1, part 4, letter no. 268, 138-140.

¹⁷ Shaykh Sirhindī elaborated his views on some aspects of Shi'ism in his letter to Khwāja Muḥammad Taqī, *Maktūbāt*, vol. 2, part 6, letter no. 36, 83-110.

¹⁸ J. M. S. Baljon, *Religion and Thought of Shāh Walī Allāh Dīblawī*, Leiden: E.J. Brill 1986, 8.

of Mashhad in 997/1589.¹⁹ The Shi'i ulama in the besieged city asked 'Abd al-Mu'min to refrain from spilling Muslim blood. The Sunni ulama in the Uzbek camp challenged their petition and labelled them as heretics because of their rejection (*rafḍ*) of the rule of the first three successors (caliphs) of Prophet Muḥammad and the vilification (*sabb* or *la'nat*) of 'Ā'isha (d. 58/678)²⁰. Mawlānā Muḥammad Fakhr al-Dīn Rustamdārī, on behalf of the Shi'i ulama, responded to the Sunni ulama.²¹ In 1590, the Uzbek soldiers massacred a large part of population in Mashhad and pillaged the shrine of Imām Riḍā (d. 203/818).²²

Shaykh Sirhindī criticized the position taken by the Shi'i ulama of Mashhad and the Uzbek Sunni ulama on the following points: (1) vilification of the companions (*ṣaḥāba*) is akin to rejection of revelation (*vaḥī*); (2) vilification is an act of unbelief (*kufī*); (3) Abū Bakr's (d. 634) condemnation is an especially grave matter because of his long and close relationship with the Prophet; (4) 'Alī's practice of dissimulation (*taqiyya*)²³ and his not open opposition to Abū Bakr's nomination to succeed the Prophet amounted to a slight on 'Alī's integrity; (5) the Shi'is' censure on some of the Prophet's companions and 'Ā'isha was enough to justify the killing of the Shi'a by a ruler seeking to promote the "true religion".²⁴ Shaykh Sirhindī did not, however, comment on the verdict of the ulama in 'Abd al-Mu'min Uzbek's camp regarding the justification of spilling of Shi'i blood and confiscation of their property during the attack on Mashhad. He concluded the *Radd-i ravāfiḍ* with an admonition to the Sunni ulama (called '*ulamā'-yi Islām*') that

¹⁹ For a discussion on the exact date of the fall of Mashhad, see Robert D. McChesney, "A Note on Iskandar Beg's Chronology" in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 39/2 (1980), 55.

²⁰ The cursing ritual of the first three caliphs gained importance in the early years of founding of the Safavid rule in 1501. The Türkmén *qizilbāsh* imposed upon all inhabitants to practice this vilification. See Jean Calmard, "Les rituels Shiites et le pouvoir: l'imposition du Shiisme Safavide: eulogies et malédictions canoniques", in: *Etudes Safavides*, Jean Calmard, ed., Paris-Tehran: IFRI 1993, 109-150. Later, the anniversary of 'Umar assassination ('*Umar kushān*) became a major celebration day.

²¹ For details, see Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *A Socio-Intellectual History of the Isnā 'Asharī Shī'īs in India*, vol. 1, Canberra: Ma'rifat Publishing House 1986, 242-243. In his other work, Rizvi cited the name of the Shi'i scholar, Mawlānā Mushakkik Rustamdārī, Rizvi, *Shāh 'Abd al-'Aziz*, 253. Nūr Allāh Shūstārī (d. 1019/1610), a prolific Shi'i author and a distinguished judge (*qāḍī*), recorded the exchange of arguments between the ulama of Mashhad and of Transoxiana in the *Majālis al-mu'minīn*, edited by Mullā Amin Tihirānī, Tehran: 1299/1881, 44-50.

²² Concerning the regular tensions and military confrontations between the Safavids and Uzbeks at the north-east frontier of the Safavid Empire, see Martin Dickson, *Shah Tahmasp and the Uzbeks: The Duel for Khurasan with Ubayd Khan, 930-946/1524-1540*, Princeton: unpublished Ph.D. thesis 1958; and Robert D. McChesney, "Barrier of Heterodoxy? Rethinking the Ties between Iran and Central Asia in the 17th Century", in: *Safavid Persia: The History and Politics of an Islamic Society*, Charles Melville, ed., London: I.B. Tauris 1996, 231-267.

²³ Concerning the *taqiyya* in Shi'i Islam see Etan Kohlberg, "Taqiyya in Shi'i Theology and Religion", in: *Secrecy and Concealment: Studies in the History of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Religions*, Hans G. Kippenberg and Guy G. Stroumsa, eds., Leiden: Brill 1995, 345-380.

²⁴ Sirhindī, *Radd*, 32-75.

it was their obligation to refute the Shi'i ulama's vilification of some of the companions of the Prophet and expose their perniciousness (*mafāsīd*).²⁵ In his letter to Muḥammad Taqī, Shaykh Sirhindī reiterated the position taken in the *Radd-i ravāfiḍ* that disagreement amongst the Prophet's companions over temporal and practical matters should not be construed as disobedience but rather as individual reasoning (*ijtihād*) and that not all statements of the Prophet should be regarded as Divine revelation (*vaḥī*).²⁶

It may be argued that Shaykh Sirhindī's severe criticism of some aspects of the Shi'i faith in the *Radd-i ravāfiḍ* was not directly related to sectarian strife in Jahāngīr's India, but was rather an effect of the religious climate in Safavid Iran. The prevailing mood in Akbar's and Jahāngīr's periods was perhaps more accurately reflected in his rather dispassionate discussion of the subject in his *Maktūbāt*. It is noteworthy that in 1009/1601, after the completion of the *Radd-i ravāfiḍ*, one of Shaykh Sirhindī's erudite contemporaries, Mawlānā 'Abd al-Ḥakīm Siālkuṭī (d. 1067/1657), gave him the title of *Mujaddid-i Alf-i Thānī* (the Renewer of the Second Millennium), for getting rid of some ambiguities in certain mystical beliefs and practices, and for bridging the gap between *sharī'at* and *ṭarīqat*.²⁷

Shāh Valī Allāh, living in the volatile social and political climate of post-Awraṅzeb (r. 1068-1118/1658-1707) northern India, has been described as a "thinker of crisis".²⁸ He took upon himself the roles of a *mujaddid*, guardian of the Time (*qā'im al-zamān*),²⁹ and pivot, the head of the mystical hierarchy (*qutb*).³⁰ In his spiritual exercises, he synthesised the practices of various Sufi *ṭarīqat* in the Subcontinent. However, before 1144/1732, he expressed his preference for the Naqshbandiyya Mujaddidiyya *ṭarīqat*.³¹

A towering figure of 18th century in India, Shāh Valī Allāh was a prolific writer with a conviction that God had charged him with the responsibility of guiding his community. Both the breadth and depth of his scholarship and the way he embarked upon a well-thought-out program for the resurgence of Islamic thought during this period of transition make him worthy of titles such as *qā'im al-zamān* and *qutb*. In his writings, he attempted to integrate a variety of subjects such as

²⁵ Ibid., 77-78.

²⁶ Sirhindī, *Radd*, 38-39, and n. 1, 39; Sirhindī, *Maktūbāt*, vol. 2, part 6, letter no. 36, 78-90.

²⁷ Tawakkulī, *Tadbkira*, 203-204. Siālkuṭī wrote an epistle titled *Dalā'il-i tajdīd*, in affirmation of the millennial religious renewal; I was unable to obtain a copy. Also see, Friedmann, *Aḥmad Sirhindī*, 13-31; Yohanan Friedmann, *Prophecy Continuous: Aspects of Aḥmadī Religious Thought and its Medieval Background*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press 1989, 94-101. For a critique of some of Friedmann's ideas on *tajdīd* in his work *Prophecy Continuous*, see Landau-Tasseron, "Cyclical".

²⁸ Fazlur Rahman, "The Thinker of Crisis – Shah Waliy-Ullah," *The Pakistan Quarterly* (Summer 1956), 44-48.

²⁹ Shāh Valī Allāh, *Mushāhadāt va ma'ārif, tarjuma-yi fuyūḍ al-ḥaramayn*, Urdu translation by Muḥammad Sarwar, Lahore: Sind Sāgar Akādīmī 1947, 296.

³⁰ For more details, see Baljon, *Religion*, 15-20.

³¹ Ibid., 85.

fiqh, *ḥadīth*, methods for studying, explaining and understanding the Qurʾān, and the significance of beliefs and practices.

Unlike Shaykh Sirhindī, whose main contribution was to resolve controversial issues related to spiritual practices and to promote the *sharīʿat* and *ṭarīqat* as integral parts of Islam, Shāh Valī Allāh dwelt on social and political problems that were causing religious confusion and disintegration within the community. His tradition of scholarship was continued and strengthened by his sons, Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, Shāh ʿAbd al-Ghanī (d. 1203/1789), Shāh ʿAbd al-Qādir (d. 1227/1813), and Shāh Rafīʿ al-Dīn (d. 1233/1818), through their scholarship and teaching at the Madrasa-yi Raḥīmiyya.³² Shāh Valī Allāh thereby left a lasting imprint on the Indo-Islamic intellectual heritage up to present time.³³

Shāh Valī Allāh commented on aspects of Shiʿism in several of his writings; however, he focused specifically on the subject in his *Izālat al-khafāʾ ʿan Khilāfat al-Khulafāʾ* and *Qurrat al-ʿAynayn*, written, according to Rizvi, between 1151-59/1739-47,³⁴ or between 1152-73/1740-60 according to Baljon.³⁵ It was a period of political confusion and socio-economic disarray, which prompted the growth of Shiʿi political power. Although regarded as polemical by Rizvi, these two works belong in my view to the biographical (*sīra*) literature on the Prophet’s companions. Written in Persian after Nādir Shāh’s invasion of Delhi, they were possibly designed to reach a larger readership in India and to counter the confusion created by the rise of “heretical creeds” (*isbrāq-i madhāhib-i muṭtadīʿa*).³⁶

While the *Qurrat al-ʿAynayn* discusses the superiority of the first two caliphs, Abū Bakr al-Siddīq (r. 10-12/632-34) and ʿUmar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 12-23/634-44), over the other caliphs, the first part of *Izālat al-khafāʾ* theorises about the nature of the Caliphate (*khilāfat*), the special vicegerency (*khilāfat-i khāṣṣa*), and the common vicegerency (*khilāfat-i ʿamma*) based on the Qurʾān and the *ḥadīth*. It expands the discussion by topics such as the attributes and qualities for eligibility and the methods of electing a Caliph, including an elaborated exposition of the Sunni

³² Madrasa-yi Raḥīmiyya was founded by Shāh Valī Allāh’s father, Shāh ʿAbd al-Raḥīm (d. 1131/1719).

³³ Scores of books have been written in English and Urdu on Shāh Valī Allāh’s religious thought and political philosophy. For references to primary and secondary sources, see bibliographies in Baljon and Rizvi’s works on Shāh Valī Allāh as well as the bibliography of Marcia K. Hermansen, *The Conclusive Argument from God: Shāh Walī Allāh of Delhi’s Hujjat Allāh al-Bāligha*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996. Institutions such as the Shāh Valī Allāh Academy (Hyderabad, Sind) were established to research on Shāh Valī Allāh’s thought. In 1960s, the monthly journal *al-Raḥīm*, published by this academy, began disseminating information on the Shāh Valī Allāh’s thought.

³⁴ Rizvi, *Shah Wali-Allāh and his Times*, Canberra: Maʿrifat Publishing House 1980, 222-223.

³⁵ Baljon, *Religion*, 176.

³⁶ Shāh Valī Allāh, *Qurrat al-ʿAynayn fi tafḥīl al-shaykhayn*, Delhi: Maṭbaʿ-iyi Muṭtabāʾī, 1892, 2. At the outset of this work, Shāh Valī Allāh noted that “the superiority of the [first] two Caliphs (*shaykhayn*) over all companions of the Prophet is proven by reason and tradition (*ʿaql va naql*).” (ibid.).

and Shi'i ulama's views on the subject, along with the author's opinions on the election of the first four caliphs. The second part focuses on the Prophet's companions, their practice of the tradition (*sunna*) of the Prophet, and the Qur'anic injunctions in their policies and personal behaviour.³⁷

Thanā' Allāh, a Naqshbandī Sufi scholar and judge (*qāḍī*) of Pānīpat during the reigns of three Mughal emperors – Aḥmad Shāh (1160-67/1748-54), 'Ālamgīr II (1167-72/1754-59), and Shāh 'Ālam (1172-1220/1759-1806) – witnessed the erosion of Mughal imperial power and the disintegration of its administrative structure. He lived through a turbulent period in northern India, which saw the struggle for power between Marathas and Sikhs, and the rise and establishment of the Shi'i state of Avadh.³⁸

Recognised as a leading jurist and Sufi by his contemporaries, his familial background and professional activities set him apart from Shaykh Sirhindī and Shāh Valī Allāh. Both Shāh Ghulām 'Alī (d. 1239/1824) (his fellow-*khalīfat* of the Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya order) and their master, Maḥzar Jān-i Jānān (killed in 1195/1781), sought his opinion on various mystical and religious issues.³⁹ Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz also held him in high esteem, and Thanā' Allāh's writings influenced their scholarship.⁴⁰ He regarded the Sikhs, the Marathas, and the Shi'a as

³⁷ For additional information on the content of the *Izālat al-khafa'* and the *Qur'rat al-'aynayn*, see Rizvi, *Shāh Walī Allāh*, 249-256; and Baljon, *Religion*, 175-179.

³⁸ For an overview of the crises, see B. S. Najjar, *Punjab under the Later Mughals, 1707-1748*, Delhi: Oxford University Press 1986; Bhaghat Singh, *Sikh Polity in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, New Delhi: Oriental Publishers and Distributors 1978. Regarding Avadh, noteworthy is Juan R. I. Cole's *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism in Iran and Iraq: Religion and State in Awadh, 1722-1859*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press 1988. This work covers the rise of a Shi'i state in Avadh and the development of Shi'i ulama as a class and their hierarchy in Avadh. For Avadh as a Shi'i state, see also Sajida Sultana Alvi, "An Unknown Source for the History of Awadh: *Tārīkh-i Husayniyyah*", in: *Perspectives on Mughal India*, 73-86.

³⁹ For Thanā' Allāh's correspondence with Shāh Ghulām 'Alī and other fellow Sufi scholars on juridical and mystical topics see Abū l-Khayr Murādābādī (compiler) *Kalimāt-i tayyibāt*, Delhi: Maṭba'-yi Muṭṭabā'ī 1891-92, 97-158.

⁴⁰ For example, his *al-Sayf al-maslūl* (Delhi: Maṭba'-yi Aḥmadi 1851) proved to be the forerunner of Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz's *Tuhfa-yi ithnā' ashariyya*. Two of his works on jurisprudence – and *Ḥaqīqat al-Islām* – became valuable handbooks for posterity and were used as texts in various *madrasa*. *Mā lā Buddha Minhu* is solidly based on major foundational sources of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). Several commentaries have been written on it. For details, see Maḥmud al-Ḥasan 'Arif, *Tadhkira-yi Qāḍī Muḥammad Thanā' Allāh Pānīpatī: Mu'allif-i tafsīr-i maḥzarī*, Lahore: Idāra-yi thaqāfat-i islāmiyya 1995, 512-526. His works continue to command respect, and many of them, including the *Tafsīr-i maḥzarī* (3rd ed., 12 vols, Karachi: Sa'id and Company 1982), have been translated into Urdu to make them accessible to a wider readership. However, not much has been written on Thanā' Allāh in English or any other European language. Rizvi wrote a few pages to discuss primarily Thanā' Allāh's "puritanical and polemical" views in his *Shah 'Abd al-'Aziz*, 558-573; see also Sajida Alvi, "Qāzi Thanā' Allāh Pānīpatī, an Eighteenth-Century Indian Sufi-'Alim: A Study of his Writings in their Sociopolitical Context", in: *Perspectives on Mughal India*, 177-193. Two Ph.D. dissertations have been written in Urdu: 'Arif's *Tadhkira-yi Qāḍī Muḥammad Thanā'*

serious threats to the survival of Sunni Islam.⁴¹ Among the four writers, Thanā' Allāh devoted more attention to examining specific divergent practices in Shi'ism. His zeal in debating controversial issues in Shi'i and Sunni beliefs may reflect his deep concern for the primacy of Sunni creed. In the five following works, he defended the Sunni creed and denounced the Shi'is and their practices: *al-Sayf al-maslūl*, *Risāla dar radd-i ravāfiḍ* (unpublished),⁴² *Fatwā dar bāra-yi ayyām-i 'āshūrā*,⁴³ *al-Shihāb al-thāqib bi-ṭard al-shayṭān al-mārid* and *Tadhkira-yi Qāḍi Muḥammad Thanā' Allāh Pānīpatī dar radd-i mu'ta*.⁴⁴ In these writings, Thanā' Allāh's style reflects his academic and professional background; it tends to be legalistic and dialectical. His language is sharp and sometimes harsh probably because of his perception of the Shi'i threat to the survival of Sunni Islam. The content of these five writings on Shi'ism is much more wide-ranging than the writings of Shaykh Sirhindī and Shāh Valī Allāh.

His major work on the topic, *al-Sayf al-maslūl* (written around 1191/1778), is more comprehensive and far-reaching than the analogous writings of Shaykh Sirhindī and Shāh Valī Allāh. In its format and content, it is the most complete work of Thanā' Allāh on Shi'ism. The *al-Sayf al-maslūl*, composed of seven chapters plus introduction and conclusion, tends to focus on the vindication of Sunni tenets and the criticism of Shi'i faith more than its predecessors' writings. In it, he covers such topics as the refutation of the "recusants' creed" (*ravāfiḍ*), confirmation of the Sunni faith, explication of Sunni beliefs, and some distinctive features of Sunni law; *imāmat*; hierarchal classification of the companions; and refutation of the Shi'i indictments against the Caliphs and other *ṣaḥāba*. Nonetheless, Thanā' Allāh wrote a separate section on the acceptability of Yazīd Ibn Mu'āwiyya's (d. 63/683) vilification.⁴⁵ Like Shaykh Sirhindī, Thanā' Allāh begins his work with a description of various sects of the Shi'a, and their divergent beliefs

Allāh; and Ridwān al-Dīn Khān's *Qāḍi Thanā' Allāh Pānīpatī avr unkī Tafsīr-i maḥzarī kā Tahqīqī Mu'tala'a*, Aligarh: unpublished Ph.D. theses, 1984.

⁴¹ Ghulām Muṣṭafā, *Lavā'ih khānaqāh-yi mazhariyya: Maktūbāt-i dīr*, Karachi: Āfrayshīā Press 1975, 239.

⁴² The only manuscript copy of the *Risāla dar radd-i ravāfiḍ* is preserved in Abū l-Ḥasan Zayd Fārūqī's personal collection in Delhi. 'Arif, *Tadhkira*, 533.

⁴³ I did not have access to this treatise. It is mentioned by Ridwān al-Dīn Khān in his Ph.D. dissertation *Qāḍi*, 162.

⁴⁴ The manuscript copies of *al-Shihāb* and the *Risāla dar radd-i ravāfiḍ* are preserved in the personal collection of Alif Allāh 'Uthmānī, Sargodha, Pakistan ('Arif, *Tadhkira*, 530, 584). I gratefully acknowledge receiving a photocopy of *al-Shihāb* from Dr. 'Arif. Thanā' Allāh's five works on Shi'ism when placed in the total corpus of his writings reflect his commitment to the renewal of Muslims' ethical values. He produced three works in Persian on beliefs and practices based on Ḥanafī law, six books on various aspects of Sufism, four works on the Prophet's biography and, his most important contribution, a commentary of the entire Qur'ān. He believed that the purpose of this major twelve-volume *Tafsīr-i maḥzarī* was to sustain the *tajdid* movement started by Sirhindī and Shāh Valī Allāh. For more details, see Sajida Alvi, "Qāḍi Thanā' Allāh".

⁴⁵ Thanā' Allāh, *al-Sayf*, 212-214.

and practices, and ends recounting the virtues of the Imams and the Prophet's family (*ahl al-bayt*).

The *al-Sayf al-maslūl* is also the forerunner of Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz's famous *Tuhfa-yi ithnā' 'ashariyya*, as it shares with it a number of features, namely the organisation of chapters, and the content and citation of Qur'anic verses.⁴⁶ Rizvi conjectured that although the *al-Sayf al-maslūl* was written before the *Tuhfa-yi ithnā' 'ashariyya*, it might not have been available to Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz.⁴⁷ However, in the light of the close association of Thanā' Allāh with Shāh Valī Allāh's family, it is unlikely that Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz could have been unaware of the *al-Sayf*'s existence.⁴⁸

Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz did not assume any title to signify that God had designated him for a specific role in the community. However, his contemporaries and those that followed eventually honoured him with different titles, such as the Luminary of India (*Sirāj al-Hind*), the Traditionist (*muḥaddith*). Posterity acknowledged Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz's erudition and placed him among the top ranks of religious reformers.⁴⁹ Author of 22 known works, his writings ranged from the philosophy of the Shi'i philosopher Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1049/1640)⁵⁰ to *ḥadīth*, Qur'anic exegesis, and the fundamentals of Sunni creed to rhetoric, genealogies, music and Persian literature. He was a connoisseur of Indian vocal music, Urdu and Persian literature, as well as an accomplished calligrapher and dexterous horse-rider. He thus might be termed as a "Renaissance man". He followed his father, Shāh Valī Allāh, in teaching and writing on various aspects of Islam. During the second half of the 18th century and the first quarter of the 19th, he became a prominent Sufi scholar, a specialist of the *ḥadīth* (*muḥaddith*) and an exegete (*mufasssīr*) who left a deep imprint on Is-

⁴⁶ For example, in the first chapter titled "Refutation (*ibṭāl*) of the Shi'i Creed and Confirmation (*ithbāt*) of the Sunni Faith", many Qur'anic verses and their interpretations are similar. See Thanā' Allāh, *al-Sayf*, 9-13, and Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz, *Tuhfa-yi ithnā' 'ashariyya*, Urdu translation by Sa'd Ḥasan Khān, Karachi: Nūr Muḥammad Kārkhāna-yi Tijārat-i Kutub n.d., 587-589. In the fourth chapter devoted to the rejection of Shi'i indictments against some of the Prophet's companions, Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz includes eleven of the fifteen indictments against Abū Bakr analogous to the *al-Sayf al-maslūl*. The arguments and citations from the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* are the same, with some additional information and discussion.

⁴⁷ Rizvi, *Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz*, 562.

⁴⁸ Thanā' Allāh praised Abū l-Naṣr Naṣir al-Dīn Muḥammad, known as Khwāja al-Ḥusaynī l-Makki l-Madani, originally from Kabul, for his erudition and extensive study of writings of the *ravāfiq* on the topics of exegesis (*tafsīr*), *ḥadīth*, Islamic law and jurisprudence (*fiqh*), fundamental beliefs of the faith (*'aqā'id*) and history (*tārīkh*). Thanā' Allāh acknowledged that he benefited from al-Ḥusaynī's work (without mentioning its title), and borrowed the Shi'i *ḥadīth* from this work, *al-Sayf*, 3. Rizvi noted that the *al-Sayf al-maslūl* was simply an abridgement of the *al-Ṣawā'iq al-muḥriqa* (See Rizvi, *Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz*, 563). There is no hint of it in the Introduction of *al-Sayf al-maslūl*.

⁴⁹ Sayyid Abū l-'Alā Mawdūdī, *Tajdīd wa ihyā'-i dīn*, 6th edition, Lahore: n.p. 1955, 114-115.

⁵⁰ Despite the fact that Mullā Ṣadrā was a Shi'i scholar, his works were a part of the Sunni *madrassa* curriculum of the Indian Subcontinent.

lamic learning through his writings and pupils who flocked to his Madrasa-yi Raḥīmiyya from all over India.⁵¹ Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, similarly to Thanā’ Allāh, witnessed the disintegration of the social and political order, the transfer of political power into Shi‘i hands, and the consequent growth of popularity of Shi‘i practices among Sunni circles in northern India.

Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz addressed the superiority of Sunni credo and refutation of Shi‘ism more than the other three authors did.⁵² Over and above the *Tuhfa-yi ithnā’ ‘ashariyya*, he wrote epistles on the superiority of Abū Bakr and ‘Umar over the rest of the Prophet’s companions⁵³, on the superiority of Abū Bakr over all other companions of the Prophet,⁵⁴ and the fallacy of Shi‘i arguments concerning the Prophet’s appointment of ‘Alī in Ghadir Khumm.⁵⁵

Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz wrote several epistles on topics such as Shi‘ism, the martyrdom of the Imams Ḥasan (d. probably in 48/669) and Ḥusayn (d. 60/680), the superiority of Sunni Islam, and the pre-eminence of the first two Caliphs, Abū Bakr and ‘Umar, over the other companions of the Prophet; however, his most comprehensive and controversial work remains the *Tuhfa-yi ithnā’ ‘ashariyya* completed in 1203-04/1789-90.⁵⁶ Compared to the other works addressed in this study, the *Tuhfa-yi ithnā’ ‘ashariyya* is wider in scope and has a larger amount of detailed arguments. Its twelve chapters comprise the history of Shi‘ism and its various branches; Shi‘i history and traditions (*akhbār*); Shi‘i/Sunni debate on divinity (*ilāhiyyāt*); prophethood (*nubuwwat*); *imāmat*; Islamic law and jurisprudence (*fiqh*); the Shi‘i “strategems” (*makā’id*); the Shi‘i indictments (*maṭā’in*) of the first three caliphs, ‘Ā’isha and some of the Prophet’s companions (including the author’s response to these allegations). The work closes with a chapter on praise of the Prophet and his family, the attachment to the Imams (*tavallā*), and a discussion of the public cursing of the first three caliphs (*tabarru’*), referred to by Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz as love and enmity respectively.⁵⁷

⁵¹ See the chart prepared by Farhān Aḥmad Nizāmī on Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s influence on learning activities taking place in *madrasas* and *khānaqāhs* and also on religious writings produced in north-west India in the first half of 19th century, *Madrasas, Scholars and Saints: Muslim Response to the British Presence in Delhi and the Upper Doab 1803-1857*, unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Oxford 1983, Appendix B, 274.

⁵² See his brief epistles, *Risāla-yi fayd-i ‘amm*, cited by Rizvi, *Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz*, 99; *Wasīlat al-najāt* in: *Faḍā’il-i ṣaḥāba wa ahl al-bayt*, Karachi: Pak Academy 1965, 201-226.

⁵³ Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, *Sirr al-jalīl fī mas’alāt al-tafḍīl*, in: *Faḍā’il*, 89-108.

⁵⁴ Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, *‘Azīz al-iqtibās fī faḍā’il akhyār al-nās* in: *Faḍā’il*, 145-166. It also justifies the order of succession on the authority of Qur’ān and *ḥadīth*.

⁵⁵ The name of this treatise is *Dalā’il-i arba’ shī’a wa bayān-i ḥadīth-i thaḡalayn*. Rizvi, *Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz*, 99.

⁵⁶ For details of Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s writings, see Rizvi, *Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz*, 98-100. For the choice of title, see Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, *Tuhfa*, 1.

⁵⁷ For a detailed discussion of the sources of the *Tuhfa-yi ithnā’ ‘ashariyya* and the analysis of its content, see Rizvi, *Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz*, 245-355. *Tabarru’* in the Shi‘i doctrine refers to the obligation of hating the enemies of the Prophet and the Imams. Concerning the central

Issues of Concern

Beliefs and practices of Shi'ism that most attracted Sunni ulama's attention ranged from missionary activities to temporary marriage (*muṭʿa*) and punishments for the vilification of the Prophet's companions envisaged by Sunni law. However, the question of religious and political authority after the Prophet's death appeared to be their major preoccupation; and all of them were unanimous in expressing their abhorrence of the Shi'i practice of vilifying the first three caliphs and 'Ā'isha. Here, I will limit my discussion to the issue of *khilāfat* and *imāmat* and briefly refer to these writers' views about the Shi'is' vilification practices.

The subject of political and religious authority was of critical importance to all. These scholars joined earlier generations of intellectuals in recognising that the years following the Prophet's death were crucial in shaping the consciousness of Muslims in later Islamic history and eventually resulted in tensions between Sunni and Shi'i ulama on the issue of succession. Dabashi has explained this phenomenon through the Weberian categories of "routinisation" and "perpetuation" of charisma through the Prophet's progeny – i.e. the Imams – for the Sunnis⁵⁸ and for the Shi'is⁵⁹ respectively.

In the 18th century, while writing on the charismatic authority of the Prophet Muḥammad, our scholars considered the history of the first three decades after the Prophet's death to be of fundamental importance to Sunni Islam. After the textual authority of the Qur'ān and the beautiful and most perfect model (*uswa ḥasana*) represented by the Prophet, it was his family and companions that determined the blessed path for the Sunni. It is because of this conviction that the scholars addressed here have tackled the issue of *khilāfat* versus *imāmat*, and sought to present the Sunni interpretation of the history of thirty years following the Prophet's death to their readership. Because of the Shi'i belief that 'Alī and his descendants were rightful successors to the Prophet, all of them discussed in detail the credentials of the first two caliphs – Abū Bakr and 'Umar – and their service to Islam, in order to prove their superiority over the fourth Caliph, 'Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib (r. 35-40/656-661).

Shaykh Sirhindī and Thanā' Allāh concurred in their view that the issue of *khilāfat* versus *imāmat* had never been an integral part of the Sunni belief system and the laws of their faith. However, because of the position taken by the Shi'is,

importance of the *tabarru'* in the Twelver Shi'i system of belief, see Etan Kohlberg, "Barā'a in Shi'i doctrine", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 7 (1986), 139-175.

⁵⁸ According to Hamid Dabashi, resumption of ordinary life requires accepting the reality of Muḥammad's death and internalising his charisma into all spheres of life, political, social and religious. For a fuller discussion, see Hamid Dabashi, *Authority in Islam: From the Rise of Muḥammad to the Establishment of Umayyads*, New Brunswick, USA: Transaction Publishers 1989, 71-93.

⁵⁹ For details, see Dabashi, *Authority*, 95-120.

the Sunnis made this subject part of their *kalām*.⁶⁰ Shaykh Sirhindī's letter (*maktūb*) to Khwāja Muḥammad Taqī, primarily devoted to the issue of *khilāfat* and *imāmat*, provided a detailed exposition of his views. At the very outset, he categorically stated his belief that the privileged position of the first two Caliphs (*tafḍīl-i shayk-hayn*) and love for the Prophet's two sons in law (ʿAlī and ʿUthmān), were the cardinal principles of Sunni Islam. Drawing on the authority of Imām Muḥammad Ibn Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204/820) and Imām Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī (d. 324/935-36), he noted that the superiority of the first two Caliphs was acknowledged by ʿAlī as well.⁶¹ The political strife and chaos common during the caliphates of ʿUthmān (the third caliph, r. 23-35/644-56) and ʿAlī (the fourth caliph) led to some misunderstandings about succession to the Prophet. In order to alleviate confusion on the subject and prevent division within the community, Sunni tradition made of reverence for ʿAlī a doctrinal cornerstone. The Sunni position, according to Shaykh Sirhindī, represented a more moderate stance than the extreme position adopted by the Khawārij (whose doctrine was characterised by an intense grudge against the *ahl al-bayt*) and by the Shiʿis (who exaggerated expressions of love for the Prophet's family).⁶²

In his efforts to correct the misrepresentation of Islamic history he ascribed to the Shiʿis, Shāh Valī Allāh adopted a slightly different argument. In his view, just as *sharʿat* was revealed through the Prophet's intuition, through intimate divine communication with the Prophet's soul (*kalām-i nafsī*), and through the revelation, so was the *khilāfat* determined by certain brief references in the Qurʾān, intimate communication with the Prophet's soul, and by Prophetic dreams and intuition.⁶³ As an exegete, Shāh Valī Allāh refrained from using a dialectical style, and chose 20 verses⁶⁴ from the Qurʾān, which in his opinion bore testimony to the order of the caliphate. He wished to convince his readership that the Caliphate of the first three Caliphs did not result in the usurpation of power from the "rightful" claimant – i.e., ʿAlī – and was not at all that great tyranny of the first century of Islam as alleged by the Shiʿi ulama. To reinstate the rightful position of the first three Caliphs and to restore their integrity and righteousness, he cited and discussed the 20 Qurʾanic verses. In support of his argument about the pre-requisites of the *khilāfat*,

⁶⁰ Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī, *Maktūbāt-i Imām Rabbanī*, Quetta: Maktabat al-Quds 1999 reprint, vol. 2, part 7, letter 67, 47-48; Thanāʾ Allāh, *al-Sayf*, 90.

⁶¹ Shaykh Sirhindī, *Maktūbāt*, vol. 2, part 6, letter 36, 74-90. Shaykh Sirhindī added that on the basis of ʿAlī's acceptance of the first two caliphs as the best individuals in the Muslim community (*ummat*), the leading Shiʿi scholar ʿAbd al-Razzāq became convinced of the superiority of the first two caliphs over ʿAlī. Ibid., 75.

⁶² Ibid., 75-76.

⁶³ Shāh Valī Allāh, *Izālat*, vol. 1, 9-10.

⁶⁴ Shāh Valī Allāh wrote a comprehensive exegesis of the following verses, with detailed description of the background and context of revelation: XXIV : 55; XXII : 38, XL : 40-41; XXI : 105; V : 54-56; VIII : 16, 15, 29; IX : 32-33; III : 110; LVII : 110; XV : 9; LXXV : 16-19. He also provided the Shiʿi interpretation of some of these verses. Shāh Valī Allāh, *Izālat*, vol. 1, 76-194.

the legitimacy of the Caliphate of the first four Caliphs, and the superiority of Abū Bakr and 'Umar over 'Uthmān and 'Alī, he referred to nine *ḥadīth* on the subject from Abū Bakr⁶⁵, 27 from 'Umar,⁶⁶ 17 from 'Uthmān,⁶⁷ and 36 from 'Alī.⁶⁸

The *ḥadīth* ascribed to 'Alī are of special interest. Among them, 'Alī confirmed that the *khalīfat* should be from the Quraysh tribe and recognized that the first two Caliphs were considered by the Prophet to be superior, ranking just below the Prophet because of their personal and qualities as a leader.⁶⁹ 'Alī also acknowledged the superiority of Abū Bakr and 'Umar, and is credited with saying that whoever considered 'Alī superior to Abū Bakr and 'Umar was an "unlawful innovator" (*bid'atī*) and liable to eighty whips.⁷⁰ According to 'Alī, the Caliphate was rightfully Abū Bakr's because of his personal qualities and virtues which made him the most worthy member of the community. Abū Bakr was designated by the Prophet to lead congregational prayers during the last days of the Prophet's life, and with his death, the *khalāfat* of prophet-hood (*nubuwwat*) ended.⁷¹ 'Alī is also quoted as having stated that he was not a party to caliph 'Uthmān's assassination.⁷²

In the *Izālat al-khafā'*, Shāh Valī Allāh wrote a separate chapter on the superiority of the first two caliphs, although he had already written an independent work, *Qurrat al-'Aynayn*, on the subject. The main argument in the *Izālat al-khafā'* was that the Caliphates of Abū Bakr and 'Umar were superior to 'Alī's because they continued the legacy of prophet-hood and maintained the spiritual atmosphere prevalent during the Prophet's life. 'Alī's Caliphate was characterised by saintliness, but a saint was lower in status than a prophet. Therefore, 'Alī could not be deemed equal to the first two Caliphs. He supported this point with references to the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* literature.

Thanā' Allāh discussed the superiority of the first three Caliphs concisely only. Following Shāh Valī Allāh's style, he supported his argument by citing from the Qur'ān, *ḥadīth* and narratives of the companions, including many from 'Alī himself.⁷³ Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz did not dwell on the superiority of the first three Caliphs and did not look for justifications to the hierarchy of the first four, 'Alī being the last. Instead, like Thanā' Allāh, he addressed the issue of political leadership. They both stipulated the basic characteristics and qualities an Imam/*khalīfa* (they used the terms interchangeably) should have: he should be a Muslim, male, free, wise,

⁶⁵ Ibid., 215-224.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 225-243.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 244-253.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 253-272.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 254-255.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 261.

⁷¹ Ibid., 265.

⁷² Ibid., 269-272.

⁷³ Thanā' Allāh, *al-Sayf*, 176-187.



mature, just and from the Quraysh.⁷⁴ Thanā' Allāh, however, limited the qualifications of the *khalīfa* to his being free, just and male, while he considered optional the kinship with the Quraysh. If a slave or an impudent person (*fāsiq*), a woman, or a non-Qurayshite came to power, it was incumbent on the community to obey him/her.⁷⁵ Thanā' Allāh challenged and refuted the Shi'ī theory of *imāmat* that the Imam be impeccable (*ma'sūm*), perform miracles, have designation (*naṣṣ*) from the Prophet, and have Prophet-like direct communication with the angel.

Thanā' Allāh based his rejection on the absence of a large scale transmission (*mutawātir*) of Shi'ī *ḥadīth* on the subject. He also disputed the Shi'ī claim that the appointment of an Imam is divine grace (*luṭf*) and that it is obligatory for God to appoint one.⁷⁶ Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz agreed with Thanā' Allāh in questioning the Shi'ī view that the designation of the Imams was incumbent upon God and that they were symbols of His benevolence. He considered any human attempt to attach obligations to God as a degradation of his omnipotence. The appointment of a leader should be the responsibility of people, for they are directly affected by their ruler's actions. Furthermore, if God were to appoint an individual to guide the people or designated some individuals to be Imam for the entire world forever, this would create dissension because of conflicting opinions and thereby negate the very purpose of *imāmat*. Consequently, the designated Imams would be forced to hide their identities and practice tactical dissimulation (*taqiyya*) to protect their lives. As history showed, all individuals whom the Shi'ī considered their Imams had met such a fate.⁷⁷ Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz was willing to accept the Shi'ī assertion that an Imam's appointment was based on divine grace only if such an appointee enjoyed the support of an overwhelming majority of people, and had the power to subdue his enemies. If such an appointment led to chaos and created dissension among people, the very thought of considering it a divine benevolence would be absurd.⁷⁸ Also, Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz, in his narrative, questioned the historical truth of the imamate theory of political authority. He argued that the Shi'īs' belief of the occultation (*ghaybat*) of the 12th Imam and the tactical dissimulation of the Imam (as presented by their ulama), lacked veracity.⁷⁹ He

⁷⁴ These are known prerequisites enumerated earlier by political theorists such as Abū l-Ḥasan 'Alī l-Māwardī (d. 448/1058), and others.

⁷⁵ Thanā' Allāh, *al-Sayf*, 91-92.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 93.

⁷⁷ Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz, *Tuhfa*, 272-273.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 273.

⁷⁹ Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz derided the Shi'ī scholar, Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d. 436/1044), for giving his rationale of occultation of Imām Muḥammad b. 'Askarī – that he was initially visible to his friends and hidden from his enemies but went in occultation because of fear of his unwise friends. There was no evidence in historical sources that the Imām was persecuted or was sought after by any particular group (Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz, *Tuhfa*, 275). Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz also found it hard to believe that while endowed with the knowledge of the past and future (as claimed by the Shi'īs), why should the hidden Imām be afraid that some one would kill

held the view that Shi'i emphasis on the impeccability of the Imams and their designation by God was intended to deny the legitimacy of the Caliphate of first three caliphs – however, the Sunni could not prove that the first three caliphs had these qualities.⁸⁰

Thanā' Allāh repeatedly stressed the significance of political leadership for Islam. He remained unconvinced by the Shi'i interpretation of the functions of an Imam – because a hidden and powerless Imam could not contribute to the welfare (*maṣlaḥat*) of his people.⁸¹

The vilification of some of the companions of the Prophet and 'Ā'isha was offensive to the religious sensibilities of our authors. After all, the champions of Islam who continued the Prophet's legacy through their exemplary behaviour and character were under attack. The attack on the Prophet's companions, declared Shaykh Sirhindī, amounted to the repudiation of *sharī'at*, which was transmitted to Muslims through the Prophet's companions.⁸²

In a systematic way, Thanā' Allāh and Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz supplied counter-arguments to the Shi'i allegations against some of the companions and 'Ā'isha: eleven in the *al-Sayf al-maslūl* and fifteen in the *Tuhfa-yi ithnā'* 'ashariyya in support of Abū Bakr; eleven in both *al-Sayf al-maslūl* and *Tuhfa-yi ithnā'* 'ashariyya in support of 'Umar; and fifteen in the *al-Sayf al-maslūl* and ten in the *Tuhfa-yi ithnā'* 'ashariyya in support of 'Uthmān. They also challenged the Shi'i charge that 'Ā'isha disobeyed the Qur'anic injunction (XXXIII : 33) requiring the Prophet's wives to stay at home, and then the criticism of her waging war against 'Alī in the Battle of Jamal (Camel) that took place in Basra, Iraq, in 35/656, and of preventing Imām Ḥasan Ibn 'Alī from being buried in the Prophet's tomb.

Polemical Debates or Efforts to Curb the Popularity of Shi'ism?

In providing a rationale for their writings, all of the four authors sought to educate their readership. In particular, their writings reflect deep concern over the growing popularity of Shi'ism in India. Bahādur Shāh I (r. 1118-23/1707-12), Awrangzeb's son and successor, for example, openly professed Shi'ism. However, in face of protests, the Emperor was forced to withdraw his edict on including a reference to 'Alī in the Friday congregational prayer sermon (*khutba*).⁸³

him by deceiving him as, for example, a Shi'a killed Maẓhar Jān-i Jānān (the leading Naqshbandiyya Sufi, and Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz's friend and contemporary). Ibid., 276.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 279-283.

⁸¹ Thanā' Allāh, *al-Sayf*, 91-93.

⁸² Shaykh Sirhindī, *Radd*, 68-71.

⁸³ Ghulām Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'i reported that the emperor's ruling, to include in the Friday prayer *khutba*, the edict, "'Alī the God's favourite and the legatee of the Prophet's will" ('*Alī Valī Allāh, Vaṣī-yi Rasūl Allāh*) caused riots in various parts of India. Consequently, in Lahore, there was a public debate between the Sunni and Shi'i ulama, and the Emperor

Against the backdrop of many Shi‘i émigrés to Mughal India holding high-profile positions in Jahāngir’s administration, Sirhindī, considering himself a member of the ulama class, presented his views in a five-point debate between the ulama of Mashhad and those of Transoxiana.⁸⁴ Sirhindī indicated that in the past he had refuted the Shi‘i claims only in general, oral discussions. Now, he felt that he must set his position in writing in order to achieve a maximum effect.⁸⁵

In the twilight of the Mughal rule, Shāh Valī Allāh wrote the *Izālat al-khafā’* and *Khilāfat al-khulafā’* to curb the spread of “heretical innovation” (*bid‘at*) of Shi‘ism, which had created doubts in the minds of the common people [Sunni] and a large number of individuals in this country [India], according to Shāh Valī Allāh;⁸⁶ and many Muslims started to doubt the legitimacy of the caliphate of the Rightly Guided Caliphs (*khulafā’-yi rāshidīn*).⁸⁷ He felt compelled to vindicate the superior position of the first three caliphs, which for him was the root (*aṣl*) of the principles of the faith (*uṣūl al-dīn*). “If people do not firmly adhere to this *aṣl*, no aspect of *sharī‘a* could be strengthened”, wrote Shāh Valī Allāh.⁸⁸ Shaykh Sirhindī and Thanā’ Allāh both considered the subject a subsidiary principle (*furū‘*). Shāh Valī Allāh believed that the Qur’anic ordinances could not be understood without explaining the position of these Caliphs; and *ḥadīth* could not have evolved into a systematic source [of Islamic law] without their input. Other religious sciences (*funūn*) such as the proper manner of reading the Qur’ān (*qirā‘at*), exegesis (*tafsīr*), and mystical path (*sulūk*) would have no basis without the traditions of these Caliphs, because the compilation of the Qur’ān, the development of judicial process, and juridical ordinances owed their existence to these caliphs.⁸⁹

By contrast, Thanā’ Allāh’s and Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s position on various issues reflect the changed realities of their time – i.e. the establishment of the state of Avadh and Shi‘ism’s deepening roots in northern India. Thanā’ Allāh, for example, states:

At this time, the *Ithnā’ ‘ashariyya* religion has emerged [as a strong religion]. Most of [my] contemporaries, especially those in Pānīpat, whose ancestors were *ahl-i sunnat*, went astray because of their ignorance and stupidity. This author [Thanā’ Allāh] wished

himself participated in these arguments, and then restored the practice of Awrangzeb’s period. See Ghulām Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā‘ī, *Sīyar al-mut’akhirīn*, vol. 2, Lucknow: Nawal Kishore 1886, 381. For details of other controversies, see Muḥammad Ayūb Qādirī’s Introduction to Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, *Faḍā’il-i saḥāba*, Karachi: Jawayd Press 1965, 13-17; and Khāfi Khān, *Muntakhab al-lubab*, vol. 2, Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal 1874, 681-683.

⁸⁴ Sirhindī, *Radd*, 18, 77-78.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 18.

⁸⁶ Shāh Valī Allāh, *Izālat al-khafā’ ‘an khilāfat al-khulafā’*, Persian Text and Urdu translation, vol. 1, Karachi: n.d., 8-9.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 8.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 8-9.

to write a book to condemn the *ravāfiq* in simple Persian for the benefit of the common folk [in the hope that] it might guide some people and that the author might receive a reward (*ajr va thawāb*) for it in the hereafter.⁹⁰

He also wished to present his argument in such a way that the “*ravāfiq* would not have any room for boasting”.⁹¹ Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz expressed similar concerns over the rising popularity of Shi‘ism in northern India, and lamented the Sunnis’ ignorance of their own history and creed. He was also disturbed by their inability to present a coherent and articulate defence of their faith. The objectives of the *Tuhfa-yi ithnā’ ‘ashariyya*, according to Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, were twofold: to educate people enough to prevent them from going astray; and to provide them with knowledge of the Sunni and Shi‘i faiths so that they could hold on to their line of argument in sectarian dialectical debate.⁹² This work differs from others discussed in this essay both in its intended readership and in its style. Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz wrote it for those people who had knowledge of dogmatic theology (*kalām*) and subsidiary principles of both the Shi‘i and Sunni faiths. It was his opinion that those who knew sources of Shi‘i faith but not of Sunni creed could benefit from this work. However, those who knew only Sunni sources were unable to benefit from it, because it was based on Shi‘i theology (*kalām*) and traditions (*riwāyāt*).⁹³ Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz demonstrated his knowledge and understanding of the science of sources of law (*uṣūl-i fiqh*) of both the Shi‘ism and Sunnism in *Tuhfa-yi ithnā’ ‘ashariyya*. However, he was not proud of this work, as he used the given names of himself, his father and grandfather: Ḥāfiẓ Ghulām Ḥalīm Ibn Shaykh Quṭb al-Dīn Ibn Shaykh Abū l-Fayḍ Dihlawī.⁹⁴

In his assessment of the situation at the time, Rizvi states: “No effort was made to develop mutual understanding although the beliefs uniting the two sects greatly outnumbered those dividing them. Both Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz and Thanā’ Allāh urged their disciples to boycott the Shi‘a socially”.⁹⁵ It is true that Thanā’ Allāh and Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz censured social interaction with the Shi‘a or inter-marriage between Shi‘is and Sunnis. However, such an attitude might have arisen from the authors’ concern over the spread of Shi‘ism and their sense of responsibility to educate the literate and lesser knowledgeable Sunni ulama in controversial religious matters.

⁹⁰ Thanā’ Allāh, *al-Sayf*, 2.

⁹¹ Ibid., 3.

⁹² Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, *Tuhfa*, 1.

⁹³ Ibid., 2.

⁹⁴ Rizvi, *Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz*, 259.

⁹⁵ Rizvi, *Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz*, 576. However, Muḥammad Ja‘far Shāh Phalwārī did later on what according to Rizvi, Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz could not do. He stipulated the common traditions in Sunni and Shi‘i faith, rituals and practices, in his work, *Majma‘ al-Baḥrayn*, Lahore: Idāra-yi thaqāfat-i islāmiyya 1969.



Concluding remarks

Indeed, the two main sects of Islam in India influenced each other over the centuries through their common Perso-Islamic heritage. A study of literary and historical sources confirms that during the 18th century, Shi'ism gained popularity in northern India, and that certain Shi'i rituals and beliefs became acceptable in the Sunni popular culture – primarily through Urdu poetry⁹⁶, devotional and spiritual music performances (*qawwālī*), poetic symposia in praise of the Prophet (*na'tiyya mushā'ira*), and public display of Shi'i rituals in the month of Muḥarram. We also understand that in Delhi and elsewhere, there were professional singers of elegies (*marthiyya*) who caused crowds (Shi'is, Sunnis and Hindus alike)⁹⁷ to gather and passionately mourn the martyrdom of Imām Ḥusayn (killed in 60/680 by the Umayyad Caliph, Yazīd Ibn Mu'āwiyya) during the first ten days of Muḥarram. In these occasions, Yazīd (r. 60-63/680-683) was vilified and graphic details of the tragedy of the martyrdom of Imām Ḥusayn in Karbala were represented and re-enacted.⁹⁸ From the primary sources, we are also informed that on the 12th of Muḥarram (the day fixed for pilgrimage (*ziyārat*)), the crowds would throng to the pilgrimage lodge (*dargāh*) of Qadamgāh-yi 'Alī (a religious site in Delhi, with a footprint attributed to 'Alī), where devotional songs and elegies were sung by professional performers to commemorate the tragedy of Karbala.⁹⁹ It is also a historical fact that when the Sayyid brothers, Quṭb al-Mulk 'Abd Allāh Khān Bārha (d. 1134/1722) and Amīr al-Umarā' Ḥusayn 'Alī Khān Bārha (d. 1132/1720), ascended the Mughal power structure, they became a dominant force on the political scene and actively participated in the Muḥarram rituals. As a result of their in-

⁹⁶ Scott Kugle, "Courting 'Alī: Urdu Poetry, Shi'i Piety and Courtesan Power in Hyderabad", in: *Muslim Cultures*, 125-166; Syed Akbar Hyder "Recasting Karbala in the Genre of Urdu *Marsiya*", *SAGAR: South Asia Graduate Research Journal* 1 (n.d.).

⁹⁷ Sadiq Naqvi & Rao V. Kishan, eds., *The Muharram Ceremonies among the Non-Muslims of Andhra Pradesh*, Hyderabad: Bab-al-Ilm Society 2004.

⁹⁸ In *Muraqqa'-yi Dīhlī*, an important source on Muslim culture and society in 18th century Delhi, there is a separate list of the *marthiyya* reciters (*marthiyya khwān*) who were hired by the Mughal nobility and who recited the compositions of famous contemporary poets of Delhi. See Navvāb Dargāh Qulī Khān Salār Jang, *Muraqqa'-yi Dīhlī. Muqaddima az Ḥakīm Muẓaffar Ḥusayn*, Hyderabad, Deccan: Taj Press n.d., 50-55. This tradition is well and alive in contemporary India and Pakistan. Concerning these ceremonials in contemporary India and particularly in Deccan see Syed Akbar Hyder, *Reliving Karbala: Martyrdom in South Asian Memory*, New York: Oxford University Press 2006; David Pinault, *The Shi'ites: Ritual and Popular Piety in a Muslim Community*, New York: St. Martin's Press 1992; Vernon James Schubel, *Religious Performance in Contemporary Islam: Shi'i Devotional Rituals in South Asia*, Columbia: University of South California Press 1993; Karen G. Ruffle, "Karbala in the Indo-Persian Imaginaire: the Indianizing of the Wedding of Qāsim and Faṭīma Kubrā", in: *Muslim Cultures*, 181-200; Andreas D'Souza, "The Influence of *Rawḍa-Ḥwānī* on the Development of *Nahwa* in the Deccan", in: idem., 167-179.

⁹⁹ Dargāh Qulī, *Muraqqa'*, 3.

fluence, some Shi'i beliefs and practices became part of the Sunni cultured social strata.¹⁰⁰

Despite their condemnation of some Shi'i practices, often expressed in sharp words, the four scholars analysed here did not reject Shi'ism in unequivocal fashion. Shāh Vali Allāh, the integrator and the harmoniser, in the works considered here designates the Shi'a with the term *imāmiyyat* instead of the less respectful *ravāfiḍ*. As a *mujaddid*, he wished to unite the Muslim community by addressing divisive issues in an authoritative manner, referring to the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* along with accepted Shi'i sources. It is also important to note that the love for the Prophet's family was a dominant theme in all religious literature and Urdu poetry written during this period.¹⁰¹ Shāh Vali Allāh's writings on Shi'ism can be properly understood only against the backdrop of his mindset and the prevailing socio-religious context of his lifetime. Unlike Shaykh Sirhindī and Thanā' Allāh Pānīpatī, Shāh Vali Allāh was not argumentative, judgmental or confrontational. He was concerned about restoring the first three caliphs, 'Ā'isha and the companions of the Prophet as models to be looked up to for inspiration and emulation. This preoccupation appears to be paramount in his works.

As a footnote, it must be added that today (1430/2009) Shāh Vali Allāh is ranked as the most influential thinker of the modern period. However, he was not well-known in his lifetime, even in India. His works did not become the core of the curriculum in his own *madrassa*, and they were not discussed, critiqued, or annotated by his progeny, as was the practice in traditional schools. His ideas, however, became attractive to the modernists, reformers, and traditionalists of diverse schools of thought only about three generations later. The prominent reformist thinkers of the 19th and 20th century, such as Sayyid Aḥmad Khān (d. 1315/1898), Muḥammad Iqbāl (d. 1356/1938), and Sayyid Abū l-A'ḷā Mawdūdī, among many others, acknowledged their debt to Shāh Vali Allāh.¹⁰² It is also interesting to note that the phenomenon of polemical debates *then* and unprovoked hostility between the sects *today* is indeed quite striking. *Then*, at the times of Shāh Vali Allāh, for

¹⁰⁰ For details of the influence of Shi'ism on the Sunni high culture in Delhi and bibliographic references, see the Muḥammad Ayūb Qādiri's Introduction to 'Abd al-'Aziz, *Faḍa'il*, 13-18.

¹⁰¹ For example, a Sufi order which was founded in the 18th century and which was known as *Tarīqat-i Muḥammadiyya* (a fusion of Naqshbandiyya and Qādiriyya orders) had love for Muḥammad as its central focus. See Annemarie Schimmel, "The Golden Chain of 'Sincere Muḥammadans'," in: *The Rose and the Rock: Mystical and Rational Elements in the Intellectual History of South Asian Islam*, Bruce B. Lawrence, ed., Durham: NC 1979, 104-134.

¹⁰² For details, see, Ron Geaves, "A Comparison of Maulana Mawdudi (1903-1980, *sic*) and Shah Wali-Allah (1703-1762): A Pure Islam or Cultural Heritage", *The Islamic Quarterly: A Review of Islamic Culture* 41, no. 3 (1997), 167-186. For a concise overview of Shāh Vali Allāh's life and for details of his legacy and the claim of various movements and educational institutions in subsequent centuries for their connection with him, see Hermansen, *The Conclusive Argument*, Introduction, 13-16.

example, the sectarian debates were solidly grounded in theological, juridical and philosophical discourses.

In the prefaces of their works, three of the authors discussed various sects and off-shoots of Shi'ism, primarily to show inconsistencies in Shi'i beliefs and practices. At the same time, however, they all devoted a chapter or a section to their expressions of love for the *ahl al-bayt*. Sirhindī considered the Twelver Shi'i love for the *ahl al-bayt* flawed because they revered some members and hated others.¹⁰³ Shāh Valī Allāh expressed his passionate love for the Prophet's family, particularly for 'Alī.¹⁰⁴ Thanā' Allāh endorsed an open condemnation of Yazid in the *al-Sayf al-maslūl* and ended his work by recounting the noble deeds and dispositions of the Imam and the *ahl al-bayt*. In the same vein, Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz also considered certain rituals and practices (e.g. mourning (*ta'ziyyat*) and observing mourning (*ta'ziyyat-i dārī*)) as abominable; but he showed great reverence for the tenth day of Muḥarram (*āshūrā*) by holding commemoration sessions (*majlis*) on that day every year.¹⁰⁵ He also wrote a short epistle, titled *Sirr al-shahādātayn*, explaining the secrets of the martyrdom of Imām Ḥasan and Ḥusayn.¹⁰⁶

In sum, these at times contradictory positions indicate the four writers' acceptance, on the one hand, of Shi'ism as an important sect of Islam and rejection, on the other hand, of some of their practices. The primary motive that prompted these Sufi scholars to write their works seems to be a desire to discuss the religious controversies of their time.

I am inclined to link their sectarian polemical stance to a sense of insecurity which, despite their numerical majority, pervaded the Sunnis. Of special relevance here is Malcolm Yapp's statement that:

In traditional societies, religious groups and their doctrines and rituals may be regarded as mere appurtenances of that social identity rather than the principal distinguishing features of the community [...] as their social functions decline they emphasize rituals as a means of preserving their identity.¹⁰⁷

The Sunni ulama's preoccupation with the "right religion," their urge to explain beliefs and rituals, and their wish to correct misconceptions of historical realities

¹⁰³ Sirhindī, *Maktūbāt*, vol. 2, part 6, Letter 36, 76, 85.

¹⁰⁴ In his vision 33, Shāh Valī Allāh categorically stated that he was instructed by the Prophet to rank Abū Bakr and 'Umar above 'Alī. It was one instance where he was forced to act contrary to his instincts. Had he not been compelled, he would have ranked 'Alī superior to the other two and would have expressed more love for him. See Shāh Valī Allāh, *Fayyūḍ al-haramayn*, 228.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 196-197.

¹⁰⁶ Some doubts have been raised about Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz's authorship of the *Sirr al-shahādātayn* (ibid., p. 98, note 90). On the basis of internal evidence, Surayyā Dār has confirmed that it was indeed Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz's work in *Ḥaḍrat Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz Muḥaddith Dihlawī aur unkī 'ilmī khidmāt*, Lahore: unpublished Ph.D. thesis 1982, 285-287.

¹⁰⁷ Malcolm Yapp, "Language, Religion and Political Identity: A General Framework", in: *Political Identity in South Asia*, David Taylor and Malcolm Yapp, eds., London: Curzon Press 1979, 27.

(such as the Caliphate of first three caliphs) represent, in my view, attempts to preserve their social identity.

The Shi'is had lived as a minority group throughout the Muslim rule in India, but held important positions in the Mughal administration and maintained matrimonial connections with the Mughal royalty. The influence of Nūr Jahān's family in the Mughal dynasty, for example, is well-known. During the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries, Shi'ism emerged as a state-religion in the three Deccani states of Nizām Shāhī (1496-1633) of Ahmadnagar, 'Ādil Shāhī (1490-1686) of Bijapur, and Quṭb Shāhī (1518-1687) of Golconda.¹⁰⁸ However, it did not evoke an intellectual response from the Sunni intelligentsia like that in the 18th century. The minority position of the Shi'is had not changed in the 18th century, but by gaining political power and clout, they were perceived as a threat by the Sunni majority. Furthermore, the Shi'i religious elite in the state of Avadh gained confidence as a class in a manner unprecedented in the history of Muslims in northern India.

These socio-political developments led to refutation of each chapter of Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz's *Tuhfā-yi ithnā' 'ashariyya* by the Shi'i ulama.¹⁰⁹ Shaken by political and social turmoil and no longer able to count on Mughal patronage and protection, the Sunni scholars began to emerge as an independent force. Against this background, the rise of the state of Avadh, along with Shi'ism as its state religion, naturally made the Sunni religious elite nervous. The polemical writings of the Sunni ulama, when read as a part of the corpus of all their works, represent systematic productions in support of their efforts to renew (*tajdīd*) and to revitalise (*iṣlāḥ*) the faith of their followers, reaffirm their Sunni identity and counter what they considered to be unlawful innovations (*bid'at*).

¹⁰⁸ For the history of these three Shi'i states see Richard Maxwell Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur, 1300-1700: Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1992; Haroon Khan Sherwani, *History of Qutb Shahi Dynasty*, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal 1974; idem., *The Bahmanis of Deccan*, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal 1985; Colin Paul Mitchell, "Sister Shi'a States? Safavid Iran and the Deccan in the 16th Century", *Deccan Studies* 2/2 (2004), 44-72.

¹⁰⁹ For details, see Rizvi, *Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz*, 356-470.



Système parlementaire et consultation selon Thiḡat al-Islām-i Tabrīzī : légitimation religieuse et justification historique

Denis Hermann

Mīrzā ‘Alī Thiḡat al-Islām-i Tabrīzī (m. 1330/1911) naît à Tabriz en 1277/1860 dans une famille d’oulémas originaire du Khorasan. Son père, Ḥājj Mīrzā Mūsā Thiḡat al-Islām (m. 1319/1901), est le chef de l’école shaykhī tabrizī¹. Très actif politiquement, il est à Tabriz l’un des chefs du mouvement contre la régie du Tabac, qui a lieu au mois de muḡarram 1301/août-septembre 1891². C’est lui qui s’occupe principalement de l’éducation de son fils jusqu’au moment où ce dernier épouse sa première femme en 1300/1882 et part pour les ‘atabāt (villes saintes chiites d’Irak), à l’âge de 22 ans. Thiḡat al-Islām-i Tabrīzī est particulièrement marqué par la tentative de son père de concilier sciences religieuses et sciences « auxiliaires » ainsi que par son activisme politique. Il s’intéresse à l’astronomie, aux mathématiques, à la géographie et surtout à l’histoire du chiisme³.

Thiḡat al-Islām-i Tabrīzī réside huit ans à Najaf où il étudie sous la direction de trois maîtres principaux, tous *uṣūlī*: Ḥājj Shaykh ‘Alī Yazdī Bafrū’ī, Shaykh Muḡammad Ḥusayn Fāḡil Ardikānī et Shaykh Zayn al-‘Ābidīn Māzandarānī Ḥā’irī⁴. Malgré l’importance du premier, aucun d’entre eux ne possède alors un statut comparable à celui de Mīrzā Ḥasan Shīrāzī (m. 1312/1895), le principal *marja’-i taqlīd* du monde chiite de l’époque. Thiḡat al-Islām-i Tabrīzī rentre à Tabriz en 1308/1890, peu avant l’agitation contre la concession du tabac, avec le rang de *mujtahid*⁵. Il commence alors à enseigner le droit musulman (*fiqh*), mais se rend surtout célèbre par ses prêches qui attirent aussi des fidèles n’appartenant pas

¹ L’école shaykhī tabrizī est fondée par Mullā Muḡammad Māmaqānī (m. 1269/1852) à la mort du second maître de l’école shaykhī, Sayyid Kāzīm Rashtī (m. 1259/1843), par opposition au courant dit kirmānī alors dirigé par Muḡammad Karīm Khān (m. 1288/1871). Sur un plan doctrinal, l’école shaykhī tabrizī est beaucoup plus proche du rationalisme *uṣūlī* puisqu’elle reconnaît notamment l’usage de l’*ijtihād* ce qui n’est pas le cas des shaykhī kirmānī.

² Voir la notice biographique sur Mīrzā ‘Alī Aṣghar Khān-Atābak A’ḡam écrite par Ibrāhīm Safā’ī dans *Rahbarān-i mashrūta*, 4 vols, Téhéran: s.éd. 1344sh./1965-66, 64; Nuṣrat Allāh Fathī, *Zindigīnāma-yi Shabīd-i Niknām Thiḡat al-Islām-i Tabrīzī (1277-1330 hijrī) va bakhsh az tārikh-i mustanad-i mashrūtiyyat-i Īrān*, Téhéran: Bunyād-i Nikūkārī-yi Nūriyānī 1352sh./1973-74, 18.

³ Il rédige notamment un article sur les origines historiques de l’imamisme dans le Jabal ‘Āmil libanais, « Shī’a dar Jabal ‘Āmil », dans Nuṣrat Allāh Fathī, éd., *Majmū’a-yi āthār-i qalamī-i Shādravān Thiḡat al-Islām Shabīd-i Tabrīz*, Téhéran: s.éd. 1354sh./1975-76, 382-383.

⁴ Safā’ī, *Rahbarān*, 273; Fathī, *Zindigīnāma*, 21.

⁵ Safā’ī, *Rahbarān*, 275; Fathī, *Zindigīnāma*, 22.

à la communauté shaykhī tabrizī⁶. Deux thèmes lui semblent prioritaires. Il exige d'une part la fin des hostilités et des violences entre shaykhī et *uṣūlī-mutasharrī*⁷ de la ville. Tabriz, comme d'autres villes iraniennes, est particulièrement touchée par le factionnalisme urbain opposant différentes sectes et courants religieux les uns aux autres⁸. On retrouve cette prise de position en faveur de l'œcuménisme religieux et le panislamisme dans tous ses traités politiques⁹. D'autre part, il invite la population à s'engager politiquement en faveur des réformes. Au cours de cette période pré-constitutionnelle c'est essentiellement à travers le prêche qu'il exprime ses opinions politiques auprès des masses¹⁰. Thiḡat al-Islām-i Tabrizī plaide aussi très tôt en faveur d'une réforme du système éducatif. Il appuie en particulier la formation des écoles influencées par le modèle européen (*rushdiyya*), sous le règne de Muḡaffar al-Dīn Shāh (r. 1896-1907) et défend l'enseignement des langues étrangères¹¹. Il semble cependant que le clergé était relativement divisé sur cette question. Certains oulémas assimilaient cette évolution à une perte des valeurs islamiques et morales et craignaient par ailleurs de voir leur quasi-monopole sur le système éducatif leur échapper¹².

En tant que shaykhī tabrizī, sa formation se distingue partiellement de celle reçue par la majorité des oulémas *uṣūlī*. Même si les différences doctrinales entre

⁶ Safā'i, *Rabbarān*, 276; Fathī, *Zindigīnāma*, 24.

⁷ L'on parle généralement, à Tabriz, de *mutasharrī* (ceux qui mènent une vie pieuse ou ceux qui sont versés dans la loi religieuse) par opposition aux shaykhī. Je préfère cependant parler ici de « *uṣūlī-mutasharrī* » qui est un terme plus précis.

⁸ Malgré la gravité, souvent mentionnée, des affrontements sporadiques entre *uṣūlī* et shaykhī dans la ville de Tabriz au cours du 19^e siècle, nous n'en possédons pas de descriptions précises. A ce sujet voir Christoph Werner, « The Amazon, the Sources of the Nile, and Tabriz: Nadir Mirza's *Tārīkh va juḡhrāfi-yi dār al-salṭanat-i Tabriz* and the Local Historiography of Tabriz and Azerbaijan », *Iranian Studies* 33/1-2 (2000), 175. Concernant le factionnalisme urbain ailleurs en Iran, et notamment à Ispahan et Shiraz, voir Hossein Mirjafari, « The Haydari-Ni'mati Conflicts in Iran » (translation John R. Perry), *Iranian Studies* 12 (1979), 135-162; John R. Perry, « Toward a Theory of Iranian Urban Moieties: The *Haydariyyah* and *Ni'matiyyah* Revisited », *Iranian Studies* 32/1 (1999), 51-70.

⁹ Pour une introduction sur le panislamisme en Iran à la fin du XIX^e siècle voir Mehrdad Kia, « Pan-Islamism in Late Nineteenth-Century Iran », *Middle Eastern Studies* 32/1 (1996), 30-52.

¹⁰ Sur le rôle du prêche au cours du mouvement constitutionnel voir les travaux de Asghar Fathī, « Preachers as Substitutes for Mass Media: The Case of Iran 1905-1909 », dans *Toward a Modern Iran. Studies in Thought Politics and Society*, Elie Kedourie et Sylvia G. Haim, éd., Londres: Frank Cass 1980, 171; id., « The Culture and Social Structure of the Islamic Pulpit as a Medium of Communication in the Iranian Constitutional Revolution », *Islamic Culture* 61/4 (1987), 28-45.

¹¹ Thiḡat al-Islām-i Tabrizī adresse une lettre d'encouragement au directeur de l'une de ces écoles récemment fondée à Tabriz, au cours du mois de sha'bān 1318/novembre-décembre 1900 Cf. Thiḡat al-Islām-i Tabrizī, « Mujmal-i ḡavādith-i yawmiya-yi mashrūṭa », 172-173.

¹² Au début du mouvement constitutionnel, en 1906, un groupe d'oulémas de Karbala et Najaf émet une fatwa interdisant l'enseignement des langues étrangères (voir Monica Ringer, *Education, Religion, and the Discourse of Cultural Reform in Qajar Iran*, Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publishers 2001, 141). Voir aussi David Menashri, *Education and the Making of Modern Iran*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1992, 40-42.

shaykhī tabrizī et *uṣūlī* sont mineures, Thiqat al-Islām-i Tabrizī n'a que des relations restreintes avec les principaux maîtres *uṣūlī* de Tabriz ou des *‘atabāt*¹³. Marginalisé, il ne peut par exemple aspirer à obtenir une charge officielle importante comme celles d'imam de la prière du vendredi (*Imām-i jum‘a*), de chef des juges de la province (*shaykh al-islām*), de juge de district et de centre urbain (*qāḍī*) ou de chef des clercs (*mullā bāshī* ou *niẓām al-‘ulamā’*). Il critique d'ailleurs régulièrement le bas clergé dans l'ensemble de ses traités¹⁴. Seuls les grands *marja‘-i taqlīd* des *‘atabāt* font pour lui exception. Les shaykhī tabrizī vivent dans des quartiers distincts et possèdent en sus leurs propres mosquées et écoles, telles la *Hujjat al-islām*, la *Kāzimīyya* et la *Ṣāhib al-amr*. Thiqat al-Islām-i Tabrizī vit à proximité de cette dernière, dans laquelle il enseigne. C'est essentiellement grâce au *vaqf*, qui constitue généralement la meilleure façon pour une communauté minoritaire de financer ses activités, que les shaykhī tabrizī parviennent à accroître leur présence et leur visibilité à Tabriz¹⁵.

À la mort de son père, en 1319/1901, Thiqat al-Islām-i Tabrizī devient le maître de l'école shaykhī tabrizī. Ce nouveau statut est entériné par Mirzā Muẓaffar al-Dīn, gouverneur de l'Azerbaïdjan et prétendant à la succession du Shāh (*valī ‘ahd*), qui lui attribue le même titre (*laqab*) que son père, « Thiqat al-Islām »¹⁶. Malgré ses nouvelles responsabilités, il continue de consacrer une grande partie de son temps aux activités réformistes. Il participe notamment aux réunions des sociétés secrètes de Tabriz inspirées par la *faramūshkhāna* fondée par Malkum Khān (m. 1326/1908)¹⁷. Cela lui fournit l'occasion de débattre avec d'autres intellectuels. Il y anime des débats sur la nécessité de limiter tout type de pouvoir absolu (*muṭlaq*),

¹³ Les différences entre shaykhī tabrizī et *uṣūlī* sont minimes. Les shaykhī tabrizī ne reconnaissent pas la doctrine du *rukn-i rābi‘* (quatrième pilier) défendue par les shaykhī kirmānī, la considérant comme une innovation de Muḥammad Karīm Khān. De plus, ils reconnaissent l'*ijtihād* et les principes du droit (*uṣūl-i fiqh*) adoptés par le courant rationaliste. Thiqat al-Islām-i Tabrizī résume dans son journal personnel les divergences vis-à-vis des *uṣūlī* à une simple et unique différence de méthode (*mashrab*), (Fathī, éd., *Majmū‘a*, 33). Concernant la doctrine shaykhī tabrizī voir principalement Hājī Mirzā Ḥasan Iḥqāqī Uskū‘ī, *Nāma-yi ādamiyyat*, 2 vol., Tabriz: Shafaq 1349sh./1970-71; id., *Risāla-yi istidlālī nāma-yi shī‘ayān*, Tabriz: s.éd. 1397/1976-1977; Mirzā ‘Alī Uskū‘ī, *Aqīdat al-shī‘a*, Koweit-City: s.éd. s.d; Mirzā Mūsā l-Uskū‘ī l-Hā’irī, *Iḥqāq al-ḥaqq*, Najaf: s.éd. 1385/1965-1966; id., *Tanzīh al-ḥaqq*, Tabriz: s.éd. 1342sh./1963-1964.

¹⁴ Concernant ses attaques contre le bas clergé chiite, accusé d'être corrompu, voir Thiqat al-Islām-i Tabrizī, « Tasāwī dar ḥayāt-i ijtīmā‘ī », 396.

¹⁵ Concernant l'usage du *vaqf* par les shaykhī tabrizī voir Christoph Werner, *An Iranian Town in Transition. A Social and Economic History of the Elites of Tabriz, 1747-1848*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag 2000, 81-82, 226. Plus largement sur l'usage du *vaqf* par les communautés minoritaires à l'époque qajare voir Denis Hermann et Omid Rezai, « Le rôle du *vaqf* dans la formation de la communauté *shaykhī kermānī* à l'époque qājār (1259-1324/1843-1906) », *Studia Iranica* 37/1 (2007), 87-131.

¹⁶ Safā’ī, *Rahbarān*, 276. Plusieurs éléments démontrent que les relations entre les deux hommes sont courtoises et bonnes. Voir notamment les notes que Thiqat al-Islām-i Tabrizī rédige dans son journal, « Mujmal-i ḥavāḍith-i yawmiya-yi mashrūṭa », 21-22.

¹⁷ Fathī, *Zindigīnāma*, 101.

dont la monarchie¹⁸. C'est seulement après l'ouverture du parlement par Muẓaffar al-Dīn Shāh, le 14 jumādā l-thānī 1324/5 août 1906, qu'il débute la rédaction de traités politiques consacrés à la réforme. Le journal personnel qu'il tient au cours du mouvement constitutionnel, ainsi que de nombreuses lettres et télégraphes qu'il envoie et reçoit à cette période, ont été conservés. Il est l'un des oulémas pro-constitutionnalistes pour lesquels l'on dispose du plus grand nombre de documents¹⁹. Malgré son intérêt pour la politique, il refuse d'aller siéger comme député au parlement de Téhéran²⁰. A Tabriz, il décide de ne pas assumer de charges officielles permanentes à l'*anjuman-i milli* (comité national), qui est certainement le parlement provincial le plus important²¹. A partir du début de l'année 1325/1907, son activité reste plutôt cantonnée au domaine intellectuel. Après la fermeture du premier parlement, le 23 jumādā l-avval 1326/23 juin 1908, dans le but d'écourter le conflit, il assume un rôle diplomatique grandissant, servant d'intermédiaire entre les forces gouvernementales de Muḥammad 'Alī Shāh (m. 1343/1925) qui assiègent Tabriz avec l'aide de certains clans Shāhsavan et les rebelles pro-constitutionnalistes entrés en résistance²². La population, qui le considère comme un homme intègre, vient également chercher son aide afin de régler des conflits. Les prix des denrées de bases sont particulièrement élevés et les affrontements entre quartiers sont réguliers. Sans être un membre du clergé *uṣūlī* il devient pratiquement un représentant, à Tabriz, des grands *marja'-i taqlīd* pro-constitutionnalistes des *'atabāt*, tels que Ākhūnd Khurāsānī (m. 1330/1912), 'Abd Allāh Māzandarānī (m. 1330/1912), et Muḥammad Ḥusayn Tihirānī. Thiqaṭ al-Islām-i Tabrizī leur envoie régulièrement des lettres et des télégrammes afin de les tenir informés des événements de Tabriz, les considérant comme les autorités les plus légitimes au sein du chiisme²³. Pour l'ensemble de ces raisons il apparaît comme l'idéologue pro-constitutionnaliste le plus actif de Tabriz. Il meurt au matin du 10 muḥarram

¹⁸ Fathī, *Zindigīnāma*, 102-103.

¹⁹ Thiqaṭ al-Islām-i Tabrizī, « Mujmal-i ḥavādith-i yawmiya-yi mashrūṭa », 11-166. Thiqaṭ al-Islām-i Tabrizī l'a tenu tout au long du mouvement constitutionnel mais il manque les textes écrits entre le mois de jumādā l-avval 1327/mai 1909 et la fin de dhū l-qa'da 1329/mi-novembre 1911.

²⁰ Sans s'être porté candidat un grand nombre vote pour lui afin de le pousser à les représenter à Téhéran. Il justifie son refus dans une lettre qu'il envoie à Mustashār al-Dawla, député de Téhéran, le 25 rabī' al-avval 1325/7 juin 1907 (Iraj Afshār, éd., *Nāmāhā-yi Tabriz az Thiqaṭ al-Islām-i Tabrizī ba Mustashār al-Dawla. Dar rūzgar-i mashrūṭiyyat*, Téhéran: Nashr va pazhūhish-i farzān 1378sh./1999-2000, 65). Un autre religieux shaykhī tabrizī prend sa place, Ḥājī Mirzā Faḍl 'Alī.

²¹ Concernant l'importance et le fonctionnement des *anjuman* de Tabriz voir Mansūra Rafī'i, *Anjuman. Argān-i anjuman-i ayālatī-yi ādhirbāyjan*, Téhéran: Nashr-i Tārikh-i Irān 1362sh./1983-84.

²² Sur le siège de Tabriz par une partie des clans Shāhsavan voir Richard Tapper, « Raiding, Reaction and Rivalry: The Shāhsevan Tribes in the Constitutional Period », *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 49/3 (1986), 508-531.

²³ Thiqaṭ al-Islām-i Tabrizī, « Tasāvi dar ḥayāt-i ijtimā'i », 396 et Thiqaṭ al-Islām-i Tabrizī, « Bālūn-i millat-i Irān ba kujā miravad? », 400-401.

1330/31 décembre 1911, pendu par les forces russes entrées dans la ville quelques jours auparavant.

L'engagement pro-constitutionnaliste de Thiqat al-Islām-i Tabrīzī marque l'apogée de la politisation des shaykhī tabrīzī, à l'exact opposé des shaykhī kirmānī qui restent quietistes durant le mouvement constitutionnel²⁴.

On présentera ici l'un des aspects originaux de l'argumentation pro-constitutionnaliste de Thiqat al-Islām-i Tabrīzī: la légitimation religieuse et la justification historique du recours à la consultation (*mashvīrat*) nationale et au parlement (*majlis*). Thiqat al-Islām-i Tabrīzī a rédigé plus de vingt-cinq ouvrages ou traités, dont *Lālān* (les muets) est sans aucun doute le plus important. Il s'agit d'un manifeste pro-constitutionnaliste adressé aux oulémas des 'atabāt, au mois de rabī' al-avval 1326/avril 1908, qui les enjoint de soutenir plus activement le mouvement constitutionnel alors en péril. Toutefois, comme le célèbre traité de Muḥammad Ḥusayn Nā'īnī (*Tanbīh al-umma wa tanzīh al-milla*) composé quelques mois plus tard, au mois de rabī' al-avval 1327/mars-avril 1909, celui-ci ressemble davantage à une réponse donnée aux arguments des oulémas anti-constitutionnalistes, dont ceux de Shaykh Faḍl Allāh Nūrī (m. 1327/1909)²⁵. Après une longue description des catastrophes vécues par le monde musulman et particulièrement par l'Iran au cours du 19^e siècle, il légitime du point de vue religieux le régime constitutionnel reposant sur le recours à la consultation afin de limiter les pouvoirs du souverain et il le justifie du point de vue de l'histoire. Il s'agit, pour lui, de la seule solution permettant de sauver l'Iran de l'anéantissement total provoqué par la pression des puissances européennes et la tyrannie (*istibdād*) interne. Il y détaille également le modèle de séparation des pouvoirs qu'il propose à l'Iran, insistant particulièrement sur le rôle du pouvoir législatif (*quvvat-i muqannina*). Il s'agit d'une défense des institutions érigées par le premier parlement (14 jumādā l-thānī 1324-23 jumādā l-avval 1326/5 août 1906-23 juin 1908), face aux accusations de sécularisme formulées par les oulémas opposés à la constitution et le souverain qajar lui-

²⁴ Zayn al-Ābidīn Ibrāhīmī Kirmānī (m. 1360/1942), qui prend la direction de l'école shaykhī kirmānī au tout début du mouvement constitutionnel, composa 154 traités. Pourtant son œuvre ne contient pratiquement aucune mention des événements du mouvement constitutionnel. Il rédige seulement une courte réponse à un article publié dans le journal pro-constitutionnaliste *Ḥabl al-maṭīn* afin de défendre l'enseignement de la langue arabe en Iran (Zayn al-Ābidīn Ibrāhīmī Kirmānī, « Maqāla dar javāb-i rūznāma-yi Ḥabl al-maṭīn », *Majma' al-rasā'il-i fārsī* (2), Kerman: Sa'adat 1352sh./1973-74, 434-443). Sur ce dernier traité et plus généralement sur la position des shaykhī kirmānī au cours du mouvement constitutionnel voir mon article, « La défense de l'enseignement de l'arabe au cours du mouvement constitutionnel iranien (1906-1911) », dans *Muslim Cultures in the Indo-Iranian World during the Early-Modern and Modern Periods*, Denis Hermann & Fabrizio Speziale, éd., Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag-IFRI 2010, 301-321.

²⁵ Sur l'argumentation anti-constitutionnaliste de Shaykh Faḍl Allāh Nūrī voir Vanessa Martin, « The Anti-Constitutionalist Arguments of Shaykh Fazlullah Nuri », *Middle Eastern Studies* 22/2 (1986), 181-196; Abdul Hadi Ha'iri, « Shaykh Fazl Allah Nuri's Refutation of the Idea of Constitutionalism », *Middle Eastern Studies* 13 (1977), 327-339.

même, Muḥammad ʿAlī Shāh²⁶. Ses autres traités politiques sont beaucoup plus courts et portent sur des questions plus précises, telles les conditions permettant d'être éligible et de voter²⁷. Thiḡat al-Islām-i Tabrizī rédige un traité similaire à *Lālān* entre muḥarram et la fin de jumādā l-thānī 1325/février-août 1907. Il s'agit de *Bālūn-i millat-i Īrān ba kujā mīravād?* (Où va la montgolfière de la nation iranienne?), traitant de manière plus générale de la situation en Iran. Ce dernier ne nous est cependant pas parvenu dans sa totalité²⁸. Après avoir comparé l'argumentaire de Thiḡat al-Islām-i Tabrizī sur la consultation et le parlement à celui d'autres clercs pro-constitutionnalistes, nous nous intéresserons à l'un des aspects les plus originaux de son exposé: la justification historique du parlementarisme.

La légitimité religieuse de la consultation et du parlement

*La légitimité du pouvoir monarchique absolu (muṭlaq),
selon les oulémas chiites iraniens de la période qajare*

La légitimité religieuse du pouvoir monarchique absolu est régulièrement défendue par les oulémas durant la période qajare. Les théories anciennes à propos de la coexistence nécessaire entre les deux types de pouvoir que sont le gouvernement (*salṭanat*) représenté ici par le souverain qajar, et le savoir (*ʿilm*), représenté par les oulémas, sont toujours en vigueur. Généralement, les oulémas justifient le règne du Shāh à la condition qu'il garantisse l'application de la *sharīʿat*, en collaboration avec les docteurs de la loi, et exigent alors des croyants et des sujets (*raʿayat*) une obéissance absolue. Ils se réfèrent le plus souvent aux hadīths appelant à la soumission au pouvoir afin, notamment, d'éviter le chaos et l'anarchie. Toutefois, le devoir d'obéissance envers le souverain n'implique aucune légitimité exclusive au règne futur de l'Imam caché. L'autorité du Shāh sur terre est alors perçue comme un reflet du règne de Dieu. Le Shāh est donné pour être son député, ainsi que l'expression de sa grâce (*Farr-i ʿizādī*). Certains de ses titres, tels *Ẓill-allāh* (ombre de Dieu) ou *Qutb-i ʿālam* (pivot de l'univers) suggérèrent ce statut. Les oulémas font régulièrement référence, dans leurs correspondances avec le

²⁶ *Lālān* a été traduit et introduit en japonais par Makoto Hachioshi, « A Message from the Dumb. A Shii Thinker's Constitutional Ideas in Modern Iran », *The Memoirs of the Institute of Oriental Culture* 111 (1990), 193-246.

²⁷ Thiḡat al-Islām-i Tabrizī, [sans titre], 409-418.

²⁸ Thiḡat al-Islām-i Tabrizī, « Bālūn-i millat-i Īrān ba kujā mīravād? », 399-406. Au cours du printemps 1326/1908, il débute également la rédaction d'un ouvrage nommé *uṣūl-i siyāsāt-i islāmīyya* (les principes de la politique islamique). Malheureusement, nous ne savons pas s'il a pu ou non le terminer. Cet ouvrage est aujourd'hui perdu. Thiḡat al-Islām-i Tabrizī évoque cette entreprise dans une des lettres qu'il envoie aux oulémas des ʿatabāt, le 30 muḥarram 1326/4 mars 1908 (Thiḡat al-Islām-i Tabrizī, « Mujmal-i ḡavādh-i yawmiya-yi mashrūṭa », 235-236).

gouvernement ou dans leurs traités théologiques, au rôle de protecteur de l'islam attribué au souverain. Ils nomment souvent ce dernier « Roi, refuge de l'islam » (*Pādishāh-yi islām-panāh*) ou bien « Roi, refuge de la *sharīʿat* » (*Pādishāh-yi sharīʿat-panāh*). Shaykh Jaʿfar Najafi (m. 1236-37/1821) présente même le Shāh qajar comme le représentant spécial de l'Imam sur terre (*nāʾib-i khāṣṣ*), tandis que les oulémas en sont les représentants généraux (*nāʾib-i ʿāmm*)²⁹. Il s'agit d'une synthèse évidente entre la vision persane classique de la monarchie et la doctrine *uṣūlī*. Dans les années 1830, les pièces de monnaie du royaume chiite d'Avadh sont même frappées du nom du souverain, Nāṣir al-Dīn Ḥaydar, accompagné du *laqab* suivant: « le représentant du messie » (*nāʾib-i mahdī*)³⁰. On a également recours à l'astrologie afin de justifier le droit divin du souverain terrestre³¹. Les maîtres soufis, parfois issus du milieu aristocratique qajar, s'évertuent eux aussi à exiger de leurs disciples l'obéissance totale au souverain³². Or, comme le souligne Abdul Hadi Hairi, il semble que le soutien accordé au Shāh par le clergé *uṣūlī* dans la première partie de l'époque qajare, est lui aussi circonstanciel. Ce dernier a alors besoin de l'appui du Shāh dans sa lutte contre les minorités chiites non-*uṣūlī* tels les *akhbārī*, les soufis et les shaykhī³³. Ainsi, le clergé *uṣūlī* demeure flexible et capable de justifier d'autres modèles politiques. Par ailleurs, si le règne absolu du Shāh est toléré, il existe pourtant un idéal supérieur de gouvernement aux yeux d'un certain nombre d'oulémas de la première moitié de la période qajare. Il s'agirait de celui d'un grand savant religieux, dont les caractéristiques citées sont très proches de celles d'un *mujtahid*. Cette théorie est notamment exposée par Sayyid Jaʿfar Kashfi (m. 1267/1850) dans son traité *Mizān al-mulūk wa-l-ṭarwāʾif wa-ṣirāṭ al-mustaḳīm fī sulūk al-khalāʾif*³⁴. Bien entendu, ces doctrines permettent au clergé *uṣūlī* de conforter toujours davantage le statut du *mujtahid*, au sommet de la hiérarchie des représentants généraux de l'Imam. Si les oulémas ne revendiquent pas le recours à un autre modèle politique que la monarchie absolue durant le 19^e siècle, la rédaction de ces différents traités à propos du gouvernement cosmique

²⁹ Vanessa Martin, *Islam and Modernism. The Iranian Revolution of 1906*, Londres: I. B. Tauris 1989, 26.

³⁰ Said Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam: Religion, Political Order and Societal Change in Shiʿite Iran from the Beginning to 1890*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1984, 227.

³¹ C'est notamment ce que fait Mullā Aḥmad Naraqī (m. 1245/1829) afin de justifier le droit de Fath ʿAlī Shāh à régner sur l'Iran. Voir Abdul Hadi Haʾiri, « The Legitimacy of the Early Qajar Rules as Viewed by the Shiʿi Religious Leaders », *Middle Eastern Studies* 24/3 (1988), 277-278. Certains oulémas justifiaient même les événements du mouvement constitutionnel par le recours à l'astrologie. C'est le cas de Shaykh Ḥusayn Būshihri. A ce sujet voir Denis Hermann, « Etude sur une interprétation messianique du mouvement constitutionnel iranien », *Oriente Moderno* 88/1 (2008), 99-108.

³² A ce sujet, se référer par exemple au traité de Mīrzā Muḥammad Dhūʿ al-Riyāsatayn (m. 1312/1894-95), *Risāla wujūb-i duʿā-yi Pādishāh* (Arjomand, *Shadow*, 249).

³³ Haʾiri, « Legitimacy », 271.

³⁴ Haʾiri, « Legitimacy », 280-283.

absolument légitime sur le plan religieux favorise l'idée d'une rupture possible. A la fin du 19^e siècle et au début du 20^e siècle, des oulémas et des réformateurs musulmans s'inspirent en partie de ces concepts.

*Catégorisation du constitutionnalisme
selon les principaux oulémas pro-constitutionnalistes*

A l'inverse des oulémas pro-constitutionnalistes les plus importants des *‘atabāt*, tels Ākhūnd Khurāsānī et Muḥammad Ḥusayn Nā’īnī, Thiqaṭ al-Islām-i Tabrizī ne propose pas de catégorisation des régimes politiques dans un cadre légal chiite, distinguant les pouvoirs légitimes ou illégitimes, justes ou injustes. Il réfute simplement le droit à qualifier le constitutionnalisme de régime « théocratique »/« en accord complet avec la *sharī‘at* » (*mashrū‘a*)³⁵. Ākhūnd Khurāsānī, dont la rhétorique et l'argumentation sont relativement similaires, présente le gouvernement parlementaire comme un pouvoir illégitime et juste cependant, car non oppressif. Aussi, alors que seul le pouvoir des imams ou des infaillibles (*ma‘ṣūm*) est considéré comme légitime, Ākhūnd Khurāsānī juge obligatoire (*vājib*) la lutte pour l'établissement du constitutionnalisme, au nom de la célèbre injonction coranique exigeant d'« ordonner le bien et prohiber le mal » (*al-amr bi-l-mar‘ūf wa-l-nahy ‘an al-munkar*)³⁶. Plus que cela, il associe explicitement la monarchie absolue à une innovation blâmable en islam (*bid‘at*)³⁷. Il s'agit d'une rupture complète avec le modèle politique généralement défendu par les oulémas auparavant. Ākhūnd Khurāsānī juge que le modèle constitutionnaliste respectueux de la *sharī‘at* et fondé sur la participation « de la masse des musulmans » (*jumbūr-i muslimīn*) est le « gouvernement juste » (*ḥukūmat-i ‘ādila*) ou le « gouvernement en accord avec la *sharī‘at* » (*ḥukūmat-i mashrū‘a*)³⁸.

*La consultation et le parlement en tant qu'héritiers légitimes
de la prophétie de Muḥammad*

Pour Thiqaṭ al-Islām-i Tabrizī, l'édiction d'une constitution est indispensable pour définir et limiter les droits du souverain qajar ainsi que pour imposer un contre-pouvoir garantissant la fin de l'absolutisme, synonyme de tyrannie. Pour lui, comme pour la majorité des oulémas pro-constitutionnalistes, l'émergence du

³⁵ Thiqaṭ al-Islām-i Tabrizī, « Lālān », 428.

³⁶ Concernant le recours au *al-amr bi-l-mar‘ūf wa-l-nahy ‘an al-munkar* chez Ākhūnd Khurāsānī afin de justifier la lutte contre tout pouvoir absolutiste, voir la préface de Muḥsin Kadivar, *Siyāsatnāma Khurāsānī*, Téhéran: Kavir 1385sh./2006, 17. Sur le sens donné à cette injonction coranique par les juristes et par les réformateurs chiites depuis la fin du 19^e siècle, voir Michael Cook, *Commanding Rights and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000, 530-548.

³⁷ Kadivar, *Siyāsatnāma*, 17-18.

³⁸ Ibid., 14, 15 et 21.

pouvoir législatif, principalement incarné par un parlement national (*majlis-i milli*), est légitimée sur le plan religieux par l'obligation pour tout musulman d'avoir recours à la consultation lors de ses prises de décisions ne relevant pas strictement de la *sharī'at*. Il considère que c'est le prophète Muḥammad qui a rendu la consultation obligatoire en islam. Il explique que le prophète l'a lui-même utilisée, tandis qu'il l'a exigée des musulmans lors de la gestion de leurs affaires courantes. Cette argumentation a déjà été employée par certains oulémas ottomans au cours de la seconde moitié du 19^e siècle³⁹. Si le prophète a consulté les croyants malgré son infaillibilité (*ma'sūm*), Thiqat al-Islām-i Tabrīzī juge impossible que les chiites non-infaillibles soient dispensés de ce qu'il assimile à un devoir religieux imprescriptible:

Le prophète est impeccable (*ma'sūm*). Il dispose d'une intelligence parachevée et il est approuvé par Dieu. Toutefois, Dieu lui a demandé de consulter [les musulmans] à propos de certains sujets. Qu'en est-il alors d'ignorants et d'injustes tels que nous? Comment pouvons-nous tolérer la tyrannie?⁴⁰

Ou encore:

Lors des grandes guerres, le prophète [...] restait sans manger durant plusieurs jours et plusieurs nuits. Ses compagnons l'imitaient. La victoire des compagnons du prophète était le fruit de la justice, de la piété et de l'obéissance au plus savant et à l'impeccable [le prophète]. Si nous ne possédons pas tout cela [les qualités du prophète] pour le moment, pourquoi refusons-nous les quelques biens qui sont en notre possession [c'est à dire l'idée de consultation qu'il considère comme enseignée par le prophète aux musulmans]?⁴¹

Thiqat al-Islām-i Tabrīzī considère la constitution d'un parlement composé de représentants de la nation comme le meilleur moyen de rendre la consultation effective et efficiente. C'est la raison pour laquelle il nomme le parlement « *Dār al-shūrā* » (maison de consultation)⁴². Ainsi, il accuse explicitement les oulémas anti-constitutionnalistes de Téhéran de nier la tradition prophétique:

Au nom de Dieu, pourquoi restez-vous ignorants face aux principes politiques de la pure *sharī'at*? Le prophète honorable [...] a débuté sa mission prophétique parmi les Arabes. Malgré la sauvagerie extraordinaire de l'époque, Dieu leur a ordonné la consultation. En dépit de leur ignorance, les Arabes assimilèrent ce principe. Alors, pourquoi après 1300 ans d'éducation des Iraniens, le pays ne parvient-il toujours pas à

³⁹ Anja Pistor-Hatam, « The Persian Newspaper Akhtar as a Transmitter of Ottoman Political Ideas », dans *Les Iraniens d'Istanbul*, Thierry Zarcone et Fariba Zarinabaf-Shahr, éd., Paris-Téhéran-Istanbul: Institut Français de Recherche en Iran & Institut Français d'Etudes Anatoliennes 1993, 143-144; Roderic H. Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire 1856-1876*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1963, 364; Marcel Colombe, « La réforme des institutions dans l'Empire ottoman au XIX^e siècle d'après le poète et écrivain turc Namık Kemal », *Orient* 13 (1960-61), 126.

⁴⁰ Thiqat al-Islām-i Tabrīzī, « Lālān », 442.

⁴¹ Ibid., 445.

⁴² Ibid., 432-33.

l'accepter [la consultation]? 'Quel partage inique!' ⁴³. Et malgré cela les oulémas de Téhéran et des pays de la région ont osé déclarer et écrire que: « Le parlement consultatif public est incompatible avec les lois de l'islam et il n'est pas possible qu'il se rétablisse ». J'ai du mal à croire que les oulémas peuvent dire cela.⁴⁴

Il est convaincu également que les oulémas anti-constitutionnalistes ne seront pas en mesure d'apporter des arguments religieux à l'encontre de la consultation publique, d'autant plus qu'ils ne l'envisagent que dans le strict domaine de la loi coutumière (*'urf*)⁴⁵. De fait, les oulémas anti-constitutionnalistes évitent de débattre ouvertement de la légitimité religieuse de la consultation en islam. Ils critiquent davantage les concepts de constitution et de parlement, les assimilant à des innovations blâmables. Shaykh Faql Allāh Nūrī et ses proches considèrent toute innovation idéologique comme un danger risquant de diminuer la foi des sujets⁴⁶. Ils estiment que la rédaction d'une constitution, au titre de loi nationale, est un acte impie et une atteinte à la sacralité et à l'autorité du Coran⁴⁷. Quant au parlement, il est pour sa part perçu comme un modèle européen étranger à l'identité islamique et iranienne. La sympathie du pouvoir britannique envers le mouvement constitutionnel et son influence dans les *'atabāt* dominés par le courant religieux pro-constitutionnel ne fait que confirmer leurs soupçons. Ils considèrent explicitement les oulémas pro-constitutionnalistes comme des agents de l'Occident sur le sol iranien et les accusent régulièrement d'être des *bābī*⁴⁸. S'abstenant de citer le nom de Nūrī, Thiḡat al-Islām-i Tabrīzī répond à ces accusations dans *Lālān*. Selon lui, si l'institution parlementaire moderne est née en Europe, elle est fondée sur des principes islamiques. Bien plus, les injonctions coraniques invitant les musulmans à se défendre contre leurs adversaires sont des indications claires en faveur du parlement, donné comme étant la seule institution permettant de résister efficacement à l'Occident dans une période de profonds bouleversements:

N'est-il pas nécessaire d'acquérir les mêmes armes matérielles et morales que l'adversaire, comme le préconise ce noble verset: « Préparez, pour lutter contre eux, tout ce que vous trouverez, de forces et de cavaleries »⁴⁹. Pour le moment celles-ci engendrent la domination et l'influence de l'adversaire. N'est-il pas nécessaire que des écoles soient construites? En conformité avec ce verset: « Soyez hostiles envers quiconque vous est hostile, dans la mesure où il vous est hostile »⁵⁰, nous devons acquérir des richesses, les technologies nécessaires au quotidien, la science politique et le savoir. Celles-ci permettent de ne plus avoir besoin de l'étranger. Cette dépendance est le premier moyen

⁴³ Coran, LIII : 22 (traduit par Denise Masson, Paris: Gallimard 1967).

⁴⁴ Thiḡat al-Islām-i Tabrīzī, « Lālān », 442.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 431.

⁴⁶ Martin, *Islam*, 62.

⁴⁷ Abdul Hadi Hairi, *Shi'ism and Constitutionalism in Iran: A Study on the Role Played by the Persian Residents of Iraq in Persian Politics*, Leiden: Brill 1977, 199.

⁴⁸ Les *bābī* sont les fidèles de la religion fondée par Sayyid 'Alī Muḡammad Bāb (m. 1266/1850).

⁴⁹ Coran, VIII : 60.

⁵⁰ Coran, II : 194.

par lequel les mécréants (*kuffār*) dominent la terre d'islam. Nous devons donc lutter contre eux par les mêmes méthodes que ceux-ci ont employées contre nous.⁵¹

*Justification et légitimité religieuse de la consultation
selon d'autres oulémas pro-constitutionnalistes*

D'autres oulémas justifient le constitutionnalisme et l'émergence du parlement en les présentant comme une conséquence directe de la consultation rendue obligatoire par le prophète Muḥammad, qui y a eu recours, selon eux, en particulier lors des conflits armés qu'il a dû mener. Rūḥ Allāh Najafī Iṣfahānī cite l'exemple de la bataille de Khandaq durant laquelle le prophète a consulté les musulmans puis a décidé d'approuver la méthode de défense proposée par Salmān Fārisī⁵². Pour lui, la création d'un parlement remonte même jusqu'à Adam, le premier prophète. Il assure également que les prophètes d'Israël, tel Salomon, ont perpétué cette tradition⁵³. Toutefois, de nombreux traités pro-constitutionnalistes ne reprennent pas cette argumentation, ayant rarement recours au hadith ou au Coran. Muḥammad Ḥusayn Nā'īnī lui-même n'évoque ce concept que très brièvement⁵⁴. Il mentionne essentiellement le Coran pour démontrer que l'établissement du constitutionnalisme découle du devoir incombant à l'homme de s'affranchir de la tyrannie⁵⁵. Cependant, un traité pro-constitutionnel rédigé par un religieux de Tabriz resté anonyme use de nombreuses injonctions coraniques en faveur de la consultation et de l'institution parlementaire⁵⁶. Il cite notamment ce verset très explicite: « [...] Consulte-les sur toute choses [...] »⁵⁷. Il mentionne aussi cet autre verset faisant les louanges de ceux qui pratiquent la consultation, les plaçant aux côtés de ceux qui prient et obéissent à Dieu: « [...] ceux qui répondent à leur seigneur; ceux qui s'acquittent de la prière; ceux qui délibèrent entre eux aux sujets de leurs affaires; ceux qui donnent en aumônes une partie des biens que nous leur avons accordés »⁵⁸. Pour cet auteur anonyme, le parlement répond également à une autre nécessité islamique: celle d'établir la concorde entre les croyants. Il assure que le débat parlementaire favorisera le dialogue nécessaire à celle-ci en recourant au verset: « Les croyants sont frères. Etablissez donc la paix entre vos frères »⁵⁹. Selon

⁵¹ Thiqat al-Islām-i Tabrizī, « Lālān », 422.

⁵² Rūḥ Allāh Najafī Iṣfahānī, « Mukālimāt-i muqīm va musāfir », dans *Rasā'il-i mashrūṭiyyat. Hijda risāla va lāyiha darbāra-yi mashrūṭiyyat*, Ghulām Ḥusayn Zargārī Nizhād, éd., Téhéran: Kavir 1377sh./1998-99, 423-468.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Hairī, *Shi'ism*, 204.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 173-174.

⁵⁶ Anonyme, « Su'āl-hā-yi dā'ir ba mashrūṭiyyat », dans Zargārī Nizhād, éd., *Rasā'il-i mashrūṭiyyat*, 337-348.

⁵⁷ Coran, III : 159.

⁵⁸ Coran, XLII : 38.

⁵⁹ Coran, XLIX : 10.

lui, cet autre verset va dans le même sens: « ô vous, les hommes! Nous vous avons créés d'un mâle et d'une femelle. Nous vous avons constitués en peuples et en tribus pour que vous vous connaissiez entre vous »⁶⁰. La réunion au sein du parlement est perçue par cet auteur comme un moyen de rapprocher les musulmans, de favoriser le sentiment de solidarité et de fraternité au sein de la communauté islamique (*ummat*). D'autres citent des hadiths attribués aux Imams. C'est le cas de Shaykh Ḥusayn Būshihri (m. 1341/1922-23), qui rapporte une tradition de l'Imam Ja'far Ṣādiq: « Consulte pour tes affaires ceux qui craignent Dieu »⁶¹ ainsi qu'une autre tradition, de l'Imam 'Alī, tirée du *Nahj al-balāgha*: « Chaque personne qui n'utilise que sa propre réflexion est amené à disparaître, mais celui qui consulte ceux qui sont savants partage alors leur savoir »⁶².

Toutefois, certains oulémas pro-constitutionnalistes considèrent que la consultation du peuple comporte des limites, voire même des dangers. Un autre auteur anonyme de Tabriz affirme que c'est notamment la consultation qui a permis aux armées de Mu'awiya (m. 60/680) d'échapper à la défaite, à Siffin, contre l'Imam 'Alī⁶³. Pour sa part, Sayyid 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Lārī (m. 1342/1924) s'exprime clairement en faveur d'un parlement composé essentiellement, voir uniquement, de grands juristes ou de *mujtahid* justes (*'ādil*), ou présidé par le plus savant des *marja'-'i taqlid*⁶⁴. Ces derniers proposent donc une augmentation du pouvoir des oulémas, leur laissant le soin de déterminer les lois régissant le pays. Ils ne sont pas opposés au concept de consultation mais souhaitent le limiter à une partie restreinte du peuple, voire au clergé.

La justification historique du système parlementaire

Thiqat al-Islām-i Tabrizī tente par ailleurs de convaincre de la nécessité du recours à la consultation et au parlement grâce à une relecture de l'histoire de l'Iran. Ceci est évident dans *Lālān* et *Bālūn-i millat-i Īrān ba kujā mī ravad?*. De tous les traités politiques rédigés par les oulémas à la période constitutionnelle et publiés jusqu'à aujourd'hui, ceux de Thiqat al-Islām-i Tabrizī comptent parmi ceux qui ont le plus recours à l'histoire dans leur argumentation. Dans *Lālān*, il propose une relecture de l'histoire de l'Iran, dans la seule perspective de justifier le constitutionnalisme

⁶⁰ Coran, XLIX : 13.

⁶¹ Voir Shaykh Ḥusayn Būshihri, « Iḥyā' al-millat », dans Zargārī Nizhād, éd., *Rasā'il-i mashrūṭiyyat*, 278-292, 288.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Anonyme, « Kalamāt-i ḥaqq-i yurād bi-hā l-bāṭil », dans Zargārī Nizhād, éd., *Rasā'il-i mashrūṭiyyat*, 354-361.

⁶⁴ Concernant le rôle idéologique de Sayyid 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Lārī durant le mouvement constitutionnel voir l'article de Mohammad Baqer Vusuqi dans ce même volume, « Remarques sur la pensée politique de l'ayatollah Lārī durant le mouvement constitutionnel ».

comme seule et unique solution politique permettant à l'Iran de s'affranchir de la tyrannie interne et de l'impérialisme externe. Selon lui, durant les règnes de Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh (r. 1848-1896) et Muẓaffar al-Dīn Shāh, les contestations populaires dénonçant les multiples concessions économiques accordées à des entreprises ou intérêts économiques européens, les emprunts contractés à l'étranger ou la mainmise de ressortissants belges sur l'administration des douanes ont annoncé l'avènement du mouvement constitutionnel⁶⁵. Toute l'œuvre de Thiqat al-Islām-i Tabrizī reflète d'un sentiment d'urgence face à la pression européenne, qui est exacerbé par la menace russe sur Tabriz et l'Azerbaïdjan:

Que Dieu nous préserve de ce que les musulmans ne deviennent ensuite misérables, vaincus, humiliés et piétinés par les nations étrangères. Ils [les musulmans] ont compris que le remède à cela consiste en l'adoption d'une forme constitutionnelle de gouvernement, en la limitation des droits de la monarchie (*salṭanat*) et en la prohibition de la tyrannie. Pour cette raison, ils se sont consacrés à la formation d'un parlement qui soit le fondement de la constitution.⁶⁶

Pensons-nous que les noms de nos descendants seront abolis de la liste des noms musulmans et transformés en Albert, fils d'Alphonse, fils de Grégoire, fils de Muḥammad?⁶⁷

Thiqat al-Islām-i Tabrizī juge que le régime qajar a, comme ses prédécesseurs, une part de responsabilité dans ce retard de l'Iran vis-à-vis de l'Europe. Ils ont tous été tyranniques et ont ainsi empêché tout développement: « La population iranienne qui fut toujours sous le poids de la tyrannie (*istibdād*) et des décisions des sultans autocrates était anéantie »⁶⁸. L'exercice absolutiste et individuel du pouvoir politique ne peut selon lui que constituer une source d'oppression: « L'expérience nous a montré qu'il ne sert à rien d'attendre autre chose que la destruction de la nation et la détresse du peuple tant que les affaires sont entre les mains d'une seule personne, que celle-ci est autocrate et qu'elle souhaite que la monarchie soit à son service et non le contraire. Comme le dit le sage Sa'adi: "Le mouton n'est pas là pour le berger. C'est le berger qui est au service du mouton"⁶⁹ »⁷⁰. Toutefois, la monar-

⁶⁵ Sur les concessions économiques accordées par le régime qajar voir Mansureh Eteḥādīeh, « Concessions. II. In the Qajar Period », dans *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 6, Costa Mesa, California: Mazda 1993, 120-122. Sur l'influence belge en Iran voir Annette Destrées, *Les fonctionnaires belges au service de la Perse 1898-1915*, Téhéran-Liège: Bibliothèque Pahlavi 1976 (distribué par E. J. Brill, Leiden); id., « Une expérience d'assistance technique avant la lettre. 100 fonctionnaires belges au service de la Perse entre 1898 et 1915 », *Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire orientales et slaves de l'Université de Bruxelles* 2 (1977), 23-36 ; id., « Quelques tentatives belges d'implantation industrielle et commerciale en Perse, dans les dernières années du XIX^e siècle », *Civilisations* 38/1 (1988), 82-100.

⁶⁶ Thiqat al-Islām-i Tabrizī, « Lālān », 436.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 425.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 418.

⁶⁹ Il s'agit d'une citation du Gulistān.

⁷⁰ Thiqat al-Islām-i Tabrizī, « Lālān », 436.

chie demeure pour lui, comme pour la plupart des oulémas pro-constitutionnalistes, une source de gloire et de prestige bénéfique pour l'islam⁷¹. Il considère notamment qu'elle facilite la stabilité. Cependant, il appelle à une monarchie constitutionnelle (*salṭanat-i mashrūʿa*):

Le sens de la constitution consiste en ce qu'aujourd'hui Muẓaffār al-Dīn Shāh, Muḥammad ʿAlī Mīrẓā après lui, puis Sulṭān Aḥmad Mīrẓā Pādishāh, dirigent le pays. Sa direction ne doit pas sortir de cette famille. La constitution consiste en ce que le Shāh de chaque période ne transgresse pas l'enthousiasme du peuple. Toutes les décisions doivent être prises avec le peuple. Voici en résumé ce qu'est le sens de la constitution. Elle n'est rien d'autre. Le parlement (*dār al-shūrā*) est l'un des instruments du constitutionnalisme et non le contraire.⁷²

Seuls les régimes qui ont intégré le concept de consultation dans leurs pratiques politiques, même de façon réduite, sont parvenus à diminuer le poids de l'injustice. Cela a notamment été le cas sous Karīm Khān Zand (m. 1193/1779): « De la même façon, Karīm Khān Zand avait une forme de gouvernance relativement plus proche du constitutionnalisme. Un des aspects qui le caractérise est qu'il refusait l'ouverture du commerce entre les Iraniens et l'Europe. N'a-t-il pas été renversé parce que les principes de sa gouvernance n'étaient pas suffisamment fondés sur la force de la constitution? »⁷³. Même la chute des Safavides (1501-1722), assimilée au déclin de l'Iran, à la misère et au chaos propre au 18^e siècle, est attribuée à l'absence de consultation, notamment lors de la succession à Shāh Sulaymān (r. 1666-1694): « Pourquoi le puissant pouvoir safavide a-t-il été renversé? La raison n'en est-elle pas que les ministres félons de Shāh Sulaymān n'acceptèrent pas le testament qu'il rédigea en faveur de son fils aîné Sulṭān Murtaḍā? Comme le naïf Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn était manipulable et à la merci de ses ministres, ces derniers le désignèrent alors en tant que souverain. Sous son règne, plusieurs parties importantes de l'Iran tombèrent sous la domination des Afghans. Finalement, cela aboutit au renversement total des Safavides. C'est Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn qui demanda de l'aide à Pierre le Grand en l'échange d'une partie du pays »⁷⁴.

Thiqat al-Islām-i Tabrizī tente aussi de justifier historiquement les bénéfices du recours à la *sharīʿat*. Dans *Lālān* par exemple, il assure que l'influence des grands docteurs de la loi a toujours favorisé l'essor des sciences, qu'il juge particulièrement nécessaire afin de rattraper le retard technique que l'Iran et le monde musulman ont pris sur l'Europe:

⁷¹ Shaykh Ḥusayn Būshihri est l'un des rares oulémas à opposer radicalement la *sharīʿat* et la religion au modèle monarchique, et pas seulement celui de la monarchie absolue, « *Iḥyāʾ al-millat* », 290. Sayyid Ḥusayn Lāri va également dans le même sens.

⁷² Thiqat al-Islām-i Tabrizī, « *Mujmal-i ḥavādith-i yawmiya-yi mashrūʿa* », 21-22.

⁷³ Thiqat al-Islām-i Tabrizī, « *Lālān* », 429.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

Ne voyez-vous pas que chaque fois que le régime fut assisté par le savoir de la *sharīʿat* il fut accompagné par une autre science. Ainsi, la science elle-même a progressé. Shaykh Mufīd, Sayyid Murtaḍā, Shaykh Tūsī – qui étaient contemporains des sultans bouyides –, Nāṣir Tūsī, ‘Allāma Ḥillī puis Shaykh ‘Alī Muḥaqqiq Thānī parvinrent à élever la vérité et le respect envers la religion pure. Leur pouvoir était-il plus grand? Les services rendus par d’autres oulémas [mineurs] furent-ils plus importants?⁷⁵

Parallèlement, il affirme que toute diminution de l’influence de la *sharīʿat* provoque systématiquement un affaiblissement de l’Iran ainsi qu’une augmentation de la tyrannie. Le respect et l’application de la *sharīʿat*, devant laquelle tous les musulmans sont égaux, sont alors perçus comme constituant le meilleur moyen d’éviter que le souverain ne devienne un despote:

Aux élites et au peuple nous posons la question suivante: « La force de la *sharīʿat* était-elle plus forte au milieu de la période safavide ou à sa fin? ». De même, comparé à la première partie de la période qajare, plus l’Etat s’est affaibli plus l’influence de la *sharīʿat* a diminué. Cela s’accompagna d’une augmentation de l’oppression, de la misère et de la faiblesse des sujets.⁷⁶

Conclusion

Nous avons exposé, dans cet article l’un des aspects les plus originaux de la contribution de Thiqat al-Islām-i Tabrīzī au mouvement constitutionnel: la légitimation religieuse et la justification historique de la consultation et du parlement. Le recours à la tradition que l’auteur opère dans son argumentation relève d’une rhétorique essentiellement inspirée par la logique (*manṭiq*) mais aussi d’une indispensable culture historique. Se référant systématiquement à l’histoire pour justifier la consultation, ainsi que tout autre choix politique, Thiqat al-Islām-i Tabrīzī typifie parfaitement une nouvelle tendance au sein du clergé chiite. En effet, certains clercs mettaient en avant leur formation en sciences religieuses, le *fiqh* en particulier, ainsi que leurs intérêts pour les sciences « auxiliaires » non-religieuses. Si Thiqat al-Islām-i Tabrīzī n’était pas reconnu en dehors du milieu shaykhī tabrīzī comme un grand *mujtahid*, il n’en demeurerait pas moins un clerc ayant suivi une formation solide dans la maîtrise des principes du droit (*uṣūl-i fiqh*) *uṣūlī*. Il apparaîtrait à ce titre qu’en dehors du milieu communautaire shaykhī tabrīzī, dont il continue à assumer la direction spirituelle, il revendique essentiellement un rôle de clerc réformateur soumis aux directives des *marjaʿ-i taqlīd* des *ʿatabāt* les plus reconnus. Il assumait d’ailleurs clairement ce statut à de nombreuses reprises dans ses

⁷⁵ Thiqat al-Islām-i Tabrīzī, « Lālān », 428. Il fait également le même constat dans son traité « Islām va siyāsāt va iqtisād va akhlāq-i ān », 389-391.

⁷⁶ Thiqat al-Islām-i Tabrīzī, « Lālān », 429.

traités politiques comme dans son journal personnel⁷⁷. Un passage de *Lālān* est explicite sur ce point: « Nous aussi, les pro-constitutionnalistes, en raison de notre soumission aux grands hommes [les *marjaʿ-i taqlīd* des *ʿatabāi*] nous nous sommes inclinés »⁷⁸.

⁷⁷ Voir Denis Hermann, *Aspects de l'histoire sociale et doctrinale de l'école shaykhī en Iran au cours de la période qājār (1843-1911)*, Thèse de doctorat inédite, Paris: École Pratique des Hautes Études 2007, 304-307.

⁷⁸ Thiqat al-Islām-i Tabrizī, « *Lālān* », 432.

Remarques sur la pensée politique de l'ayatollah Lārī durant le mouvement constitutionnel

Mohammad Baqer Vosuqi

L'ayatollah sayyid 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Lārī¹ (m. 1342/1923-24) fut, de la naissance du mouvement constitutionnel jusqu'à la fin de la première guerre mondiale, l'un des principaux dirigeants politico-religieux du sud de l'Iran. Il quitta Najaf où il étudiait pour Lār² en 1308/1890-01 sur les conseils de Mīrzā Ḥasan Shīrāzī (m. 1312/1895), pour assumer la fonction de principal guide politico-religieux dans les régions méridionales de la province du Fārs. En effet, les négociants du Lāristān résidant à Najaf et Karbala avaient demandé à Mīrzā Ḥasan Shīrāzī d'y envoyer un leader religieux déterminé « à combattre les oppresseurs³ » qui mènait, depuis la ville de Lār, les luttes politiques locales contre les qajars. En outre, Mīrzā Ḥasan Shīrāzī, qui fut le premier *marja'-i taqlīd* très actif politiquement, venait alors de prendre la tête du mouvement populaire à l'encontre du monopole du commerce du tabac accordé par le régime qajar à la Régie britannique Talbot et cherchait à gagner davantage de soutiens en Iran.⁴

À son arrivée dans la ville de Lār, l'ayatollah Lārī fonda une école religieuse⁵. Il bénéficia d'un fort soutien local et, bien que la ville ne fut pas réputée pour son enseignement religieux, de nombreux étudiants (*tullāb*) y affluèrent⁶; grâce au sou-

¹ Dans certaines sources nous le trouvons également mentionné sous d'autres noms (*nisba*), comme Najafī, Shūshārī, Muṭtahid et Mūsavī. Toutefois, c'est celui d'ayatollah Lārī qui apparaît le plus fréquemment et que nous avons donc adopté ici.

² Lār est une ville importante, située dans l'arrière-pays de la province du Lāristān au sud-est du Fārs. Concernant cette ville et cette région voir Jean Calmard, « Lār et Lāristān », dans *Encyclopédie de l'Islam*, vol. 5, Leiden: Brill, 670-681. Sur le statut commercial privilégié de cette région voir Willem Floor, « The Bandar Abbas-Isfahan Route in the late Safavid Era », *Iran* 30/7 (1999), 67-94.

³ Voir Shaykh 'Abd al-Ḥamid Muhājirī, *Shajara-yi tayyiba*, Chiraz: Nūr 1370/1950-01, 3.

⁴ Voir Ann K. S. Lambton, « The Tobacco Régie: Prelude to Revolution », *Studia Islamica* 22 (1965), 119-157.

⁵ Pour consulter la liste des religieux qui furent formés par Lārī voir Muhājirī, *Shajara*, 29-31; id., *Dawba Ahmadiyya fi ahwāl dhuriyyat al-zakiyya*, ms., ff. 42-51. Ce manuscrit est actuellement dans la collection privée d'Āqā Buzurg Jahrumī à Jahrum dans le Lāristān. Nous tenons à le remercier pour nous avoir donné la possibilité de consulter ce fonds unique; anonyme: *Majmū'at maqālāt kunghrih-yi buzurgdasht Āyat Allāh Sayyid 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Lārī*, vol. 11, Qum: Bunyād-i Ma'ārif-i islāmī 1418/1997-98, 109-153 et 391-414; Muḥammad Bāqir Vuthūqī [Mohammad Baqer Vosuqi], *Asnād va mukātibāt-i Āyat Allāh Ḥājī Sayyid 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Lārī*, Téhéran: Mu'assasa-yi taḥqīqāt va tavassu'-yi 'ulūm-i insānī 1385sh./2006-07, 235-247.

⁶ La liste des noms des élèves de l'ayatollah Lārī révèle la présence d'un grand nombre d'étudiants en sciences religieuses originaires de Lār et, plus généralement, du sud de l'Iran.

tien financier des commerçants de la région, ils disposèrent de larges commodités. Dès 1310/1892-23, l'ayatollah Lārī instaura la prière du vendredi (*namāz-i jum'a*) dans la ville de Lār⁷, acte qu'il considérait comme obligatoire dès lors qu'un juriste (*faqīh*) est présent. Il désigna par la suite les imams de la prière du vendredi (*imām-i jum'a*) pour les autres villes de la région⁸.

En digne disciple de Mirzā Ḥasan Shirāzī, dont il avait obtenu une licence d'exercer l'*ijtibād*, il insistait beaucoup dans ses cours sur la nécessité pour tout musulman de lutter contre l'oppression (*istibdād*) et ses activités ne tardèrent pas à revêtir un aspect nettement politique, suscitant des réactions de la part des autorités locales et du gouverneur de la province du Fārs qui tenta de limiter ses déplacements⁹. Les positions de l'ayatollah Lārī contribuèrent à attiser le conflit entre d'une part, négociants, petits commerçants, classes populaires et, bien sûr, étudiants en théologie et, d'autre part, les responsables politiques de la région.

Entre 1308/1890-1 et 1342/1923-4 l'ayatollah Lārī publia plusieurs traités à caractère politique dans lesquels il s'opposa principalement à l'autocratie (*istibdād-i fardī*) et au régime monarchique (*niẓām-i shāhī*). Il fut l'un des rares leaders religieux à prendre lui-même les armes, notamment contre les Britanniques, lors de la première guerre mondiale¹⁰. Contraint de s'exiler dans d'autres villes de la région, il publia divers avis juridiques appelant à la guerre sainte (*aḥkām-i jihādiyya*)¹¹.

Nous envisagerons, dans cet article, les deux aspects principaux de la rhétorique pro-constitutionnaliste de l'ayatollah Lārī: l'illégitimité qu'il attribue à la monarchie en islam et le rôle accru qu'il accorde au clergé dans la direction du mouvement et le contrôle du parlement. Son argumentation, qui semble originale et quelque peu marginale au tout début du 20^e siècle, a influencé les développements de la théologie politique chiite à plus long terme. Sous la période Riḍā (Reza) Shāh (1925-1941), déjà, bon nombre des membres du *Ḥizb-i barādarān*¹² très actifs dans le Fars et à Chiraz étaient des étudiants de l'ayatollah Lārī.

Mais il attira également des étudiants venus d'Inde et de certaines régions riveraines du Golfe persique, dont le Bahreïn.

⁷ Voir sayyid 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Lārī, *al-Ta'liqat 'alā l-makāsib*, ms. Ce manuscrit est conservé dans la collection de l'ayatollah 'Abd 'Alī Āyat Allāhī à Lār; Āyat Allāh 'Alī l-Karīmī l-Jahrumī, « Šalāt al-jum'a fī ghaybat al-ḥujja », dans *Majmū'a*, vol. 11, 445-503.

⁸ Voir anonyme, *Majmū'at maqālāt*, 445-503.

⁹ Voir Muḥammad Bāqir Vuṭhūqī, *Lāristān va junbish-i mashrūṭiyyat*, Qum: Hamsaya 1374sh./1995-96, 91.

¹⁰ Voir Mohammad Baqer Vosuqi, « L'ayatollah Seyyed Abdolhossein Lārī et son "Manifeste pour la défense" (1915) », dans *La Perse et la Grande Guerre*, Oliver Bast, éd., Téhéran: IFRI 2002, 277-291.

¹¹ Pour plus d'informations sur l'appel au *jihād* par l'ayatollah Lārī et pour consulter ses avis juridiques, voir Vuṭhūqī, *Asnād*, 193, 195, 196, 201-202.

¹² Le *Ḥizb-i barādarān* est un parti politique qui fut fondé à Chiraz en 1320sh./1941-42, peu après la chute du régime de Riḍā Shāh (m. 1323sh./1944) en 1941. Son fondateur et dirigeant, l'ayatollah sayyid Nūr al-Dīn Shirāzī (m. 1335sh./1956-57), militait pour une réislamisation de la société iranienne après deux décennies marquées par le sécularisme. Il s'exprimait principalement à travers la presse du mouvement dominée par le journal

L'illégitimité du régime monarchique

L'un des éléments les plus marquants de la pensée de l'ayatollah Lārī est qu'il a très tôt nié toute légitimité au régime monarchique. Très peu d'oulémas défendirent une telle position à la fin du 19^e siècle et même les clercs pro-constitutionnalistes, qui revendiquaient la fondation d'un parlement, accordaient généralement une légitimité à la famille qajare¹³. L'ayatollah Lārī s'exprima pour la première fois à ce sujet dans un traité juridique, *Su'āl va javāb*, composé en 1314/1896-97. Y figurent cent vingt questions posées par l'un de ses disciples, Zāyir Muḥammad Ashknānī, dont l'une concerne l'attitude à adopter face aux autorités politiques. Dans sa réponse, l'ayatollah Lārī les assimile à des tyrans: « Ne cédez pas à la tentation de vous rapprocher de la tyrannie au risque d'être consumés par son feu et ne côtoyez pas les oppresseurs, sauf pour leur prodiguer des conseils et leur demander d'interdire le mal (*nahī az munkar*)¹⁴ »¹⁵. Cette réponse à un étudiant nous mène à penser qu'il tenait ce discours dans son école et qu'il influença ses étudiants en ce sens.

La même année, l'ayatollah Lārī composa un autre ouvrage *Āyāt al-zālimīn* (les versets sur les oppresseurs), qui fut bien accueilli dans les milieux commerçants du sud de l'Iran. Il s'y employait à démontrer l'illégitimité de la monarchie en islam, et du régime qajar en particulier¹⁶. Dans sa préface, l'ayatollah Lārī expose ses motivations à le rédiger: « Comme en ces temps, désordres et souffrances, en raison de la prolongation de la grande occultation (*ghaybat kubrā*) et de la disparition des effets des œuvres et des décrets (*aḥkām*) des prophètes, des califes et des véritables représentants de l'Imam du Temps, [...] sont incommensurables [...]. Et vu l'adage selon lequel les individus suivent la religion de leurs rois, il est devenu obligatoire (*vājib*) et nécessaire d'effacer cette erreur [le régime monarchique] de notre esprit, pour y couper court »¹⁷.

Se référant à plus de 400 versets coraniques, il présente les caractéristiques de l'opprimeur et du tyran et réfute les hadiths qui défendent la légitimité des monarches. Pour l'ayatollah Lārī, les prônes des imams encourageant à se dissocier des tyrans sont davantage des appels à la mobilisation politique pour renverser

Sālnāma-yi barādarān publié à Chiraz. A la mort de sayyid Nūr al-Dīn Shīrāzī le parti perdit beaucoup de son influence dans la vie politique locale.

¹³ A ce sujet voir les remarques de Denis Hermann dans le même volume, « Système parlementaire et consultation selon Thiqaṭ al-Islām-i Tabrizī: Légitimation religieuse et justification historique ».

¹⁴ Concernant le sens donné à cette injonction coranique par les juristes, ainsi que les réformateurs chiites depuis la fin du 19^e siècle voir Michael Cook, *Commanding Rights and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000, 530-548.

¹⁵ *Su'āl va javāb*, ms., ff. 8-9. La seule copie connue de ce manuscrit est conservée dans la bibliothèque personnelle du Shaykh Ḥasan Nukhba. Ce dernier réside à Lār.

¹⁶ Sayyid 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Lārī, *Āyāt al-zālimīn*, Chiraz: Muḥammadi 1314/1896-97.

¹⁷ Ibid., 1-2.

l'ordre établi que des incitations au quietisme¹⁸. Il affirme ainsi qu'« assister les souverains dans leurs actions, les aider et contribuer ainsi à la propagation des malheurs qu'ils répandent revient à tomber dans la mécréance (*kuf*). Leur accorder volontairement de l'attention est une grande faute (*gunāh kabīra*) »¹⁹.

Toujours dans son *Āyāt al-zālimīn*, l'ayatollah Lārī cite par ailleurs ce poème de Shaykh Bahā'i (m. 1030/1620-21):

O mon fils, sais-tu ce que sont le pain et le *ḥalvā* ?
Ce sont les faveurs du sultan, dont tu dois te méfier.
Elles font perdre la raison et la paix du cœur.
Fuis les faveurs du sultan.
Fuis ce fléau de ton âme, obstacle sur ta voie de croyant²⁰.

L'ayatollah Lārī associe donc généralement l'absolutisme représenté par les gouvernants (*ḥukkām*) et les monarques (*pādishāhān*) à l'oppression (*ẓulm*). Il désigne ces derniers comme des « puissances usurpatrices » (*qudrat-i ghāṣib*) et « illégitimes du point de vue de la loi religieuse » (*ghayr-i mashrū'*)²¹. Il leur refuse par conséquent le droit de s'attribuer le titre d'« amis de Dieu » (*awliyā-yi Allāh*) et de se donner toute autre désignation de ce type²². En outre, il considère que tout soutien aux fonctionnaires du gouvernement qajar est interdit (*ḥarām*). Pour lui, le seul moyen pour les élites politiques d'échapper aux foudres de la colère de Dieu et du peuple est de se repentir et finalement d'abandonner le pouvoir: « Logiquement, il ne leur reste aucun espoir, excepté celui du repentir sincère et définitif [...] »²³.

Le rôle du clergé dans la direction du mouvement constitutionnel

Dès 1323/1905-06, l'ayatollah Lārī appuya les revendications des constitutionnalistes qui exigeaient la formation d'un parlement et une séparation des pouvoirs entre l'exécutif et le législatif. Ainsi, il se rangea aux côtés d'autres grands clercs tels que Muḥammad Ṭabāṭabā'i (m. 1336/1918), 'Abd Allāh Bihbahānī (m. 1328/1910), Ākhūnd Khurāsānī (m. 1329/1911) et 'Abd Allāh Māzandarānī (m. 1330/1911-

¹⁸ Un religieux *akhbārī* de la région, Mullā Qulī Akhbārī Jarāshī, s'opposa à cette interprétation des hadiths dans un traité intitulé *Su'ālāt-i Mawlā Qulī Akhbārī az 'umda-yi uṣūliyyīn va fakhr-i mujtabiḍīn Āqā Sayyid 'Abd al-Ḥusayn* auquel l'ayatollah Lārī répondit. Voir Vuthūqī, *Asnād*, 31-69.

¹⁹ Lārī, *Āyāt al-zālimīn*, 59. L'ayatollah Lārī cite des dizaines de versets coraniques relatifs à l'ignominie de la tyrannie (*qubḥ-i ẓulm*), dont les versets II : 35, II : 54, II : 65, II : 51, II : 57, II : 92, II : 114, II : 140, III : 86, III : 117, III : 140, III : 192, IV : 75, IV : 148, IV : 10, IV : 30, IV : 97, V : 29, V : 33, V : 42, V : 51, V : 2, V : 32, V : 38, V : 45, VI : 21, VI : 45, VI : 52, VI : 68, VI : 10, VI : 33 et VI : 47.

²⁰ Ibid., 64.

²¹ Ibid., 58-61, 65-71.

²² Ibid., 78.

²³ Ibid., 77.

12)²⁴. Son soutien intellectuel au mouvement se manifesta plus explicitement en 1325/1907-08 par la rédaction d'un traité politique intitulé *Mashrūṭa-yi mashrū'a* (Le constitutionnalisme « légal », i.e. en accord avec la loi islamique), dans lequel il tenta de démontrer la légitimité du nouveau régime politique en place.

Dans *Mashrūṭa-yi mashrū'a*, l'ayatollah Lārī développe sa conception de la fonction de l'assemblée (*majlis*) en islam, ainsi que les conditions de sa légitimité, à savoir la stricte conformité à la loi islamique. Dès l'introduction, en s'appuyant sur des versets coraniques, il énonce ce principe de base: « Toute opinion, toute assemblée, toute idée ou scrutin contraires aux fondements et aux lois de la religion musulmane sont des absurdités d'inspiration démoniaque, sources de toutes les corruptions (*fasād*) du monde et de la religion ». Ce principe posé, il poursuit: « Du début de l'humanité jusqu'à sa fin et du début de l'islam jusqu'au jugement dernier, toutes les corruptions du monde, les inégalités entre les nations, les perturbations, la disparition des bienfaits divins, [...] n'ont été et ne seront que le fait de mécréants (*kuffārān*) s'opposant au pouvoir de l'assemblée du peuple (*ḥukm-i shūrā'i millat*) »²⁵. Afin de le démontrer, l'ayatollah Lārī procède à la relecture de plusieurs faits historiques dont il tire argumentation en faveur du constitutionnalisme. Il affirme d'abord que les premiers musulmans durent leur victoire sur les Sassanides grâce au fait qu'ils étaient unis et consultaient leurs élites religieuses²⁶. Ensuite, la dynastie safavide aurait perduré plus de deux siècles grâce à « la bénédiction (*barakat*) des oulémas de la nation »²⁷. Les Safavides, contrairement aux Qajars, consultèrent régulièrement les oulémas, ce qui explique, pour Lārī, leur succès. Enfin, Lārī a recours à l'exemple du Japon – ce qui était courant à l'époque – et affirme que la victoire de ce pays sur la Russie en 1905 démontre la nécessité d'une constitution (*qānūn-i millī*) pour résister aux puissances occidentales: en effet, le jeune gouvernement Meiji avait adopté une constitution en 1889²⁸. C'est, pour l'auteur, grâce à une loi de ce type que le parlement pourra contrecarrer les ambitions que nourrissent les non-musulmans œuvrant pour dominer l'islam et abolir sa loi.

Selon Lārī, l'engagement politique en faveur du mouvement constitutionnel devient dès lors un acte religieux obligatoire: « Mettre en place cet *anjuman* [ici le

²⁴ Concernant Muḥammad Ṭabāṭabā'i et 'Abd Allāh Bihbahānī, tous deux à Téhéran au cours du mouvement constitutionnel et députés du premier parlement voir Vanessa Martin, *Islam and Modernism. The Iranian Revolution of 1906*, Londres: I. B. Tauris 1987, 65-85 en particulier. Sur l'activisme politique d'Ākhūnd Khurāsānī, qui résidait alors à Najaf et était certainement le *marja'-i taqlīd* le plus suivi au début du 20^e siècle, voir l'introduction de Muḥsin Kadivar, éd., *Siyāsatnāma Khurāsānī: Qaṭa'āt-i siyāsī dar ātār-i Ākhūnd Mullā Muḥammad Kāzīm Khurāsānī ṣāhib-i Kifāya (1255-1329 hijrī qamarī)*, Téhéran: Kavir 1385sh./2006-07.

²⁵ Sayyid 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Lārī, *Mashrūṭa-yi mashrū'a*, Chiraz: Muḥammadī 1325/1907-08, 8.

²⁶ Ibid., 9.

²⁷ Ibid., 10.

²⁸ Ibid., 11.

parlement] et entrer dans cette ère pleine de promesse font partie des efforts obligatoires incombant aux "garants de la sécurité de la nation" (*sarvarān-i amān-i kishvar*) »²⁹. L'expression *sarvarān-i amān-i kishvar* renvoie aux oulémas que l'auteur considère comme les défenseurs de l'identité islamique de la société iranienne.

Lārī ajoute d'ailleurs qu'il considère toute opposition au parlement national (*majlis-i millī*) comme interdite (*ḥarām*): « l'opposition à l'approbation du peuple est illégitime en ce qu'elle brise l'unanimité de la nation »³⁰. C'est une logique profondément religieuse mais aussi personnelle et élaborée qu'a développée l'ayatollah Lārī pour défendre les nouvelles institutions politiques ainsi que la nécessité de défendre le règne absolu de Dieu et de sa *sharʿat*.

L'ayatollah Lārī tenta donc, dans ce traité, de dépasser deux contradictions. La première concerne la toute puissance de Dieu. Pour lui, la souveraineté divine est incontestable et son droit à légiférer absolu; toutefois, il a recours à des hadiths pour démontrer que Dieu accorde aux hommes le droit d'instituer d'autres lois en recourant au consensus (*ijmāʿ*) lors d'une assemblée (*shūrā*). La seconde contradiction concerne son rejet du régime monarchique. Alors qu'il considérerait le monarchisme comme illégitime, l'ayatollah Lārī rallia un mouvement qui entérinait l'autorité du monarque qajar et de sa famille et leur reconnaissait le droit de conserver le pouvoir exécutif. Il assumait ce choix en affirmant que l'urgence était d'établir le parlement national dans la durée, même si cela nécessitait, pour un temps, le maintien du régime monarchique. Il s'agit là d'une attitude pragmatique visant à ne pas fragiliser le jeune parlement symbole d'espoir et de changement.

Après la fermeture du parlement le 23 jumādā l-avval 1326/23 juin 1908 l'ayatollah Lārī rédigea un nouveau traité intitulé *Qānūn dar ittihād-i dawlat va millat* (La loi pour l'unité de l'Etat et de la nation)³¹. Il y critiqua avec virulence les clercs opposés au mouvement constitutionnel et à la restauration du parlement, en les accusant d'avoir « ranimé la flamme de l'absolutisme, du fléau de la corruption et de la division entre les musulmans »; il les qualifia même d'« ennemis de Dieu » (*muhārīb ba khudā*)³². Il utilise par ailleurs ce même terme technique d'« ennemis de Dieu » dans un traité de droit (*fiqh*) pour décrire tous ceux qui portent assistance à l'absolutisme et aux tyrans³³.

Pour autant, les positions de l'ayatollah Lārī concernant le mode de fonctionnement du parlement, plus explicites ici que dans son traité précédent, sont très proches de celles défendues par les oulémas généralement qualifiés de « partisans du constitutionnalisme légal [i.e. en accord avec la loi islamique] » (*mashrūʿa khāb*).

²⁹ Ibid., 46.

³⁰ Ibid., 49.

³¹ Sayyid ʿAbd al-Ḥusayn Lārī, *Qānūn dar ittihād-i dawlat va millat*, Chiraz: Muḥammadi 1326/1908-09.

³² Ibid., 25.

³³ Sayyid ʿAbd al-Ḥusayn Lārī, *Aḥkām-i qānūn-i idāra-yi baladiyya*, Chiraz: Sipahr 1326/1908-09, 25.

Il est nécessaire ici de préciser que les oulémas considérés comme « partisans d'un constitutionalisme fondé sur la charia » ont souvent été qualifiés par les chercheurs d'« anti-constitutionnalistes » ce qui n'est pas toujours le cas. Une lecture attentive des traités de théorie politique (*risāla-yi siyāsi*) qu'ils rédigèrent au cours du mouvement constitutionnel montre qu'ils ne remirent pas systématiquement l'existence d'un parlement et d'une constitution en cause, mais ils développèrent une autre interprétation du rôle et de la composition du parlement en contexte islamique. Cependant, ces oulémas furent décrits comme « anti-constitutionnalistes » en raison de leur opposition au fonctionnement du premier parlement entre le 14 jumādā l-thānī 1324/5 août 1906 et le 23 jumādā l-avval 1326/23 juin 1908 et comme « pro-absolutistes » en raison de leur association de circonstance avec le souverain Muḥammad 'Alī Shāh (r. 1324-1327/1907-1909) qui cherchait effectivement à reconquérir son pouvoir et était certainement opposé à toute forme de parlementarisme ou division du pouvoir.

L'ayatollah Lārī est d'un point de vue théorique proche des « partisans du constitutionalisme légal » ou des « pro-théocratiques » (*mashrū' a khāh*) dans le sens où il n'accorde de légitimité au parlement que s'il est entièrement sous la responsabilité d'un grand juriste, certainement l'un des *marja'-i taqlīd* les plus suivis: « Le parlement sera parfait si il possède à sa tête un "juriste juste" (*faqīh-yi 'ādil*) qui répond aux conditions requises pour ce statut; si cela n'est pas possible ce dernier doit faire partie des "croyants justes" (*'udūl-i mu'minīn*)³⁴; Si ceci n'est pas non plus possible l'homme à la tête du parlement doit alors compter parmi les pieux (*ahl al-dīn*)³⁵ »³⁶. En outre, « [Le parlement sera parfait] si la charge d'appliquer les peines légales (*ḥudūd-i shar'i*) et, plus largement, la loi religieuse, revient de droit à un juge religieux juste (*ḥākim-i 'ādil*) et à nul autre. Le contrôle des votes du parlement, du respect de ses règles et de ses dispositions incombe aussi de droit à un juge religieux reconnu équitable et membre du parlement. Nul autre ne peut accomplir ces tâches »³⁷. La supervision des juristes au sein du parlement doit donc être continue. Ainsi, « personne n'a le droit de réunir le parlement, de désigner (des représentants), de prendre des décisions et de conduire le parlement sur une voie périlleuse, sauf sur autorisation du juge religieux reconnu équitable, et choisi parmi les oulémas partisans de la monarchie constitutionnelle et non parmi les oulémas oppresseurs »³⁸. L'ayatollah Lārī accorde donc un rôle politique prépondérant aux *mujtahid* de haut rang, et c'est à ce groupe qu'appartient le « juge religieux juste ». Il assimile même toute assemblée qui ne bénéficierait pas de l'appui ferme d'un juriste

³⁴ L'expression « croyants justes » (*'udūl-i mu'minīn*) désigne ici des oulémas justes, en quelque sorte des oulémas de second rang comparés à ceux qualifier de « juristes justes ».

³⁵ Le terme « pieux » (*ahl al-dīn*) désigne ici un non-clerc attaché à la charia.

³⁶ Lārī, *Qānūn dar ittihād*, 5-6.

³⁷ Ibid., 10-11. Lārī, *Aḥkām-i qānūn-i idāra-yi baladiyya*, 25.

³⁸ Ibid., 14.

reconnu du plus grand nombre à la fameuse « mosquée nuisible » (*masjid-i ɖarār*)³⁹: « Ceux qui ont fondé une mosquée ou assemblée nuisible (*masjid va majlis-i ɖarār*) et qui ont rassemblé des rebelles pour semer la discorde parmi les croyants et pour répondre aux attentes ce ceux qui luttent contre Dieu et son messager sont condamnés au verdict réservé aux corrompus et aux ennemis des musulmans »⁴⁰.

L'ayatollah Lārī consacre aussi dans son traité plusieurs passages aux députés, énonçant les règles de leur éligibilité, leur nombre et leurs missions principales⁴¹. Aucun mot, cependant, ne concerne les assemblées constituées dans les provinces, alors que les *anjuman-i ayālātī va vilāyatī* fonctionnaient, de fait, comme des parlements régionaux et qu'ils étaient souvent critiqués par les oulémas. Il est probable que l'ayatollah Lārī espérait que ces parlements régionaux se cantonnent au rôle que leur avait conféré le parlement central, c'est-à-dire l'organisation d'élections locales pour désigner les députés allant siéger à Téhéran. Nous savons par ailleurs que l'ayatollah Lārī ne se présenta pas aux élections du Fārs ou du Lāristān pour être député. S'il semble revendiquer implicitement le droit à être le guide du parlement en tant que juriste juste, il ne l'affirma jamais formellement.

Contrairement à certains penseurs pro-constitutionnalistes, l'ayatollah Lārī n'insiste pas sur la tâche du parlement de débattre de la loi coutumière (*urf*). Toute sa construction intellectuelle est précisément fondée sur la supériorité de la charia qui, seule, permet de lutter contre l'oppression ou l'absolutisme (*chahra-yi ɖid-i zulmī*). Le vocabulaire technique qu'il emploie dans l'ensemble de ses traités est particulièrement clair à ce sujet et demeure essentiellement un vocabulaire religieux et juridique⁴². Sa position quant à la nécessité du recours systématique à la charia est distinctement résumée dans la réponse qu'il donna dans un traité de *fiqh* à la question suivante: « Quels sont/doivent-être les décrets de la loi nationale? » (*ahkām-i qānūn-i idāra-yi baladiyya chīst?*). Il répliqua: « Il s'agit fondamentalement de [toute loi permettant de] se défendre contre les corrupteurs, acquérir des gains et réformer la nation, mais toujours dans le respect strict de la charia »⁴³.

³⁹ C'est une référence explicite au verset coranique IX : 107, « Ceux qui ont édifié une mosquée nuisible et impie pour semer la division entre les croyants et pour en faire un lieu d'embuscade au profit de ceux qui luttèrent auparavant contre Dieu et contre son Prophète; ceux-là jurent avec force : "Nous n'avons voulu que le bien! Mais Dieu témoigne qu'ils sont menteurs" » (*Le Coran*, traduit par Denise Masson, Paris: Gallimard 1967).

⁴⁰ Lārī, *Qānūn dar itihād*, 14.

⁴¹ Ibid., 4.

⁴² Une comparaison du lexique technique employé par l'ayatollah Lārī et d'autres oulémas pro-constitutionnalistes permettrait de montrer que Lārī utilise de façon plus systématique des termes à connotation juridico-religieuse.

⁴³ Lārī, *Ahkām-i qānūn*, 2.

Conclusion

Si les positions théoriques de l'ayatollah Lārī sur le fonctionnement d'un parlement en contexte islamique sont de fait plus proches des dirigeants du courant considérés généralement comme anti-constitutionnaliste, il a néanmoins soutenu ardemment le parlement et a contribué à ce que les régions du Lāristān et du Fārs soient plus politisées que les historiens l'ont généralement indiqué⁴⁴. À ce titre l'ayatollah Lārī fut et reste généralement désigné en Iran sous la qualification de « pro-constitutionnaliste » (*mashrūṭa khāh*) malgré son rang singulier et original au cours de ce mouvement. Son opposition au fonctionnement du parlement est demeurée très ténue, la sauvegarde des acquis du processus en cours étant pour lui prioritaire. Dans ce sens nous pourrions ici le décrire également sous l'appellation technique de « constitutionnaliste constant » (*mashrūṭa mūjūd*). Comme nous l'avons déjà souligné, c'est essentiellement sa rhétorique « d'opposition [systématique] à toute forme d'oppression » (*ẓulm-i sitizāna*) qu'il associe premièrement à l'absolutisme qajar qui domine son discours. Cela nous porte à croire que de nouvelles études de cas sur le rôle des oulémas au cours du mouvement constitutionnel révéleraient la complexité des positions des religieux souvent trop rapidement rangés dans deux catégories: les pro-constitutionnalistes (*mashrūṭa khāh*) et les pro-théocratiques (*mashrū'a khāh*), parfois également qualifiés d'anti-constitutionnalistes.

Selon l'ayatollah Lārī, c'est bien le clergé tout entier qui doit s'investir dans la vie politique et qui est appelé à gérer l'avenir de l'Iran. C'est dire qu'il accorde aux oulémas un rôle plus important que ne le faisaient la majorité des religieux dirigeant le mouvement constitutionnel, notamment ceux des villes saintes d'Irak et Muḥammad Ḥusayn Nā'inī (m. 1355/1936) en particulier⁴⁵. D'ailleurs, si dans la classification des régimes proposée par Muḥammad Ḥusayn Nā'inī, le mouvement constitutionnel est défini comme le régime le plus en accord avec l'esprit de la charia au cours de la grande occultation (*ghaybat-i kubrā*), il demeure cependant un régime constitutionnel non-infaillible (*mashrūṭa-yi ghayr-i ma'sūm*) et par conséquent imparfait. Le régime proposé par Muḥammad Ḥusayn Nā'inī est encore un régime monarchique constitutionnel alors que l'ayatollah Lārī semble vouloir se débarrasser définitivement de la monarchie pour instaurer un parlement dirigé par un guide religieux, afin de restaurer l'idéal consultatif promu par

⁴⁴ Sur les événements dans le Lāristān et le Fārs au cours du mouvement constitutionnel, voir Muḥammad Bāqir Vuthūqī, *Lāristān va junbish-i mashrūṭiyyat*, Qum: Hamsaya 1374sh./1995-96; Mas'ūd Shafī'i Surūstānī, *Fārs dar inqilāb-i mashrūṭiyyat*, Chiraz: Bunyād Fārs Shināsī 1383sh./2004-05.

⁴⁵ Voir Abdul Hadi Hairī, *Shī'ism and Constitutionalism in Iran: A Study on the Role Played by the Persian Residents of Iraq in Persian Politics*, Leiden: Brill 1977, 156, 202-203, 207, 211-217.

le prophète. Pour ces raisons, on peut considérer le modèle proposé par l'ayatollah Lārī comme les prémices de celui qui fut développé plus tard par l'ayatollah Khomeiny (m. 1989)⁴⁶.

⁴⁶ On peut par ailleurs renvoyer à un autre traité de l'ayatollah Lārī dans lequel il fait référence au concept de *vilāyat-i faqīh*, « Hashiyya bar Makāsib-i Shaykh Anṣārī », dans *Rasā'il-i Sayyid Lārī*, sayyid 'Alī Mir Sharifi, éd., Téhéran: Irshād-i Islāmi 1377sh./1998-99, 3/11-30. Il justifia dans ce dernier le droit supérieur du juriste en se fondant sur plusieurs versets coraniques (XXII : 6; XXXIII : 6; IV : 59; LIX : 7 et V : 2). Sur ce sujet voir également sayyid Muḥammad Taqī Āyat Allāhī, *Vilāyat-i faqīh zīr banā'i fikrī mashrū'a-yi mashrū'a. Sayrī dar ifkār va mubārzāt-i Sayyid 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Lārī*, Téhéran: Amir Kabir 1363sh./1984-85.

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