

The Nuṣayrī- ʿAlawī Religion

AN ENQUIRY INTO
ITS THEOLOGY AND LITURGY



BY

MEIR M. BAR-ASHER
& ARYEH KOFSKY

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Brill



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to Ruth and Bettina

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ABBREVIATIONS AND NOTES ON DATES AND CITATION

ABBREVIATIONS

- Bākūra* = Sulayman al-Adhanī, *Kitāb al-bākūra al-sulaymāniyya fī kashf asrār al-diyāna al-nuṣayriyya*, Beirut, n.d.
- “Buch der Schatten” = H. Halm, “Das «Buch der Schatten»: Die Mufaḍḍal-Tradition der Gulāt und die Ursprünge des Nuṣairierts,” *Der Islam* 55 (1978), pp. 219–266 — part 1, *ibid.*, 58 (1981), pp. 15–86—part 2.
- Catechism* = *Kitāb ta’līm diyānat al-Nuṣayriyya*—a catechism of the Nuṣayrī Religion, in Ms. Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale), fonds arabe 6182, pp. 1a–20b (= Chap. 8, pp. 200–220, below).
- Esoterische Sonderthemen = R. Strothmann, “Esoterische Sonderthemen bei den Nuṣairi: Geschichten und Traditionen von den heiligen Meistern aus dem Prophetenhaus,” *Abhandlungen der deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin*, Berlin, 1958, pp. 5–23 + 36 pp. of the Arabic text of Ms. Hamburg 303 (= *Risālat al-shaykh Maḥmūd Ba’amra ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Nuṣayrī*).
- Kiel = *Akhbār wa-riwāyāt ‘an mawālīnā ahl al-bayt ‘alayhim al-salām*, edited by R. Strothmann, in “Morgenländische Geheimsekten in abendländischer Forschung und Handschrift Kiel arab. 19,” *Abhandlungen der deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin*, Berlin, 1953, pp. 7–45 + 7 pp. (the Arabic text of the manuscript).
- KM = *Kitāb al-Majmū’*, in R. Dussaud, *Histoire et religion des Nuṣairis*, pp. 181–198 (the Arabic text); pp. 161–179 (French translation by Dussaud).
- MA = Abū Sa’īd Maymūn b. Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī, *Kitāb sabīl rāḥat al-arwāḥ wa-dalīl al-surūr wa-l-afrah ilā fāliq al-aṣbāḥ al-ma’rūf bi-majmū’ al-ā’yād*, edited by R. Strothmann, *Der Islam* 27 (1944–1946) (German Title: *Festkalender der Nusairier grundlegendes Lehrbuch im syrischen Alawitenstaat*).
- Munāzara = *Munāzarat al-shaykh Yūsuf ibn al-‘Ajūz al-Nashshābī tataḍammanu akhaṣṣa ‘aqā’idihim bi-l-tawḥīd*, in Ms. Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale), fonds arabe 1450, pp. 67–155.
- RT = *Risālat al-tawḥīd* by Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥusayn b. Ḥamdān al-Khaṣībī, in: Ms. Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale), fonds arabe 1450, pp. 42–48.
- Salisbury = E. Salisbury, “The Book of Sulaimān’s First Ripe Fruit Disclosing the Mysteries of the Nusairian Religion” by Sulaimān Effendi of Adhanah,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 8 (1864), pp. 227–308.

NOTES ON DATES AND CITATION

- (1) Dates are given according to the *hijrī* calendar, followed by the Western (i.e. CE) equivalent.
- (2) When citing from the Qur’ān, the entire verse under discussion is presented in English followed by the Arabic transliteration of the verse. The English translation is taken from A. Arberry, *The Qur’ān Interpreted* (Oxford, 1983, 2nd edition), with occasional modifications. Verses are cited according to the numbering of the common Egyptian edition.

INTRODUCTION

I

The Nuṣayrīs—also known as ‘Alawīs—have been in power in Syria for the past three decades. Little is known of their origins or their long history, while their religious creeds and thought are somewhat better known. The main reason for our fragmentary knowledge of the Nuṣayrī religion is that, since its beginnings, it has always been the secret faith of a self-conscious elite that zealously guarded its sectarian literature.

The Nuṣayrī faith is a clear example of a syncretistic religion. It combines and fuses elements of cults and creeds of very disparate, and remote, origins. Among these are various pagan beliefs (residues of ancient Mesopotamian and Syrian cults), as well as Persian, Christian, Gnostic, and Muslim—both Sunnī and Shī‘ī—religious precepts and practices. All these components have been brought together in a syncretistic religious system that has assumed a heterodox Shī‘ī garb.

This syncretistic complex has led to various hypotheses regarding the origins of the Nuṣayrī religion. René Dussaud, one of its pioneering scholars, saw its roots in the pagan circles of Late Antiquity.¹ Henri Lammens, on the other hand, regarded the Nuṣayrī religion as a peculiar offshoot of ancient Syrian Christianity.² Other scholars, among them Samuel Lyde, Heinz Halm, and Matti Moosa, view the Nuṣayrī religion as having developed from a radical Shī‘ī group. Our own investigation of Nuṣayrī sources has led us to espouse the latter view.

According to both Nuṣayrī and non-Nuṣayrī writings the beginnings of the Nuṣayrī religion are connected with the figure of Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, a devotee of the tenth and eleventh Shī‘ī Imams, ‘Alī al-Hādī (d. 254/868) and Ḥasan al-‘Askarī (d. 260/873/4). The term “Nuṣayriyya”, the most common appellation of the new religion, apparently goes back to Ibn Nuṣayr. Other names by which

¹ See R. Dussaud, *Histoire et religion des Nusairis* (Paris, 1900), pp. 17–40.

² See H. Lammens, “Les Nosairis furent-ils chrétiens? A propos d’un livre récent,” *Revue de l’Orient Chrétien* 6 (1901), pp. 33–50.

the religion is commonly known are al-Namīriyya (or al-Numayriyya), deriving from one of Ibn Nuṣayr's *nisbas*, al-Namīrī (or al-Numayrī); al-Khaṣībīyya, after Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥusayn b. Ḥamdān al-Khaṣībī (d. 346/957–8 or 358/969), the great scholar and missionary of the Nuṣayrī faith; and, in recent times, 'Alawiyya, which seems to be preferred by the Nuṣayrīs as emphasizing their affinity with 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, who is venerated by all Shī'ī groups. Also worthy of note are the self-appellations *ahl al-tawḥīd* or *muwaḥḥida*—that is, unitarians or monotheists. All of these appellations signify the self-perception of the Nuṣayrīs as the unique and only true monotheistic faith, distinct from the rest of Islam, including the Shī'a. The Muslims, for their part, have generally tended to regard them as heretics, outside the Muslim fold.³

II

Little study has so far been devoted to the Nuṣayrī religion. Of the various manuscripts of Nuṣayrī esoteric and sacred writings that have reached European libraries, only a few have been published and studied. Modern research into the Nuṣayrī religion began in the middle of the 19th century when European travellers, diplomats, and missionaries in Syria made contact with the Nuṣayrī people, became aware of their peculiar religion, and managed to obtain some of their manuscripts. Among these pioneers was Joseph Catafago, who served during the 1840s as chancellor and dragoman of the Prussian consulate-general in Syria, located in Beirut. Catafago published some short Nuṣayrī liturgical texts and began—but never completed—work on the manuscript of a Nuṣayrī catechism. This catechism appears in the present volume with translation. A few years later the first monograph on the Nuṣayrīs—*The Asian Mystery: The Ansaireeh or Nusairis of Syria*—was published by Samuel Lyde, a British missionary who lived and worked for a time among the Nuṣayrīs. Lyde regarded his monograph as a counterpart to Silvestre de Sacy's groundbreaking study on the religion of the Druzes.⁴ Lyde, however, was able to obtain

³ On the Muslim attitude toward the Nuṣayrīs, see e.g. the well-known legal opinion of the 14th-century Ḥanbalī jurist and theologian Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya, in S. Guyard, "Le Fetwa d'Ibn Taymiyyah sur les Nuṣayrīs," *Journal asiatique* 8 (1871), pp. 162–178.

⁴ See S. Lyde, *The Asian Mystery: The Ansaireeh or Nusairis of Syria* (London, 1860), p. v.

only one Nuṣayrī manuscript; he therefore had to base his account on this single document, together with scanty earlier information and oral sources.

At the beginning of the 20th century Dussaud, who was unfamiliar with Lyde's work, published a new monograph on the Nuṣayrī religion—*Histoire et religion des Nuṣayrīs*—using some additional manuscripts that had reached the National Library in Paris since the appearance of the earlier studies. One of the major sources available to Dussaud, as well as to scholars who followed him, was *al-Bākūra al-Sulaymāniyya fī kashf asrār al-dīyāna al-nuṣayriyya*. Published in Beirut in 1840, this work is a modern description and refutation of the Nuṣayrī religion written by Sulaymān al-Adhanī, a Nuṣayrī apostate. This book, unknown to his predecessors, supplied Dussaud with most of the material on which he based his description of the Nuṣayrī religion. Sulaymān concentrated primarily on the religious situation prevailing in his own time. Yet our study of the Nuṣayrī religion has led us to conclude that Sulaymān's book testifies to the persistence of early Nuṣayrī doctrines and religious practices over the intervening centuries.

Following Dussaud, a textual study was undertaken by Rudolph Strothmann. He published a few Nuṣayrī manuscripts, among them a large manuscript containing the Nuṣayrī "Book of Festivals" (known as *Kitāb majmū' al-a'yād*) and also published important articles on specific doctrinal issues. More recently, Heinz Halm has concentrated on the early roots and traditions of the sect as well as its Gnostic background. His major contributions to the neglected field of Nuṣayrī studies have been his detailed and well-documented study on the proto-Nuṣayrī text *Kitāb al-haft wa-l-aẓilla*, and his monograph *Die islamische Gnosis: die extreme Schia und die 'Alawiten* (Zurich and Munich, 1982).

The most recent survey on the Nuṣayrīs is Moosa's *Extremist Shiites: The Ghulāt Sects* (New York, 1988), a mainly descriptive synthesis, based on both primary and secondary sources. Finally, a few books in Arabic appeared in the 20th century, purporting to present an authoritative picture of Nuṣayrī history and religion. These books are written either by Nuṣayrīs, evincing a markedly apologetic approach, or by non-Nuṣayrīs motivated by polemical considerations.

III

The present volume comprises our previous studies of the Nuṣayrī religion that have appeared in various scholarly publications (Chap-

ters 1 to 5 and 7)⁵ and our more recent work, appearing here for the first time (Chapters 6 and 8), and constituting nearly half of the book. Our previous studies have been substantially revised and adapted to book form. Together the chapters form a mosaic of fundamental aspects of Nuṣayrī theology and liturgy.

The first five chapters are concerned with issues of Nuṣayrī theology. Chapter 1, consisting mainly of a detailed analysis of the doctrines of trinity and incarnation, focuses on a 13th-century polemical treatise, demonstrating the complexity of medieval Nuṣayrī theology and presenting the diversity of religious thought within the Nuṣayrī fold.

Chapter 2 consists of a thematic analysis of the main theological issues of *Kitāb al-usūs*, a medieval pseudepigraphic Nuṣayrī work that is a kaleidoscopic treasure of theological issues. In addition to the major theological doctrines, it covers such subjects as angelology, prophecy, theodicy, transmigration, and the Nuṣayrī attitude toward heretics and believers—all with a breadth unequalled in other known Nuṣayrī texts. This lengthy treatise is also marked by its preoccupation with Christian motifs, exemplifying the significance of the Christian element in Nuṣayrī theological thought.

Chapter 3 is devoted to a discussion of the mystical quest of the Nuṣayrī Gnostic for unification with the divine realm of emanation. Such unification is achieved by heavenly ascent through the degrees of gnosis of the mystery of divinity, perceived as an antinomian restoration of the pristine spiritual existence of the Nuṣayrī believer before his mythical fall from the divine world of light. This ideal quest is presented as the true meaning of Muḥammad's night journey and heavenly ascent.

In contrast to chapters 1–3, which highlight major theological topics, chapters 4 and 5 contain two brief 10th-century theological treatises by Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥusayn b. Hārūn al-Šā'igh, given here in their original Arabic and accompanied by an annotated translation. The treatise in chapter 4 focuses on the believer's duty to know the mystery of divinity and sets out in detail the allegorical interpretation of Muḥammad's night journey and heavenly ascent discussed in the preceding chapter. This treatise stands out in its peculiar concept of the dynamics operating between the various degrees of emanation, a process presented as a principle that can be applied to the heavenly ascent

⁵ The original title of the earlier version of these chapters, and the publication in which they appeared are indicated in a list at the end of the book.

of the soul through these degrees. The treatise in chapter 5 basically pursues the same theme but focuses on the relationship between the two supreme persons of the trinity, the *ma'nā* and the *ism*.

Chapter 6 deals with the Nuṣayrī liturgical calendar presented in al-Ṭabarānī's 11th-century *Majmū' al-a'yād*. The variety of festivals—deriving from Persian origins, from Christianity, and from Islam (both Sunnī and Shī'ī)—is a mirror reflecting the syncretistic nature of the Nuṣayrī religion. Nuṣayrī allegorical and antinomian tendencies, a recurrent feature of heterodox sects, are clearly attested in this calendar, demonstrating the means employed by Nuṣayrī theologians in their endeavour to fuse their eclectic calendar into a new theological and liturgical system. This chapter focuses on the Muslim component—which forms the major part of the Nuṣayrī calendar—and its adaptation to the Nuṣayrī system.

The Druze-Nuṣayrī polemic contained in the Druze canon is the subject of chapter 7. This polemic focuses on cardinal questions of both religions, such as the antinomian stance toward Muslim religious commandments and concepts of divinity, and transmigration. An uncommon theme of this polemic is the religious significance of the physical union between man and woman. The chapter examines Nuṣayrī doctrine and praxis as reflected in the polemic, and further suggests a degree of social and religious contact between Nuṣayrīs and Druzes in the formative phase of the Druze religion.

The eighth and final chapter comprises the Arabic text and annotated translation of the only Nuṣayrī catechism known outside Nuṣayrī circles: *kitāb ta'līm diyānat al-nuṣayriyya* (literally: Book of instruction in the Nuṣayrī religion). As with other esoteric religious groups, initiation into the mysteries of the religion seems to have played an important role in the process of shaping and maintaining the particular Nuṣayrī identity. This is evident from various works dealing with aspects of initiation as well as from contemporary Nuṣayrī practices. Nuṣayrī catechisms are reported to have been transcribed by sheikhs in preparation for initiation.

The catechism format suggests Western influence; for Christian catechisms circulated in 19th-century Syria. Yet notwithstanding its manifestly Christian literary form, the Nuṣayrī catechism indubitably contains doctrines and formulas found in early Nuṣayrī literature.

Despite some one hundred and fifty years of research into the Nuṣayrī religion, Nuṣayrī studies are still limited, since there are very few printed editions even of the manuscripts that are currently available. Additional manuscripts may yet be found outside of the Nuṣayrī

community. The Nuṣayrīs themselves still zealously protect their literary heritage, but there is hope that, like the gradual opening up currently taking place in Druze educated circles, the Nuṣayrīs will also eventually become less hermetically sealed to the outside world. It goes without saying that a more complete library of Nuṣayrī texts would broaden our so far limited and fragmented grasp of the Nuṣayrī religion and history, lending support to some of our currently held notions and no doubt refuting others.

IV

In conclusion, it is a great pleasure for us to acknowledge the help we have received from friends, colleagues, and institutions. We are immensely grateful to Etan Kohlberg and Sarah Stroumsa, who read a draft of this study and made insightful suggestions. Thanks are due also to Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, Simon Hopkins, and Tzvi Langermann for their sound comments on sections of the work. In addition, we wish to express our heartfelt appreciation to Tarik Abu Rajab for his invaluable assistance in preparing the Nuṣayrī catechism for publication. A special debt of gratitude is owed to Evelyn Katrak for her rigorous editing of the manuscript.

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Last but not least, special thanks are due to our spouses, Ruth and Bettina, for their patience and encouragement throughout years of study.

CHAPTER ONE

NUṢAYRĪ TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY ACCORDING TO A 7TH/13TH CENTURY TREATISE

1. *Introduction*

In the Nuṣayrī religion, radical Shīʿī elements constitute a central component. The most important of these is the deification of ʿAlī (b. Abī Ṭālib), a doctrine typical of radical Shīʿī groups. It is chiefly due to this tenet that those groups are known as Ghulāt (“extremists”).

The question of ʿAlī’s divine/human character in the Nuṣayrī religion has been discussed in previous studies. A number of scholars, beginning with Lyde and Dussaud and including others to whom we will refer later have discussed the Nuṣayrī trinity in varying degrees of detail and depth,¹ attempting to trace the sources of this doctrine and to discern its centrality in the Nuṣayrī religion and ritual. Moosa has of late dealt with this subject in an exhaustive study of the Ghulāt sects, about half of which deals with the Nuṣayrī religion.² An extensive chapter deals with the Nuṣayrī trinity. However, it appears that all the scholars who have until now expounded on this question share a tendency to present the Nuṣayrī theology on the divine nature of ʿAlī, the essence of the Nuṣayrī trinity, and other issues as woven from the same cloth. Although these scholars are aware of the existence of sub-sects and other groupings among the Nuṣayrīs, and have in fact described them in their studies,³ they have not paid attention to the considerable doctrinal differences existing among the Nuṣayrīs themselves regarding the issues under discussion. This cannot always be attributed to a meagreness of sources. In certain cases, such as the topics discussed in the present study, this lack of differentiation is in fact due to an insufficiently careful reading of the sources which they had at their disposal.

¹ See e.g. Dussaud, *Histoire et religion des Nuṣayrīs*, pp. 46–72.

² See Moosa, *Extremist Shīʿites: The Ghulat Sects*, pp. 50–56, 342–351.

³ See Dussaud, *Histoire et religion des Nuṣayrīs*, pp. 77–103; Moosa, *ibid.*, pp. 337–341.

This chapter deals with a few aspects of the question of the divine/human nature of 'Alī, and attempts to shed light on the essence of the trinity in the Nuṣayrī religion as presented in a Nuṣayrī treatise of the 7th/13th century. The treatise is an internal Nuṣayrī polemic in which the author's personal perception is presented in opposition to rival views. The argument exhibits various positions reminiscent of internal Christian disputes concerning the nature of Christ and the essence of the Christian trinity. Moreover, the author himself occasionally clarifies and refines his opinion through a comparison with Christian views, clearly demonstrating his familiarity with Christian concepts of the nature and image of Jesus.

2. *Bibliographic Description of the Treatise and Some Notes on Its Language*

The treatise, in the form of a dispute (*munāzara*), is preserved as part of a collective manuscript of Nuṣayrī writings (codex arabe 1450) in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. The manuscript comprises 179 folios and includes a number of Nuṣayrī treatises, catalogued concisely by G. Vajda and Y. Sauvan.⁴

The debate under discussion occupies pages 67–155 of the codex. Vajda and Sauvan inaccurately divided the treatise into two: they defined the portion contained in pages 67–130a as a *munāzara* and that in pages 130b–155a as an independent treatise. Basing themselves on what is written at the beginning of page 130b, they gave this “second treatise” the title *Ithnā'ashara ḥarf* (!) and ascribed it to al-Mufaḍḍal b. 'Umar (al-Ju'fī), a disciple of the Imam Ja'far al-Šādiq and an important figure in the Nuṣayrī religion.⁵ In other words, the beginning of page 130b, which includes statements attributed to al-Mufaḍḍal concerning the knowledge of twelve words, is presented as the commencement of a new treatise, which is clearly not the case. Dussaud, without paying too much attention to this collective manuscript, realized that the personages involved in the debate, as well

⁴ See G. Vajda and Y. Sauvan, *Catalogue des manuscrits arabes, deuxième partie, manuscrits musulmans*, vol. 3 (Nos. 1121–1464), Bibliothèque Nationale (Paris, 1985), pp. 311–314.

⁵ On al-Mufaḍḍal and his place in the Nuṣayrī religion, see H. Halm, “Das «Buch der Schatten»: Die Mufaḍḍal-Tradition der Gulāt und die Ursprünge des Nuṣayrismus,” *Der Islam* 55 (1978), pp. 219–266—part 1; *ibid.*, 58 (1981), pp. 15–86—part 2.

as the place names, attest to a single tractate.⁶ To Dussaud's observation one may add that the issues discussed in the "two treatises" and the sequence of ideas also attest to their being a single tractate: the opening statements of 130b constitute, in our opinion, a clear and direct continuation of the text from the previous page (130a), rather than the beginning of a new one as suggested by Vajda and Sauvan.

The anonymous scholar who penned a brief preface in French to the description of the treatises included in the collective manuscript also viewed these consecutive pages (67–155) as one unit. His pertinent comments regarding various sections of the collection attest to his attentive reading of it in its entirety.⁷

Also noteworthy is the list of treatises, written in the hand of the copyist (or one of the copyists) of the collection, from which it transpires that the copyist himself viewed the complete sequence of the pages under discussion as one work, which he entitled *Munāẓarat al-shaykh al-Nashshābī tataḍammanu akhaṣṣa 'aqā'idihim bi-l-tawḥīd* (Debate of sheikh al-Nashahābī including fundamentals of their [=the Nuṣayrīs] belief concerning the unity of God); the title that follows, *sharḥ al-imām wa-mā yūjabu 'alayhi* (Explanation of [the institution of] the Imam and the obligations imposed on him), refers already to the treatise following the *Munāẓara* (pp. 155ff).

The description of Vajda and Sauvan⁸ indicates that the entire collection was copied by a number of copyists, as is evident from the colophon at the end of each treatise therein.⁹ The copying of the treatise with which we are concerned was completed on the first of the month of Ṣafar 1211H (7 August, 1796).¹⁰ This collection, along with another (Paris, arabe 1449) also containing Nuṣayrī texts in Oriental (Syrian) handwriting, reached the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris in 1866.¹¹

The language of the manuscript, as in most Nuṣayrī manuscripts

⁶ See Dussaud, *Histoire et religion des Noṣairīs*, introduction, p. xx.

⁷ See the handwritten preface to the codex Paris, arabe 1450, p. 2, line 12, to p. 3, line 4. There is no pagination of the handwritten preface; the enumeration given here is ours.

⁸ See *Catalogue des manuscrits arabes*, vol. 3, p. 314.

⁹ See e.g. pp. 38a, 167a, 174b.

¹⁰ *Munāẓara*, p. 155a, lines 1–2. See also Vajda and Sauvan, *Catalogue des manuscrits arabes*, vol. 3, p. 314.

¹¹ See Vajda and Sauvan, *ibid.*

known to us, is Middle Arabic,¹² being characterized by various grammatical deviations from classical Arabic that are typical of middle Arabic. Phonetically, the weakening of the *hamza* is a frequent phenomenon (e.g. بَضَائِع instead of بَضَائِع;¹³ رَيْس instead of رَئِيس;¹⁴ أَحْبَاه instead of أَحْبَاه;¹⁵ and many others); the exchange of ت/ث, د/ذ, ظ/ض is routine. In spelling, the replacement of ة with ت, which is usual in manuscripts, occurs quite often; but the opposite, less frequent replacement—i.e. ة instead of ت in verbal forms in the perfect tense (e.g. عَايَنَ instead of عَايَنَتْ;¹⁶ إِدْعَيْ instead of إِدْعَيْتَ;¹⁷ طَوَّعَ instead of طَوَّعْتَ;¹⁸)—is also documented numerous times in this manuscript.¹⁹ Morphologically, the classical forms are generally preserved, although here and there slips into the vernacular occur, such as the doubling of the ج after the definite article (الْجَهْل instead of الْجَهْل)²⁰—a phenomenon familiar from spoken dialects, including the Syrian and Palestinian dialects.

As regards syntax, particularly noteworthy is the misuse of case endings and even subsequent hyper-corrections;²¹ the disappearance of modes of the imperfect,²² which is one of the salient characteristics of middle Arabic, can also be observed.

3. Background and Content of the Treatise

The treatise is aptly described by the anonymous scholar who wrote the preface to the collective manuscript as constituting:

¹² See also Strothmann's note, *MA*, pp. 11–12.

¹³ *Munāzara*, p. 69a, line 5.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 71a, line 9.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 112a, line 12.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 67b, line 10.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 108b, line 8.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 113a, line 12.

¹⁹ On this and other grammatical phenomena mentioned here, see J. Blau, *A Grammar of Mediaeval Judeo-Arabic*, 2nd ed. (Jerusalem, 1980), esp. pp. 41–42; idem, *A Grammar of Christian Arabic* (Louvain, 1966–1967), pp. 115–117.

²⁰ *Munāzara*, p. 111a, line 10.

²¹ Many examples of this are found in passages from the *Munāzara* quoted in our study. Wherever a grammatical form appeared that deviated from the rules of classical Arabic, this form was left to stand with an exclamation mark signaling the deviation.

²² E.g. لَا تَمِيلُ (in the indicative imperfect) instead of لَا تَمِيلْ (in the jussive imperfect) (*Munāzara*, p. 70a, line 10).

an account of various debates which the author held with his coreligionists, including a debate with a teacher named ‘Alī ibn Maṣṣūr that took place in the village of Asfin or Isfīn²³ in the month of Ṣafar 685H (i.e. March or April 1286). In this treatise the author attempts to prove the divinity of the Commander of the Faithful [=‘Alī] and a kind of trinity in unity and unity in the trinity.²⁴

These words, in conjunction with his additional comment concerning the vague nature of the treatise,²⁵ convey succinctly both the gist of the treatise and its fragmentary nature.

The writer of the treatise and the dominant figure in conducting the debates described therein is Yūsuf ibn al-‘Ajūz al-Nashshābī al-Ḥalabī.²⁶ Nothing is known of his origins except that he possibly hailed from the city of Aleppo, as may be inferred from his *nisba* al-Ḥalabī and perhaps also from the fact that he refers to a certain al-Jazarī, with whom he studied, as the “Imam of the people of Aleppo” (*imām al-ḥalabiyyīn*).²⁷

Al-Nashshābī himself sums up the reasons that led him to write the polemic: He wishes to set forth the correct path and to caution against distortions by deviants and corruptors who follow the fallacies of their hearts.²⁸ Along with this didactic-polemical purpose, the author also gives an eschatological explanation for his action: the differences between the various factions are, in his opinion, one of the signs of the end of days. The author even suggests a connection between the events of his day and those of the end of time, destined to occur within twenty years, i.e. at the beginning of the 8th/14th century.²⁹

²³ The identification of this place as well as of others mentioned in the *Munāẓara* is uncertain. It is possible that some places changed names or no longer exist. However, there are allusions to them as being located in the Nuṣayrī mountain. Some might be identified with similar place names appearing in the maps supplied by Dussaud in his *Topographie historique de la Syrie antique et médiévale* (Paris, 1927); see esp. map no. IX.

²⁴ See the above-mentioned French handwritten preface to the *Munāẓara*, p. 2, lines 20–23.

²⁵ “Il s’exprime d’une manière si obscure, que je n’ai pu le suivre dans le dédale de son raisonnement” (ibid., p. 2, lines 24–26).

²⁶ This is his full name as it appears on p. 68a, line 10. At the beginning of the treatise (67b, lines 4–5) he is mentioned as Yūsuf al-Ḥalabī al-ma’rūf bi-l-Nashshābī, but the surname Ibn al-‘Ajūz appears only on the margin of the page. Henceforth he will be referred to by his *nisba* al-Nashshābī or simply as “the author.” On him, see also, D.‘A. Ḥasan, *ʿĀlām min al-madhhab al-jāʿfarī al-ʿalawī* (Damascus, 1998), vol. 2, pp. 12–15.

²⁷ *Munāẓara*, p. 140b, line 6.

²⁸ Ibid. p. 142b.

²⁹ Ibid. pp. 139b–140b. The author notes that these eschatological events will

Al-Nashshābī notes at the beginning of the treatise that he accompanied his teacher, at the latter's request, in his wanderings to a number of villages in northwestern Syria,³⁰ whose inhabitants treated them hospitably.³¹ From there, due to poor living conditions, he was forced to continue his wanderings until he came to "the people of the mountain and the shore,"³² the historical centre of the Nuṣayrīs.³³ The author does not conceal his profound disappointment with the mountain people, most of whom, according to him, "have turned away from the correct (path) and from telling the truth and have turned to corrupt matters and worthless trade" (*fa-wajadtu akthara ahl al-jabal qad shadhdhū 'an al-ḥaqq wa-qawl al-ṣidq wa-mālū ilā l-asbāb al-fāsida wa-l-baḍāyī' al-kāsida wa-l-tijāra al-khāsira*).³⁴ Later in the treatise al-Nashshābī emphasizes his disappointment with both their moral and their religious-doctrinal values; he accuses them of upholding deviant views and relates that he disputed with them on the heresy of various groups of the mountain people.³⁵ Among the latter he specifically mentions Nāshī Karmas and Rabī'a al-Suwayda,³⁶ who, in his eyes, exemplified those holding disreputable views.³⁷ The author argues in particular with Rabī'a al-Suwayda and his teacher, al-Mu'allim Mūsā, who is mentioned several times in the treatise. Al-Nashshābī accuses Rabī'a of disclosing the secrets of the religion to the multitudes—in

take place within the influence zone of three planets: Saturn (*zuḥal*), Jupiter (*al-mushtarī*) and Mercury (*uṭārid*). There follows a detailed account of the coming of the Mahdī and the establishment of his rule over the entire universe.

³⁰ *Munāẓara*, pp. 68b–69a; al-Nashshābī mentions the names of several stations in his wanderings, among them the villages Bilād al-dhimām, Bilād al-niṣāf, and al-Khūṣa. As far as we are able to tell, these names do not appear either in the Arabic geographical literature or in modern studies. See also note 23, above.

³¹ *Munāẓara*, p. 68b, lines 12–13.

³² *Munāẓara*, p. 69a, line 2; by this the author probably refers to the Nuṣayrī mountain and the coast of Lādhiyya.

³³ On this region, the historical domain of the Nuṣayrīs for centuries, see J. Weulersse, *Le pays des Alaouites* (Tours, 1940), pp. 124–162.

³⁴ *Munāẓara*, p. 69a, lines 2–5.

³⁵ On the heresy of the "mountain people," see also the author's words on pp. 139b, 142a.

³⁶ *Munāẓara*, p. 69a, lines 3–4. The former is not mentioned again in the treatise; the latter (Rabī'a) is mentioned further on by the name Rabī'a b. Naṣr al-'Aṣīda (*Munāẓara*, p. 70b, line 9). His surname al-Suwayda may indicate his connection with one of several places named al-Suwaydiyya (or al-Souweidiyye as the name is actually pronounced in the Syrian Arabic dialect). See the index in Dussaud's *Topographie*.

³⁷ *Munāẓara*, p. 69b.

pursuit of power, authority, and material pleasures, and also because of a psychological disorder.³⁸

The debate between al-Nashshābī and Rabīʿa takes place in the village of Dayrūna in the district of al-Qulayʿa,³⁹ as well as in the aforementioned village of Asfin/Isfin, Rabīʿa's village. The author notes that he won support for his views from a number of scholars, whose names (unknown to us from other sources) he cites specifically.⁴⁰ Contrary to his usual practice, he describes in relative detail the circumstances of one of the meetings. During the debate between the two, others are present, some of whom take a position in favour of one of the sides; tempers flare and the polemic causes a breach between families and friends. Al-Nashshābī blames Rabīʿa for denouncing him to the local governor saying that his rival (i.e. the author) and his faction are plotting against him. The governor then summons them and they are compelled into hiding.⁴¹

The vigour and intensity of the polemic indicates, in our view, the religious and theological ferment that existed in the first centuries of the consolidation of the Nuṣayrī religion. This contrasts with the poor state of religious education in more recent times, especially in the last two hundred years, about which there is quite detailed evidence.⁴²

The treatise deals with numerous topics and is not marked by conceptual consistency. The author jumps from one subject to another without maintaining a thread of thought to connect the many ideas he discusses. Nevertheless, the fundamental axis around which his discussion revolves seems to incorporate two main questions (which are in fact two aspects of the same issue): the internal Nuṣayrī dispute over the nature of ʿAlī and the essence of the Nuṣayrī trinity. We have chosen, therefore, to focus on these issues.

³⁸ *Munāẓara*, pp. 113a, 142b; the author's criticism of Rabīʿa is grounded in a general psychological theory that he learned from his master Ḥātim al-Ṭubānī, one of the leading Nuṣayrī authorities at the end of 7th/13th century and beginning of the 8th/14th. On him, see Muḥammad Amīn Ghālib, *Taʾrīkh al-ʿAlawīyyin* (Beirut, n.d.), pp. 376ff; D.ʿA. Ḥasan, *Aʿlām min al-madhhab al-jāʿfarī al-ʿalawī*, pp. 38–40.

³⁹ *Munāẓara*, p. 70a, line 4.

⁴⁰ *Munāẓara*, pp. 71a–b.

⁴¹ *Munāẓara*, pp. 112b–113a.

⁴² See e.g. Lyde, *The Asian Mystery*, pp. 186–231, and esp. p. 188.

4. *The Debate over the Nature of 'Alī*

After describing the circumstances of the dispute, al-Nashshābī establishes the literary framework of the treatise. He sets out to dispute and refute the views of a number of groups sharing a concept that reduces the divine status of 'Alī.⁴³

The dispute between the author and his rivals regarding the divine/human nature of 'Alī reflects essentially the intrinsic tension between two polarized perceptions of this issue. The viewpoint represented by the author is an abstracting one⁴⁴—i.e. a conception that accentuates the divine elements of 'Alī while avoiding aspects of his nature that could impart to him qualities of flesh and blood. This is essentially a docetic conception. The rival conception depicts 'Alī as closer to flesh and blood and sketches him in anthropomorphic terms, even in actual incarnation.

The tension between these conceptions is inherent to the Nuṣayrī creed, which views 'Alī as a deity that appeared in various periods of history in diverse human guises.⁴⁵ This essentially resembles the Christian dogma of the divinity of the Son and his historical appearance in his incarnation as Jesus. The tension between the two perceptions of 'Alī stems from the theological difficulty latent in the doctrine of incarnation. In what follows we shall see that the various Nuṣayrī concepts born of the desire to solve this difficulty also resemble, to a large degree, Christian attempts to wrestle with this question.

Al-Nashshābī's charges against the convictions of his rivals appears throughout the treatise, but their gist can already be found in its beginning:

We debated the question of acknowledging or rejecting the existence of image (*fa-jarā baynī wa-baynahu al-ḥadīth 'alā ithbāt wujūd al-ṣūra wa-naḥyihā*), and his [Rabī'a's] opinion of the Commander of the Faithful [= 'Alī]. . . was that he did have an image both in his appearance and in his concealment (*muṣawwar ṣūra bi-zuhūrihi wa-buḥūnihi*); [possessing] a hand of light, a head of light and a foot of light; and he [Rabī'a] was of the opinion that the abstract image [is identical] with the light

⁴³ *Munāẓara*, pp. 80a–83b. On these groups see below.

⁴⁴ The Arabic term frequently used by the author is *tanẓīh* or some other derivative of the root *nzh*. The literal meaning of this is “purification,” but for our purposes it may in some cases be best rendered as “abstraction.”

⁴⁵ The cyclical revelation of the deity is discussed below.

of essence⁴⁶ (*wa-athbata anna al-ṣūra al-anzaʿiyya hiya nūr al-dhāt*). . . . And he further stated: "I do not deny anything about him⁴⁷ except eating and drinking," and I rejected his remarks on this. In addition, we discussed the question of the "imāma line" (*saṭr al-imāma*). He believed that it is "*maʿnāwī*"⁴⁸ and I rejected [also] this claim.⁴⁹

Three points evolving from this paragraph are repeated and discussed in many other places in the text: (a) Rabiʿa's conception of ʿAlī the deity as possessing a form in which he is revealed, "the visible form," as it is designated in many places in the course of the treatise; (b) this form is portrayed in anthropomorphic terms, although it should be noted that Rabiʿa does not present here a crude anthropomorphism; he refers to the members of God's body (hand, head, foot) as manifestations of light;⁵⁰ and (c) the *maʿnā* reveals himself in the historical "imāma line" (of Twelver Shīʿism).

5. Internal Polemics Regarding the Nature of ʿAlī

Elsewhere in the treatise,⁵¹ al-Nashshābī presents Rabiʿa's opinion in great detail and adds that the latter views the perception that negates ʿAlī's (exoteric) form—an outlook that does not recognize his incarnation—as heretical.⁵² The author again emphasizes Rabiʿa's stand, which contends that only incontrovertibly concrete actions such as eating and drinking cannot be ascribed to ʿAlī. To prove his claim that ʿAlī the God took on a visible form, Rabiʿa cites historical episodes from ʿAlī's life in which he is described as undertaking human activities. Chief among these are events that took place in the course of military expeditions at the beginning of Islam, such as the killing of the Jew Marḥab during the expedition of Khaybar (in 7/628),⁵³

⁴⁶ The term "light of essence" (*nūr al-dhāt*), mentioned in several passages of the *Munāzara* quoted here, signifies a mediating power between the persons of the trinity; see the discussion on the trinity below.

⁴⁷ I.e. about ʿAlī.

⁴⁸ This means that the most sublime aspect of the trinity (normally identified with the *maʿnā*) is incarnated in the historical Imams. This concept is in fact entailed in the term "imāma line" (*saṭr al-imāma*). This question as well as the affinity of the Nuṣayrīs to Twelver Shīʿism is discussed below.

⁴⁹ *Munāzara*, pp. 70b, line 12—71a, line 6; see also p. 100b, line 10—101a, line 3 (to be discussed later), and p. 142b, line 9.

⁵⁰ A similar view is ascribed to the sect of the Bayāniyya. See ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Baghḍādī, *al-Farq bayn al-firaq*, edited by P. Hitti (Cairo, 1924), p. 145.

⁵¹ *Munāzara*, p. 100b, line 10—p. 101, line 3.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 100b, lines 10–11.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 101a, line 5; On this well-known incident, see the account, founded

and 'Alī's war against Mu'āwiya at Ṣiffīn (in 37/657).⁵⁴ 'Alī's participation in clearly human activities of this sort leaves no room for doubt, in Rabī'a's mind, that he also possessed a human aspect.

Some of the opinions that al-Nashshābī ascribes to Rabī'a, as well as other views, are identified by the author as those of various groups that we will detail shortly. These groups shared the belief in the incarnation of God in 'Alī. It appears that in describing in detail the various heretical groups, the author does not necessarily intend to identify any of them with groups holding these same views in his own time. His primary intention is rather to point out the similarity between the views of apostates of his own time and the views held by these groups.

Among the heresies which the author lists are some that are known from other sources and some that are as yet completely unknown. It transpires from the treatise that the majority are internal Nuṣayrī "heresies." The Ḥātimiyya and Ishāqiyya occupy a conspicuous place among these heresies. The treatise describes the first as a Nuṣayrī faction; we have been unable to trace it in other sources.⁵⁵ Among the views which al-Nashshābī attributes to the Ḥātimiyya is the conception that 'Alī is not the supreme concealed aspect of the divinity. In their understanding, the three divine lights of the trinity, 'Alī, Muḥammad, and Salmān, emanated (*inbajāsāt*) from the "absence" (*al-ghayb*). 'Alī in his historical appearance is, according to them, a created flesh-and-blood figure (*shakhṣ basharī makhlūq*) that reflects the human aspect of the deity. Between the divine aspect of 'Alī and divinity itself there is an intermediate entity, the "light of essence";⁵⁶ 'Alī is therefore, in their understanding, the manifestation of God in a created human form.⁵⁷ In another place al-Nashshābī even attributes

on both Sunnī and Shī'ī sources, in Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* (Beirut, 1403/1983), vol. 21, pp. 15ff.

⁵⁴ *Munāẓara*, p. 105b, lines 9ff. It is noteworthy that among the biographical episodes meant to demonstrate 'Alī's human aspect, there is one referred to by the title *khbar al-a'inna* (the account of the clouds). This event is seemingly referred to by *MA* (p. 194) where 'Alī is depicted as descending from heaven on clouds. A similar view appears in al-Shahrastānī's account of the Bayāniyya sect. See D. Gimaret and G. Monnot, *Livre des religions et des sectes* (Leuven, 1986), p. 451.

⁵⁵ The title Ḥātimiyya seems to derive from the name of a certain Ḥātim al-Ḥanifiyya mentioned in *Munāẓara*, p. 137a, line 3. See also p. 82b, line 10, where he is called *shaykhunā Ḥātim* and where heretic views are ascribed to him.

⁵⁶ On the term "light of essence," see *Munāẓara*, pp. 82a–b.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 134a, lines 2–3.

to them the somewhat vague notion that this created form in fact originated in the actions of the multitudes. In other words, God created 'Alī's human form for people out of their own actions.⁵⁸ The author's intention here seems to be that God appears to the people in a created human form due to mankind's inability to grasp His exalted nature. The view that 'Alī is of flesh and blood, just like the "leader of the community" (*imām al-jamā'a*) in every generation, is also attributed to the Ḥātimīyya.⁵⁹ A double claim may be implied here: First, for the complete incarnation of 'Alī and second, for the belief that 'Alī is embodied anew not only in the historical Imams but also in the leaders of the Nuṣayrī communities in every generation.⁶⁰

The Ishāqiyya are the other important group whose views al-Nashshābī portrays as reflecting the heretical views with which he takes issue in his treatise. In a number of places in the treatise the author notes that those who hold these deviant opinions are the followers of Abū Duhayba. Although the author does not mention this person by any other appellation, he is apparently referring to Ismā'īl b. Khālīd al-Ba'labakkī, known by his surname of Abū Duhayba, a disciple of Ishāq (b. Muḥammad al-Nakha'ī al-Aḥmar), one of the founders of the Ishāqiyya sect. In origin and outlook this sect was close to the Nuṣayriyya, and it seems that al-Nashshābī's polemic against them reflects some historical reality and does not belong merely in the literary domain.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 149b, lines 11–13.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 134a, lines 4–5.

⁶⁰ For evidence for the persistence in modern times of the belief that 'Alī was incarnated in certain persons, see R. Strothmann, "Die Nuṣayrī im heutigen Syrien," *Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen* (Göttingen, 1950), p. 35. See also J. Catafago, "Die drei Messen der Nussairier," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 2 (1848), p. 389.

⁶¹ So far the only source for the history of the Ishāqiyya in Syria is Ghālib, *Ta'rikh al-'Alawīyyīn* (pp. 262–264), according to which the Syrian centre of the sect in Aleppo moved under the leadership of Abū Duhayba to the region of the Nuṣayrī mountain and from there to the coast of Lādhiqiyya, where Abū Duhayba and his followers became rivals of the Nuṣayrī sect. At the beginning of the 13th century the Ishāqiyya were oppressed in this region by the activities of Ḥasan al-Makzūn al-Sinjārī, a Nuṣayrī emir and a great poet of the Nuṣayriyya. Al-Sinjārī burned their writings and practically eliminated the presence of the Ishāqiyya in the region. Some followers of the sect may have remained among the Nuṣayrīs; at any rate the memory of the rivalry was still very much alive. The Nuṣayrīs also retained in their possession Ishāqī writings. On Ishāq and the Ishāqiyya, see Halm, "Das «Buch der Schatten»,", part 1, pp. 245–247, 250–253; *MA*, pp. 130, 195, 205. For a French translation of al-Shahrastānī's account of the Ishāqiyya, see Dussaud, *Histoire et religion des Nuṣayrīs*, pp. 57ff; Gimaret and Monnot, *Livre des religions et des sectes*, pp. 542–545.

The central point in Ishāq's teachings, presented in the treatise through his disciple Abū Duhayba, is the belief in 'Alī's divinity and his incarnation in the Imams. In four places in the treatise al-Nashshābī attributes to Abū Duhayba an anthropomorphic conception of God;⁶² Abū Duhayba's opinion regarding the *ma'nā* as part of the *imāma* line is mentioned in two places.⁶³ As we know, the author rejects this view, since those who profess it in fact believe in incarnation (*ḥulūliyya*).⁶⁴ Elsewhere the author claims that he who holds that "'Alī's ability is [part] of the ability of God and that the *ma'nā* is not identical to 'Alī is thereby a polytheist (*mushrik*), an infidel and a follower of Abū Duhayba."⁶⁵ A more explicit link between the Ishāqiyya and the "deviant" views rejected by al-Nashshābī is made in another paragraph, in which the author describes events that occurred after God's incarnation in the Imam Ḥasan (al-'Askarī):

Questions and answers have multiplied, doubt has intruded, and disreputable views have appeared such as those of Ishāq and his comrades and others from among those who believe in incarnation (*ḥulūliyya*), those who fabricated lies in their hearts and said that God resides in the *ḥijāb* and in the *bāb* and in the *yafīms*,⁶⁶ and in others among the "people of rank" (*ahl al-marātib*).⁶⁷

This passage directly links Ishāq and his followers with views that advocate the incarnation (of 'Alī). However, is the portrayal of rival views, such as those held by Ishāq and his followers (i.e. considering

⁶² *Munāẓara*, p. 118a, lines 10–11. Here he is not mentioned by his surname Abū Duhayba but as the "author of *kitāb al-faḥṣ*." Further on, however (p. 123a, line 3), al-Nashshābī explicitly identifies Abū Duhayba as the writer of the above-mentioned book, now referred to by its full title *kitāb al-faḥṣ wa-l-baḥṭh*.

⁶³ *Munāẓara*, p. 123a, line 3; p. 125b, lines 12–13.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 125b lines 12–13.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 131b, lines 4–6. For a derogatory mention of Abū Duhayba in one of the prayers of *Kitāb al-majmū'*, see *KM*, p. 185, line 2 (=p. 165 in the French translation); for an English translation, see Salisbury, pp. 239–240.

⁶⁶ The five *yafīms* (the Incomparables) are divine entities emanating from the trinity, or more specifically, from the *bāb*. The *yafīms*, like the persons of the trinity, are identified with Muslim figures, five of the companions of the prophet who are also known as 'Alī's supporters: al-Miqdād b. Aswad al-Kindī, Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī, 'Abd Allāh b. Rawāḥa al-Anṣārī, 'Uthmān b. Maẓ'ūn al-Najāshī and Qanbar b. Kādān al-Dawsī. See: *KM*, p. 188 lines 7–9 (=p. 168 in the French translation); Salisbury, p. 246. On the place of the *yafīms* in Nuṣayrī theology see: Dussaud, *Histoire et religion des Nuṣayrīs*, p. 68 ff. and Moosa, *Extremist Shī'ites*, pp. 357–361.

⁶⁷ *Munāẓara*, p. 120a, line 11–120b. The term *ahl al-marātib* is a general title for all the persons of the Nuṣayrī spiritual realm. See: *KM*, p. 191, line 4 (=p. 194 in the French translation); Salisbury, p. 250, and Moosa, *Extremist Shī'ites*, *ibid.*

the *ma'nā* as part of the *imāma* line, distinguishing between the *ma'nā* and 'Alī, and believing in the incarnation in 'Alī and the Imams), sufficient to prove that the treatise reflects a historical debate between two closely related sects (Nuṣayriyya and Ishāqiyya)? There does not appear to be sufficient evidence to decide this issue unequivocally. It is indeed possible that the participants in the debate testify to its persistence in their own time, so that whereas al-Nashshābī represented the Nuṣayrī-Khaṣībī view,⁶⁸ his rivals, led by Rabī'a, represented the Ishāqī view. However, one can just as reasonably assert that the debate does not reflect a true historical reality and that the author used the names of past rivals, Ishāq and his disciple Abū Duhayba, in order to condemn the deviant doctrines of his own time.

In any event, al-Nashshābī regards the sect that followed al-Khaṣībī as the only one holding correct views and the only one whose followers are worthy of being considered as unitarians (*muwahhida*).

The author mentions two other groups—apparently also Nuṣayrī sub-sects—the Mu'tazila and the Zaydiyya; but it should be noted that there is no correlation between them and the groups known to us by these names in Muslim literature. The Mu'tazila referred to by the author of the *Munāẓara* may be identical with the Shī'ī sub-sect mentioned under this name by al-Mas'ūdī.⁶⁹ The view that "the visible form of the deity is the sun which encompasses the sky" is ascribed to the Mu'tazila,⁷⁰ as is the view that the divine manifested form from which the *ma'nā* speaks is the universal end (*al-ṣūra al-mar'yya al-ghāya al-kulliyya al-zāhira al-lāhūtiyya al-nāṭiqā bi-l-ma'nawīyya*).⁷¹ In their system this form is actually identical with the entire trinity, and it speaks through the historical human figures in which the trinity is incarnated.⁷²

Regarding the name Zaydiyya, it should first be noted that the author includes several groups under this rubric (*al-fīraq al-madhkūra min al-zaydiyya*).⁷³ From the text it appears that the appellation is de-

⁶⁸ I.e. the doctrine attributed to Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥusayn b. Ḥamdān al-Khaṣībī. Al-Nashshābī, as it becomes clear from various places in his book, regards al-Khaṣībī as a leading authority of the authentic Nuṣayriyya. In *Catechism*, question 99, al-Khaṣībī is presented as the founder of the Nuṣayrī religion. On the life and works of al-Khaṣībī, see the preface by the anonymous editor of al-Khaṣībī's *al-Hidāya l-kubrā* (Beirut, 1406/1986), pp. 5–24.

⁶⁹ See "Mu'tazila," *EF*, vol. 7, p. 793.

⁷⁰ *Munāẓara*, p. 137b, line 4.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 137b, lines 7–8.

⁷² *Ibid*, lines 8–11.

⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 143a, lines 8–9.

rived from the name of a certain Zayd al-Ḥāsib,⁷⁴ to whom various essays are attributed. The essays, known to al-Nashshābī, included heretical beliefs, among them (a) that Muḥammad, ‘Alī, and Salmān are one person (*al-mīm [=Muḥammad] wa-‘Alī wa-Salmān shay’ wāḥid wa-nūr wāḥid*);⁷⁵ (b) that ‘Alī is only a holy spirit which sustains the body of the believer (but does not dwell inside it);⁷⁶ and (c) that the spirit of the believer is the spirit that speaks through the voice of the Imam and is identical with ‘Alī (!). Alongside this complex of doctrines concerning the divinity that express views diminishing ‘Alī’s divine status, these essays are also said to include an exalting view of the deity whereby the *ma’nā* is separated and placed above the trinity, i.e. “the *ma’nā* is neither visible nor sensible, and it is ‘the intellect’ (*al-‘aql*) and also ‘the intellectually cognized object’ (*al-‘aql al-ma’qūl*)”⁷⁷ that creates all things.”⁷⁸

It is noteworthy that the view attributed here to the Zaydiyya, according to which ‘Alī, Muḥammad, and Salmān constitute one person, is reminiscent of the Christian Sabellian heresy of the third century, which stipulated that the Father and the Son are one person.⁷⁹

The last of the deviant groups mentioned by al-Nashshābī and known to us also from other sources is the Mukhammisa, mentioned only once in our text. Unlike the foregoing groups this is not a Nuṣayrī sect, although it does hold views similar to those of the Nuṣayrīs. Al-Nashshābī does not dwell on it at length, he merely attributes to it a simplistic concept of incarnation; yet it transpires from his remarks that this sect is well known to him and that he is familiar with the literary polemics against it.⁸⁰

Finally deserving of mention is the marked propensity of the treatise to characterize later religious groups according to their resemblance to earlier known groups and factions, without there necessarily be-

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 138, lines 5–6.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 139a, lines 9–10.

⁷⁶ Ibid., line 8.

⁷⁷ The rendering of these well-known Aristotelian terms is that of S. Pines in his English translation of Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed* (Chicago and London, 1963), vol. 1, p. 163. See also our discussion below of the trinity, and esp. p. 38 with note 150.

⁷⁸ *Munāẓara*, p. 139a, line 7.

⁷⁹ On this Christian heresy, see Epiphanius, *Panarion*, *Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte* 31, edited by K. Holl (Leipzig, 1922), 62, 1.

⁸⁰ *Munāẓara*, p. 131a. On the Mukhammisa, see Halm, “Das «Buch der Schatten»,” part 2, p. 250; and idem, *Die Islamische Gnosis*, pp. 218–230. See also W. Madelung, “Mukhammisa” *EP*, vol. 7, pp. 517–518.

ing a connection between them, not even a literary one.

The central doctrine common to the diverse outlooks presented here is that 'Alī has a separate, human nature not identical with his divine nature. In the author's opinion, this of necessity leads to an anthropomorphic view of the deity, a conclusion that in his opinion entails both heresy and polytheism (*shirk*); he likens their error to the Christian error in comprehending the divine aspect of Christ in the Trinity:

He who believes that 'Alī is a human name (*ism nāsūt*) and that Allāh is a divine name (*ism lāhūt*) has thus admitted that Allāh is a body (*jism*) representing both divinity and humanity—indeed he has become an infidel and polytheist (*kafara wa-ashraka*), and reverted to what the Christians believe concerning Christ. They say that he [i.e. Christ] represents both divinity and humanity; that his execution and crucifixion affected his humanity, and that his divinity ascended to heaven, returning to its source. God, however, denounced them as liars in His words (Q. 4:159): "Yet they did not slay him, neither crucified him, only a likeness of that was shown to them," as well as in His words (Q. 112:1): "The Commander of the Faithful has not begotten and has not been begotten," etc. And He denied them in His words: "I am a tongue, neither flesh nor blood." And He denounced them as liars as He denounced the Christians. It is proven by these words that he [i.e. 'Alī] is one, single, rational in his essence and does not reside in a created human form, nor does he speak through such a human form.⁸¹

A few points in this passage warrant attention. First, quite instructive is the analogy the author draws between the mistaken conception that, according to him, exists in Christianity regarding the figure of Jesus, and Nuṣayrī doctrinal deviations concerning the belief in 'Alī's divinity. Both impair the perception of the nature of the deity by creating a duality—a divine aspect (*ism lāhūt*) and a human aspect (*ism nāsūt*)—in the deity. The tendency to draw an analogy between 'Alī and Jesus is indeed a familiar theme in heterodox Shī'ī circles and has been noted by scholars in the past; the adoption of a docetic view in relation to 'Alī's death, similar to Gnostic-Manichaean docetism in relation to Jesus, can also be found in Muslim heresio-graphic literature.⁸² However, one can discern here also the author's

⁸¹ *Munāẓara*, p. 136a, line 11.

⁸² See e.g. the chapter on the Sabā'iyya (i.e. the followers of 'Abd Allāh b. Sabā') in al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-fīraq*, p. 142. See also I. Friedlaender, "The Heterodoxies of the Shiites according to Ibn Ḥazm," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 28 (1907), pp. 29–30. For a discussion of the docetic doctrine concerning 'Alī, see also Lyde, *The Asian Mystery*, p. 123.

familiarity with the complex nature of Christian trinitarian theology, and his familiarity with the Christian terminology is seen in the use of the twin terms *nāsūt-lahūt*, which are specifically Christian.

It is interesting to note, too, the use the author makes of the docetic verse in the Qur'ān regarding Jesus, as the aim of the Qur'ānic verse is to demonstrate the impossibility of a man like Jesus being humiliated and dying a shameful death by crucifixion. The Qur'ānic verse does not negate Jesus' human aspect in any way. Here, however, general docetic use has been made of this verse, as if in order to deny Jesus'—and thereby 'Alī's—true human aspect.

The second interesting point in this passage is the deification of 'Alī. The exaltation of 'Alī reaches its apex in his complete identification with God, which is achieved through exegesis and even by means of a daring modification of the Qur'ānic verse that opens *sūra* 112 (*al-ikhhlās*): “*qul huwa llāhu aḥad...lam yalid wa-lam yūlad*” (Say: He is God, one God... has not begotten and has not been begotten). Instead of the word *allāh* in the canonic version of the Qur'ān, the words *amīr al-mu'minīn* (Commander of the Faithful) appear here—an expression that in Nuṣayrī literature, as well as in Shī'ī literature in its various subdivisions, refers to 'Alī.⁸³

In order, on the one hand, to refute more vigorously the accusations made by Rabī'a and others who hold similar views and, on the other hand, to reinforce his own approach, which exalts 'Alī as God, al-Nashshābī turns to a series of sayings of the Imam Ja'far al-Šādiq and other authorities, including Muḥammad b. Sinān⁸⁴ and al-Khaṣībī.

In a statement made by al-Šādiq, he is cited as telling his disciple al-Mufaḍḍal (b. 'Umar): “[since] it is impossible to say that the essence [of God] is light, how, therefore, is it possible to say that it is

⁸³ Elsewhere in the *Munāẓara* (p. 130b, lines 3–5) the divine attributes mentioned in the above-cited verse are listed as part of the twelve attributes (literally: “words” [*hurūf*]) of 'Alī as *ma'nā*. Only “the believer who knows them and acts according to them can be considered as a true believer.” See also *RT* (p. 47b), where the author, al-Ḥusayn b. Ḥamdān al-Khaṣībī, distinguishes between divine attributes appropriate to the *ism* and others to be applied exclusively to the *ma'nā*. On the text and analysis of *RT*, see T. Abu Rajab, “The Nuṣayrī Theology of the Epistle of Unity by al-Ḥusayn b. Ḥamdān al-Khaṣībī” (M.A. thesis, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2002 [Hebrew]).

⁸⁴ A Shī'ī scholar, disciple of the Imam 'Alī al-Riḍā, known in Imāmī literature for his heterodox views. On him, see Abū 'Amr Muḥammad b. 'Umar al-Kishshī, *Kitāb al-Rijāl*, edited by A. al-Ḥusaynī (Najaf, n.d.), pp. 332, 427 and esp. 486–488. See also Abū 'Abbās Aḥmad b. 'Alī al-Najāshī, *Kitāb al-Rijāl* (Qumm, 1407H), p. 328.

flesh and blood?”⁸⁵ In other words, the attempt of Rabīʿa and others to apply human terms to the divinity (hand, foot, head, back and front, up and down, right and left) necessarily leads to its circumscription.⁸⁶

The author clarifies further that regarding God in anthropomorphic terms such as those used by Rabīʿa teaches nothing about Him, only about His creatures. “The deficiency is in them, not in Him, and every [one] sees Him as something of his own kind; how can it be that traits be attached to God that are proper to His creatures?” (*wa-dhālīka al-ʿajz fīhim lā fīhi wa-kullin (!) yarāhu bimā huwa min jinsihi fa-kayfa yaḥṣulu bihi mā huwa min jinsi khalqihī*).⁸⁷

In an interpretation of another statement by al-Ṣādiq, one that presents a summary of an abstracting conception of God, the author reiterates the idea just stated and stresses it: There is no change in God/ʿAlī in the incarnation; if such a change is perceived by human beings, it stems from their limited understanding. In summarizing his opinion of the correct conception concerning the deity of ʿAlī, the author makes the following declaration of faith:

We bear witness that the Commander of the Faithful [ʿAlī] is God, the Lord of all beings, the eternal, the primal, the converter of hearts and sights (*muqallib al-qulūb wa-l-abṣār*), so that they see Him in human shape. But He is exalted above the limitations of circumference, time, and space, and is superior to the belief of those who deny the possibility of knowing Him (*ahl al-tabfīl wa-l-inkār*). The unitarian, while acknowledging the existence of the Creator, is indifferent to clear expressions of abstraction (*wa-lā yubālī al-muwaḥḥid idhā [a]qarra bi-wujūd al-bārī mā yaṣraḥu min alfāz al-tanzīh*).⁸⁸ I, however, acknowledge [His] appearance and abstract Him from a limited and conceived form, and from a described and numeral aspect. I therefore exclude Him from two extremes: from anthropomorphic manifestation to His creatures and from negation (*ibṭāl*).⁸⁹

⁸⁵ *Munāzara*, p. 102b, lines 1–2.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, lines 2–3.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, lines 7–8.

⁸⁸ It seems that the text would read more coherently if *tanzīh* were replaced by *tashbīh*; however, the text is perhaps meaningful even as it stands. Reading *tanzīh*, as the text has it, leads us to understand that in his understanding of the deity the true monotheist surpasses even the category of *tanzīh*, becoming indifferent to its expressions.

⁸⁹ *Munāzara*, p. 103a, line 13—p. 103b, line 7. *Ibṭāl*, synonymous with *tabfīl*, mentioned above, means here the extreme negation of even the most abstract and negative attributes of the supreme deity, leading in turn to the denial of any possibility of knowing God.

Another authority whose remarks are cited as corroboration of al-Nashshābī's conception is, as noted earlier, Muḥammad b. Sinān. A statement attributed to him proclaims that only the human aspect of 'Alī is manifested because of the people's inability to grasp the power and knowledge of God. However, when the believer understands that the revealed form of God, when seen, is not a concrete thing but only a figment of the imagination, he can graduate to the appropriate abstraction of God.⁹⁰

In a continuation of Ibn Sinān's words, and as an extensive commentary on them, al-Nashshābī proffers three different ways of perceiving the divinity, only one of which (the last) can bring man closer to the proper abstraction of God: (a) Those who believe that the revealed form of God is flesh and blood err, because there is no reality to the flesh and blood form (*fa-in i'taqada aḥadan (!) annahā bashar fa-l-bashariyya lam yakun lahā ḥaqīqa*). (b) Those who believe that they see a form of light also err, since it is impossible to observe a form of light (*wa-in qāla šūrat nūr fa-qad aḥṭala naẓarahu idhā kāna naẓaruhu lam yarā (!) nūr (!) wa-innamā ra'ā bashar (!)*). That leaves the third possibility (c), which is seeing a form of flesh and blood and denying it or, in his words, believing "in a form different from what the eyes see" (*khilāf mā ra'athu al-'ayn*). Those who do so come closer to understanding the abstract essence of God, since the correct faith is not expressed by denying the sight of the form but rather by denying its existence.⁹¹

To sum up: According to al-Nashshābī, the traditions adduced by Rabī'a (and likewise the views of deviant groups mentioned previously wherein the human aspects of 'Alī are emphasized) should be understood not literally but symbolically.

In numerous other places in the treatise, in response to his various rivals, al-Nashshābī offers the different aspects of the correct perception of the *ma'nā* maintained by early Nuṣayrī authorities, specifically al-Khaṣībī. His views are at times contradictory, and some details are vague. However, the substance of his conception is clearly outlined in the following passage:

Al-Khaṣībī, may God bless his soul, said concerning the form (*šūra*) that it is not the totality of the Creator, nor is the Creator something other than the form (*innahā laysat kulliyyat al-bārī wa-lā al-bārī ḡayrahā*). By this

⁹⁰ *Munāẓara*, p. 104b, lines 2ff. An extreme abstracting concept of the *ma'nā* is also held by al-Jisrī; see *RT*, pp. 42b. and 46b.

⁹¹ *Munāẓara*, p. 104b, lines 2ff.

he both affirmed and denied it [i.e. the form]. Thus the affirmation is a proof for the existence while the denial is the abstraction (*tanzīh*) of the Creator from being circumscribed by form. By this he demonstrated that the *ma'nā*, the One, the Eternal, named himself “the Absence” (*al-ghayb*) and all the other divine names. He abstracted (*nazzaha*) himself from the human form when the divine knowledge and power (*qudra*) were manifested by Him. This is [the God] I worship (*hādhā ma'būdī*) and [this is] what I hold.⁹²

These words, which al-Nashshābī cites in the name of al-Khaṣībī, coincide with al-Nashshābī's views as expressed at various places in the treatise and in some of his statements alluded to earlier: the distancing of God or, more precisely, of His visible form, beyond the perception of the people. God, the *ma'nā*, who is the object of worship of al-Khaṣībī, i.e. of every true Nuṣayrī, is depicted in exalted terms, the most important of which is “absence” (*al-ghayb*). He who is described by such attributes as “eternal” and “primal,” it is further said, cannot possibly be veiled by something or restricted (*wa-lā yajūzu anna l-ma'nā 'azza wa-jalla mahjūb bi-shay' wa-lā mahṣūr li-'annah al-azal al-qadīm*).⁹³

Later, the author presents an even more far-reaching view: the *ma'nā* actually has no attribute; because as he was alone, there was no one to call him by name or by attribute, neither among the creatures of the world of light, nor from among the earthly, those of flesh and blood (*min al-kawnayn al-nūrānī wa-l-turābī al-basharī*). God's attributes were introduced solely for the need of humans (or, more accurately, the gnostics [*al-ʿarīfīn*]).⁹⁴ However, even the gnostics cannot know God except through His external manifestations, i.e. the *ism*—found within Him and indicating Him (*wa-l-ism mawjūd bihi wa-dāll ʿalayhi*)—the *bābs*, and the *yatīms*, defined as servants of the *ma'nā* and as the lights that guide towards him (*li-annahum ʿābīduhu wa-jāʾalahum anwāran li-hidāyatihī*).⁹⁵

In concluding this review of the possible perceptions of the *ma'nā*, it is worth mentioning a view ascribed to al-Mufaḍḍal, which distinguishes between the status of the *walī* and the *ma'nā*. The *walī*, who represents an entity inferior to the *ma'nā* is only able to create something out of something, whereas the *ma'nā* is able to create something *ex nihilo*. Furthermore, the *walī* is known by the attribute of ability

⁹² Ibid., p. 143a, line 9— p. 143b, line 2.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 145b, lines 1–2.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 145b, lines 3–7.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 149a, lines 3–4.

while the *ma'nā* is not known by any attribute. The attribute of ability, it is further maintained, is the ultimate of what the believer can fathom of the *ma'nā*.⁹⁶ From the context it transpires that the *walī* is a sort of attribute of ability of the *ma'nā*. It must further be stated that at the root of this unique distinction between *walī* and *ma'nā* there lies a hierarchic conception, one that creates a correlation between the three levels of faith and the three degrees of attaining enlightenment:

Al-Ṣādiq said: Islam is knowledge of the *walī*; *īmān* is knowledge of the end (*ghāya*), and truth (*ḥaqq*) is knowledge of what lies beyond the end. He who knows this is permitted to converse on whatever he wishes (*uḥilla lahu an yataḥaddatha bi-mā shā'a*). He [al-Ṣādiq] said further: *al-walī* is the form, and the end lies beyond it. Truth cannot be circumscribed nor described, except through its acts and influence upon us (*wa-l-ḥaqq mā lā yuḥaddu wa-lā yūṣafu illā min ṭarīq al-af'āl wa-ta'thūrātihi fīnā*).⁹⁷

To conclude, the author's conception of the *ma'nā*, is one of extreme abstraction. The supreme aspect of the deity cannot be described in any terms. The only designation of which the *ma'nā* is worthy is "the Absence" (*al-ghayb*). This appellation is the apex of the concept of abstraction, and it expresses the absolute inability to know the *ma'nā* in a direct and complete way.

Yet despite the extreme abstractionist conception advocated by al-Nashshābī, paradoxically he still leaves an opening for attaining not only knowledge of the *ma'nā* but even a sort of mystical union with it. In other words, we have here an example of the contrast between a radical rational conception of negative theology (*theologia negativa*)⁹⁸ and the mystical impulse of the gnostic. Against this background it is possible to comprehend the contradictory statements appearing in various places regarding the possibility of attaining the *ma'nā*.

The author claims that it is indeed possible to negate only the human aspect of the *ma'nā*; nevertheless, one can neither describe nor extol the esoteric side, which is shrouded from human contemplation. Belief in the existence of an esoteric aspect is established solely by "the heart's conscience and by meditation" (*lā yumkinu li-aḥadan (!) min al bashar an yaqdira yaṣifuhu wa-lā yunazzihuhu wa-innamā yuthbituhu*

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 151a, lines 3–8.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 150b, line 15—p. 151a, line 3.

⁹⁸ Where the author discusses the trinity in another context, he uses the term *salb al-ṣifāt* (negation of attributes) and explicitly notes that he holds this view (*Munāẓara*, p. 86b, line 4).

bi-‘aql ḍamīr al-qalb wa-tadbīr al-fikr).⁹⁹ That is to say, the negation of God’s attributes is valid only with regard to His external aspect, and the believer cannot progress beyond that. He is limited in his capacity to grasp the human quality of the revealed form of the deity.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, the extent and quality of the gnostic’s knowledge of God is proportionate to the degree of the purity of his essence and spirituality (*wa-inammā al-nāzīr ilayhi bi-ḥasab al-ṭāqa wa-kull ‘aql ‘alā miqdār ṣafā (!) jawharihi wa-iṣrāf nūr baṣīratihi wa-laṭāfat rūḥāniyyatihi*).¹⁰¹

It is therefore possible, as we saw earlier, to advance to a knowledge of the *ma’nā* by means of the powers emanating from it, which represent stages in the believer’s progress toward complete knowledge: the *ism*, the *bāb*, and below them the *yafīms*:

Realize that he who knows the *ma’nā* through the *mīm* [=Muḥammad], and knows the *mīm* through the *sīn* [=Salmān], and knows the *sīn* through the *yafīms*, and derives one thing out of another, and [knows] how things were separated one from another—has attained perfect knowledge.¹⁰²

In another passage, which includes a Nuṣayrī interpretation (in the name of al-Ṣādiq) of the *basmala* formula, this idea, describing the gradual progress of the believer in attaining the secret of the deity, is phrased in a similar manner. Whoever understands the *mīm* (=Muḥammad=*ism*) can comprehend the *ma’nā*, *al-raḥmān al-raḥīm* (the Merciful, the Compassionate).¹⁰³

When the believer has achieved the uppermost degree of self-purification, he is cut off from his corporeal existence and becomes a spiritual being. He thereby ascends to the level of faith characterized by a unique *shahāda*, distinct from that of common believers: “I bear witness that You are my goal, and You are my *ma’nā* . . . and You are I and I am You” (*ashhadu annaka ghāyatī wa-ma’nāya . . . wa-anta anā wa-anā anta*).¹⁰⁴

The true *shahāda* therefore includes a declaration of the believer’s spiritual identity and perhaps even his mystical union with the *ma’nā*. In another tradition, knowledge of the *ma’nā* (=‘Alī=Allāh) and submission to Him are identified with paradise. Those who know the

⁹⁹ *Munāzara*, p. 145a, lines 5–6.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 149b, lines 8–12.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 145b, line 12—p. 146a, line 1.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 145a, lines 11–13ff.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 149b, lines 3–5. See also below, chap. 8, p. 172

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 137a, lines 8–9

ma'nā enter it (*wa-l-ma'rifa bihi wa-l-iqrār bihi hiya al-janna fa-man 'arafa llāha dakhala l-janna*).¹⁰⁵

6. *The Manifestation of the Deity in Historical Cycles*

The belief in the revelation of the divine trinity in the guise of seven triads of historical figures in the seven cyclical periods dividing the history of the world is well known and is frequently mentioned in the literature on the Nuṣayrīs.¹⁰⁶ In our treatise, this belief is examined only once and from a narrow perspective. As we have seen, the possibility of the incarnation of the *ma'nā*, anthropomorphic conceptions concerning him, and all the attributes circumscribing him in any way are all vigorously repudiated by al-Nashshābī. Following this reasoning, we would expect the author to denounce also the belief in the incarnation of the *ma'nā* in the seven historical cycles as being part of the Nuṣayrī trinity. It appears, however, that the centrality of this belief forces the author to adapt it to his theological conception of the *ma'nā*. And indeed, the discussion of the cyclical incarnation of the *ma'nā* is introduced chiefly in order to create an intricate compromise between the abstracting conception of the *ma'nā* and the Nuṣayrī myth. The author limits himself to addressing aspects of this question; he is not concerned with presenting the myth of cyclical revelation in a systematic fashion. This myth being apparently well known to his reader, the author alludes to its details only in passing.

Despite the abstracting conception, the *ma'nā* is revealed in the seven historical cycles, albeit indirectly, as part of the Nuṣayrī trinity.¹⁰⁷ The gnostics recognize the whole sequence of His revelations as a unity. They should acknowledge the interior unity of the cycles, as opposed to their external ritual manifestation in various religions in which the deity appeared in different historical periods. At the same time, the correct view, according to the author, is that the deity should not be worshipped in all its seven manifestations concurrently, but only in its most recent one, so as to avoid plurality in the *ma'nā*.¹⁰⁸ A saying attributed to 'Alī is that he who knows him in the Muḥam-

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 132a, lines 11–12.

¹⁰⁶ See *RT*, pp. 44ff; *Catechism*, question 5; Lyde, *The Asian Mystery*, p. 118; Moosa, *Extremist Shī'ites*, pp. 352ff.

¹⁰⁷ *Munāẓara*, pp. 106b–107a. See discussion of the trinity, below.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 108a–b.

madan historical cycle¹⁰⁹ also knows him in the other historical cycles (*fa-man 'arafanī fī-l-qubba al-Muḥammadiyya fa-qad 'arafanī fī sāyir (!) al-qibāb*).¹¹⁰ That is to say, those who acquire a knowledge of 'Alī in the most recent period also know him in the other periods of his manifestation, and hence have no need to know all his manifestations simultaneously.

The revelation of the *ma'nā* in historical cycles is adapted by al-Nashshābī to a unique docetic conception. In every historical cycle the *ma'nā* reveals himself in the person of the *nāṭiq*—the historical figure representing him.¹¹¹ This is a voluntary act of the *ma'nā*. When he desires to be absent, the *ma'nā* causes the death of the *nāṭiq*, but the figure of the historical *nāṭiq* in which the *ma'nā* was revealed remains in the people's consciousness. The historical figure of the *nāṭiq* is genuine flesh and blood.¹¹² These statements do not quite tally with the author's general concept that the *ma'nā* does not reveal himself in any form that might circumscribe him. However, this seems to be an autonomous discussion of cyclical revelation of the deity, which apparently reflects the author's deliberation, leading him to an only partial docetic compromise. In other words, the *ma'nā* is indeed revealed to his believers for a brief period. After he vanishes, the believers continue to regard the historical figure in which he appeared for a while—and which continues to exist from then on only in their consciousness—as representing the deity, whereas in fact the *ma'nā* has returned to His state of absence. At the same time, the *ma'nā* does

¹⁰⁹ That is, the last historical cycle in which the *ism* was manifested in the person of Muḥammad.

¹¹⁰ *Munāẓara*, pp. 110b–111a. The literal meaning of *qubba* (pl. *qubab* or *qibāb*) is a hide tent or a tomb surmounted by a dome. In geography and astronomy the terms *qubbat al-ālam* and *qubbat al-arḍ* denote the geographical centre of the earth at the zenith of which the heavenly dome (*qubbat al-samā*) is found. See C. Pellat, "Kubba," *EP*, vol. 5, p. 297. It may be that the peculiar Nuṣayrī usage, denoting a historical cycle or period, is derived from the geographical-astronomical terminology.

¹¹¹ The term *nāṭiq*, characteristic of Ismā'īlī doctrine and its later Druze offshoot, rarely appears in the Nuṣayrī literature known to us. It is possible that the presentation of the cyclical conception and its terminology in this treatise bear hallmark of Ismā'īlī doctrine. The influence of the Ismā'īliyya on the Nuṣayrī religion has been noted by scholars in the past. See e.g. Lyde, *The Asian Mystery*, pp. 32ff.; Dussaud, *Histoire et religion des Nuṣayrīs*, pp. 26ff.; Strothmann, "Kiel," p. 22; Halm, "Das «Buch der Schatten»," part 1, pp. 263–265.

¹¹² *Munāẓara*, pp. 109a–b. This passage treats specifically the incarnation of the *ma'nā* in the eleventh Imam, Ḥasan al-'Askarī. However, it seems to reflect the general view of the author concerning the incarnation of the *ma'nā* in all the Imams. On the role of Ḥasan al-'Askarī in the Nuṣayrī doctrine, see note 114, below.

not necessarily reveal himself in all of His essence; and what the author may mean is that the *ma'nā* reveals himself only in his visible aspect, that is to say through his *ism* and his *bāb*.¹¹³

7. *The Manifestation of the Deity in the Imams*

The deity reveals itself in historical triads, the most recent being 'Alī, Muḥammad, and Salmān. Since then, it continues to manifest itself in every generation in the figures of the twelve Imams¹¹⁴ and their disciples and also, according to some, in the Nuṣayrī Imams of every generation.¹¹⁵ The incarnation of the deity in the *imāma* line (*saṭr al-imāma*) appears in our treatise also as part of the Nuṣayrī dogma. However, al-Nashshābī debates this issue too with those who advocate a concept of incarnation where the *ma'nā* himself is incarnated in the Imams, devoting a number of pages in his treatise to this topic. He is prompted to enter the debate because of Rabī'a's heretical views. Rabī'a, as we have seen, adheres to an anthropomorphic conception of God, whereby the deity is incarnated, even if only partially, in the *imāma* line.¹¹⁶ That is to say, in Rabī'a's opinion too, the created form of 'Alī is not only luminary and spiritual but undergoes incarnation in his historical figure and even in the *imāma* line. The author claims that Rabī'a's error and his heresy are in regarding the

¹¹³ Our understanding of the author's words here is supported by what he says regarding the manifestation of the external aspect of the *ma'nā* in the Imams (*Munāẓara*, pp. 122b–123a).

¹¹⁴ Here the ambivalent position of the Nuṣayriyya concerning the number of the Imams should be noted. Alongside the recognition of the twelve Imams, some Nuṣayrī texts speak of only eleven Imams, the last of whom is Ḥasan al-'Askarī. It seems that in our treatise the two views appear side by side. In certain places the text speaks of twelve Imams (e.g. *Munāẓara*, pp. 123a–122b). On the other hand, in a discussion about Ḥasan al-'Askarī he is presented as the eleventh and last Imam in whom God was incarnated, while his son Muḥammad is only appended to him (*Munāẓara*, pp. 118a–121b), or serves as his *ism*. This last view is germane to the central Nuṣayrī doctrine concerning the incarnation of the deity in the eleven Imams, and the revealing of religious mysteries by al-'Askarī to his disciple Muḥammad ibn Nuṣayr. In this view there is no place for Muḥammad, son of al-'Askarī, as the twelfth Imam, but he retains, as in Twelver Shī'ism, his role as Mahdī. For an enumeration of the eleven Imams see Lyde, *The Asian Mystery*, pp. 132–133; Halm, "Das «Buch der Schatten»,", part 2, p. 78; idem, *Die Islamische Gnosis*, p. 302. See also *KM*, p. 187, lines 4–5 (=p. 167 in the French translation), and Salisbury's translation: "I also testify that Ḥasan al-Akhīr al-'Askari was the First and the Last, the Hidden and the Manifest, and Omnipotent" (Salisbury, p. 242).

¹¹⁵ See Strothmann, "Esoterische Sonderthemen," pp. 9, 11.

¹¹⁶ *Munāẓara*, pp. 100b–102b.

imāma line as the manifestation of the *ma'nā*, i.e. in believing that the *ma'nā* himself is revealed in the Imams.¹¹⁷

The "correct" perception of the *ma'nā* emerges from remarks which the author ascribes to Abū al-Ḥusayn Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Jillī, one of al-Khaṣībī's eminent disciples: The *ma'nā* is revealed in the *imāma* line in his internal, abstract, and unattainable aspect.¹¹⁸ The manner of his manifestation is described in detail in statements attributed to al-Khaṣībī, which the author defines as "a secret not known even to the community of unitarians (i.e., the Nuṣayrīs)."¹¹⁹ When the *ma'nā* wishes to reveal his abstract form, he withdraws the historical personality and reveals himself to the people as a sort of image of that person. Hence his appellation *ma'nā mathalī*, i.e. "imaginal *ma'nā*," as opposed to the essential *ma'nā*.¹²⁰ From this description it transpires that the author nevertheless holds the conception that the *ma'nā* reveals himself in the *imāma* line. It should however be stressed that this manifestation does not come about through simple incarnation, as Rabī'a or the Ishāqiyya believe. The author solves the contradiction between the position of extreme abstraction of the *ma'nā* and the position that upholds the incarnation (at least to some extent), by asserting that the *ma'nā* is revealed in a docetic fashion, in the form of the historical person that appears to humans. In light of this compromise, the author's brief remarks concerning the revelation of the *ma'nā* in seven historical cycles can be better understood. In contrast, he explicitly states in another place that the line of the *imāma* is *ismī* rather than *ma'nāwī*. That is to say, the *ma'nā* is revealed in the Imams

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 117a. Elsewhere al-Nashshābī claims further that sects like the Ishāqiyya, referred to by the term *ḥulūliyya*, believe that God is incarnated in a human being and speaks through that person. In addition they hold that for those on earth who seek Him, the Imam is in fact identical with the *ma'nā*. Further along the author attributes a similar view to another unnamed group: "They are undoubtedly heretics, for they say: 'This one is God, and that one is God.' By this they mean a created and limited person while he manifests power. And they believe that He is its source. This power is according to them the speech of the Imam to his audience. He is their Lord, and they have no path leading to the Absence (*ghayb*). They hold that the Imam is a human form because, according to them, God can speak only through a human form. They believe in speech (*nuṭq*). Speech passes on from one Imam to another while the form passes away" (*Munāẓara*, p. 150a, line 12—p. 150b, line 3). For the general Nuṣayrī concept of divine incarnation in the Imams, see Lyde, *The Asian Mystery*, pp. 132–133.

¹¹⁸ *Munāẓara*, p. 117a, lines 3ff.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., lines 9–11.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 117b, line 6.

through the *ism*.¹²¹ Indeed Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, the eleventh Imam, is called *ism* and is portrayed as the incarnation of the *ism*.¹²² At the same time, al-Khaṣībī's remarks cited by the author seem to suggest that the historical revelation of ʿAlī as the "Commander of the Faithful" was the revelation of the *ma'nā* in his essence.

Furthermore, at the conclusion of the discussion of God's incarnation in the Imams, the author cites a saying attributed to al-ʿĀlim (=Jaʿfar al-Šādiq) expressing a view which ostensibly supports the *ḥulūliyya*: "God, may He be exalted, after creating His creatures, revealed Himself in their midst and moved about like them." In other words, even in this passage a clear conception of incarnation is attested. To this the author responds by presenting an entirely different interpretation of al-Šādiq's statement: God is exalted above diminution and change. Rather, He created seven veils (*ḥujub*) and twelve stations (*maqāmāt*) through which He revealed Himself.¹²³ He wanders among the twelve Imams, reveals Himself and becomes known as *amīr al-mu'minīn*, whose revealed aspect is the *imāma* and the *waṣiyya*,¹²⁴ and whose hidden aspect is His divinity (*rubūbiyya*). The last of the persons in whom He manifests Himself is the Mahdī.¹²⁵ This proves that God-the-*ma'nā* is separate from the *imāma* line.¹²⁶

To conclude: The author makes strenuous efforts to find a way to abstract the *ma'nā* from a conception of explicit incarnation in the Imams, while at the same time attempting to preserve the dogma without emptying it of meaning. The result is a number of alternative conceptions, none of which the author espouses explicitly. On the one hand, he disavows the possibility of the *ma'nā*'s incarnation in the Imams, arguing that a conception of incarnation is possible only in relation to the *ism*—in other words, in relation to the visible aspect of the *ma'nā*. On the other hand, he endeavours to sustain the concept that the *ma'nā* does somehow reveal himself in the Imams.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 122a.

¹²² Ibid., p. 119a.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 122b, lines 13–14; *ḥujub* here means the historical cycles, while *maqām* (pl. *maqāmāt*) refers to the lifetime of each Imam.

¹²⁴ The term *waṣiyya*, normally used in Shīʿī doctrine to denote the (divine) testament through which the Imams derive their authority, here means the role of the *waṣī* (the ruler by divine designation). Thus it is virtually synonymous with *imāma*.

¹²⁵ *Munāẓara*, p. 122b, lines 13–14. The Mahdī is here called *al-qā'im bi-l-qisṭ* (the one who upholds the truth).

¹²⁶ *Munāẓara*, pp. 122b–123a. The author adds here that the person who claims that the *ma'nā* is part of the *imāma* line is Abū Duhayba.

This however is a tortuous road and one that leads him to a complicated docetic conception.

8. *The Trinitarian Doctrine*

In studies on the Nuṣayrī religion, the Nuṣayrī trinity is consistently and simplistically depicted as hierarchic conception in which 'Alī is identified as the supreme and concealed degree of the deity while below him are the lower levels, Muḥammad and Salmān. The latter two represent the revealed sides of the deity in the trinity and operate lower spiritual worlds and forces that emanate from them, including the material world of mankind.¹²⁷ From our treatise it is clear that early Nuṣayrī scholars were occupied by theological questions concerning the nature of the trinity and the relationship between the various persons, and that these questions served as a basis for theological argument. The conception al-Nashshābī posits is indeed hierarchic, but it contains various nuances, and its details are not always lucid, suggesting that his perception was not totally integrated in all its details. This lack of integration may stem from the fact that the principal aspect of the treatise is not a discussion of the trinity but rather a polemic on the status of the *ma'nā*, whereas the author's deliberations concerning the trinity are for the most part presented as a supplement to the discussion on the *ma'nā*. In any event, these deliberations echo the different conceptions existing in Nuṣayrī circles of his time. His detailed examination of the trinitarian creed reveals a complex and intricate picture of the Nuṣayrī theology of the trinity.

The coming into being of the trinity is a problematic issue. Al-Nashshābī presents his own conception while polemicising against a conception of emanation that he ascribes to the Ḥātimiyya according to which three divine lights emanated from the "absence" (*al-ghayb*). These lights are the three persons of the trinity: 'Alī, Muḥammad, and Salmān, the "absence" represents the supreme deity (Allāh). An intermediate power (also deriving from the supreme deity) exists

¹²⁷ On the Nuṣayrī trinitarian doctrine, see Lyde, *The Asian Mystery*, pp. 118–119 and the references to the studies of Dussaud and Moosa in notes 4 and 5. Moosa, *Extremist Shi'ites* (pp. 50–64) also deals with trinitarian doctrines among late *Ghulāt* groups. Among these doctrines is one adhering to a relatively moderate version, according to which the three persons of the trinity are Allāh, Muḥammad, and Salmān (*ibid.*, p. 50).

between the “absence” and the first person of the trinity, ‘Alī; this is the “light of essence,” and it is identified, among other things, with “the greatest name of God” (*al-ism al-a‘zam*).¹²⁸ This view, attributed here to the Ḥātimiyya, is compatible with the conception that the author attempted to refute earlier, which demotes the divine status of ‘Alī by placing above him the “absence”—identified with Allāh, the source of the emanation of the trinity. In opposition to this view, al-Nashshābī presents his own conception, which propounds an absolute identification between the “absence” and ‘Alī. In addition, the author strives for a moderate conception of unity of the trinity whereby the hierarchy is still preserved. According to him, the “absence”—i.e. Allāh—is identical with ‘Alī as *ma’nā*; and the *ism* (=Muḥammad) is created directly from the *ma’nā* without the mediation of any entity, not even the light of essence (*laysa baynahu* [i.e. the *ma’nā*] *wa-baynahu* [i.e. the *ism*] *farq wa-lā fāṣila*).¹²⁹ The existence of the light as mediating between Allāh (=‘Alī as *ma’nā*) and Muḥammad (=the *ism*) is thus precluded. It should be noted that the author does not completely reject the term “light of essence,” and he actually uses it to explain the creation of the *ism* from the *ma’nā*. However, he emphasizes that the use of the term “light of essence” is meant only for the sake of clarity and should not be viewed as a sort of entity separating the *ma’nā* from the *ism*.¹³⁰ In contrast, such terms as “the light of essence,” “the holy spirit,” and “the buffer” (*farq* or *fāṣila*), which express a conception supporting the existence of some kind of mediating entity between the two lower persons of the trinity, are valid concerning the affinity between the second person (the *ism*) and the third (the *bāb*). In other words: the relation between the *bāb* and the *ism* is different in substance from the connection between the *ism* and the *ma’nā*.¹³¹ At the same time, the author does not reject the existence of divine lights in the world of divine emanation. Furthermore, when he details the stages of creation and emanation of the upper

¹²⁸ *Munāzara*, p. 82b, lines 1–4.

¹²⁹ *Munāzara*, p. 83b, lines 12–13. For an intermediate concept, see *KM*, p. 187, lines 10–12 (=pp. 167–168 in the French translation; Salisbury, pp. 245–246): The *ma’nā* indeed creates the *ism* by means of the light of essence, and the *ism* is simultaneously tied to him and separate from him. Or in the author’s own words: “He [the *ism*] is neither truly tied to him nor truly separate from him” (*muttaṣil bihi wa-lā munfaṣil ‘anhu; wa-lā muttaṣil bihi bi-ḥaqīqat al-ittiṣāl wa-lā munfaṣil ‘anhu fī mubā‘adat al-infiṣāl*).

¹³⁰ *Munāzara*, p. 84a, lines 5–6.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 84b, lines 5–12.

worlds, their creation precedes the creation of the *ism* and the *bāb*: The *ma'nā* first creates the upper worlds, of which the author says nothing. After them, the divine lights are created. Only then do the *ism* and the *bāb* emanate, followed by the lower entities, the five *yatīms* and the two *walīs*, which belong to the world of divine emanation although their place is below the trinity.¹³² For each of the nine latter entities (i.e. the *ism*, the *bāb*, the five *yatīms*, and the two *walīs*), there exists a counter figure belonging to the world of evil. In other words, there is an allusion here to a concept, known also from Jewish Kabbalistic sources for example, of a parallel emanation of evil and impure forces that exist in the demonic world, similar to the *siṭrā aḥrā* (the Other Side) of the Zohar, which parallels the realm of the deity. The author does not develop this concept and only mentions it in passing. Each person in the trinity has both an internal and an external side. Thus the ranks of the divine sphere emanate so that the external side of the highest rank constitutes the internal side of the rank below.¹³³

9. Relationship between the Persons of the Trinity

The author repeatedly mentions the hierarchy within the trinity and in his discussion uses the concept of the three “persons” (*aqānīm*).¹³⁴ The author regards the *ism* and the *bāb* as created entities.¹³⁵ He later modifies his assertion and views them as effects of the *ma'nā*. In other words, they are not actually created; rather, the relationship between them and the *ma'nā* is that of cause and effect (*fā'il/munfa'il*).¹³⁶ The author ascribes to Salmān the statement: “Only out of honour and respect for Muḥammad do I refrain from stating that he was created, but indeed God, the *ma'nā*, is above him (*lā aqūlu Muḥammad makhluq ijlālan wa-īzāman bal Allāh al-ma'nā faṭwqahu*).¹³⁷ But in order to preserve the hierarchical subordination in the *ma'nā-ism* relationship, the author nevertheless strives to maintain the principle that the *ism* was

¹³² Ibid., p. 87a.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 95a. *Aqānīm* (sing. *uqnūm*) is a Syriac Christian term adopted into Arabic, denoting the persons of the trinity.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 96a. This concept is similar in principle to the Arian doctrine in early Christianity, according to which the Son was created *ex nihilo*. See e.g. the fifth-century Christian historians: Theodoret of Cyrus, *Ecclesiastical History*, I, 5; Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History*, I, 9.

¹³⁶ *Munāzara*, p. 96b, lines 7–8.

¹³⁷ Ibid., lines 4–5.

indeed created; though, as noted earlier, he was created neither *ex nihilo* nor from a certain matter, but rather from the essence of the *ma'nā*. The author corroborates this concept with a few sayings attributed to Muḥammad: "I am from 'Alī and 'Alī is from me" (*anā min 'Alī wa-'Alī minnī*); "I am 'Alī and 'Alī is I" (*anā 'Alī wa-'Alī anā*).¹³⁸ These statements do not serve him here to express a view of complete equality and unity, as if 'Alī and Muḥammad were one person; as we have seen, this is a view he vigorously opposes.¹³⁹ Rather, these statements aim to prove that Muḥammad, the *ism*, was created from the very essence of 'Alī—the *ma'nā*.

In this context it is worth mentioning an instructive Nuṣayrī variant to *ḥadīth al-ghadīr*, i.e. the tradition wherein Muḥammad appoints 'Alī his successor at Ghadīr Khumm. In contrast to the familiar Shī'ī version according to which Muḥammad, when appointing 'Alī his successor, said of him: *man kuntu mawlāhu fa-'Alī mawlāhu* (He of whom I am the patron, of him 'Alī is also the patron), the version appearing in the Nuṣayrī tradition attributes to Muḥammad the following words: *man kuntu mawlāhu fa-'Alī ma'nāhu* (He of whom I am the patron, of him 'Alī is the *ma'nā*).¹⁴⁰

The author does not relate here to the issue of the creation in time of the persons of the trinity, an issue known to us from the Christian Arian polemic. In other words, the question does not arise as to whether Muḥammad, the *ism*, was created at a certain point in time, or before the existence of time, or whether perhaps he always existed with God the *ma'nā* and was never actually created (questions reminiscent of the problematics in Muslim theology concerning the creation or preexistence of the Qur'ān). In any case, the belief that the *ism* was created from the essence of the *ma'nā* recalls the orthodox Christian view which maintains that the Father and the Son are two persons of the same essence (*homoousios*).

The hierarchy within the trinity is depicted in various ways. One of the prevalent descriptions of this hierarchy emphasizes the internal-external relationship between the persons. As we have seen, each person possesses two sides, internal and external. The external aspect of the *ma'nā* is the internal side of the *ism*; and the external facet

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 97a, lines 8–9.

¹³⁹ *Munāẓara*, p. 137b.

¹⁴⁰ See *MA*, p. 54. For a detailed discussion of the festival of Ghadīr Khumm in Shī'ī and Nuṣayrī traditions, see below, chap 6, pp. 120–128.

of the *ism* is the internal side of the *bāb*.¹⁴¹ The author goes on to specify that the names Allāh, Muḥammad, and Salmān actually apply only to the external side of the persons. Therefore the name Muḥammad refers to the external aspect of the *ism*, whereas the internal aspect is represented by the name Allāh, which also represents the external aspect of the *ma'nā*. This holds true also for the relationship between Salmān and Muḥammad.¹⁴²

The hierarchy also finds expression in the four degrees that the author perceives in the deity: *rabb* (Lord), *malik* (king), *rasūl* (messenger), and *imām*. *Rabb* is the "absence," which cannot be comprehended; *malik* represents the spiritual aspect; *rasūl* and *imām* represent the aspect of divinity that is manifest in the incarnation.¹⁴³

This theme is further portrayed by the use of familial terminology: a father and mother to whom the son may be added. In this context, Muḥammad is identified as the father and Salmān as the mother. This identification creates a model that establishes the relationship between every two ranks in the emanation of the spiritual world. The upper level is equated with the father and the one below it with the mother.¹⁴⁴ The model can become a triad whenever al-Miqdād, the first *yatīm*, appears in the emanation in the role of the son.¹⁴⁵

Finally, the hierarchy of the emanation of the trinity is also delineated through symbolic letters denoting the components of the trinity. This conception is expounded in an interpretation of the *basmala* formula attributed to al-Ṣādiq, an interpretation mentioned already in a different context. The letters of this formula contain the Nuṣayrī trinity: the *bā'*, says al-Ṣādiq, refers to the greatest *yatīm*, al-Miqdād;

¹⁴¹ *Munāẓara*, p. 86b, line 12–p. 87a, line 7; p. 99b, line 4–p. 100a, line 6; p. 146b, line 9–p. 146b, line 4.

¹⁴² *Munāẓara*, p. 151b, lines 6–7. The internal side of Salmān, the *bāb*, is here also named *imām*, and the *imāma* is identified with Muḥammad. In one instance the author opposes a view giving priority to the *bāb* over the *ism*, which is an indication that the status of Salmān within the trinitarian hierarchy was also not unanimously agreed upon (*ibid.*, pp. 99bff.).

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 86b, lines 5–6.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 92, lines 10–13. This view seems to contradict a common notion among scholars according to which the Nuṣayrīs are reluctant to attribute a feminine aspect to the deity. The notion is undoubtedly founded on the change of Fāṭima's name to Fāṭim or Fāṭir in the emanation of the five persons of the "holy family," i.e. Muḥammad, 'Alī, Fāṭim/Fāṭir, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. See *MA*, p. 9 and elsewhere; Lyde, *The Asian Mystery*, p. 118.

¹⁴⁵ *Munāẓara*, p. 92a, line 11–p. 92b, line 3.

the *ṣm* to the *bāb*; the *mīm* to the *ism*; and the name Allāh to the *ma'nā*.¹⁴⁶

10. *Apologetics on the Trinitarian Creed*

The author wishes to provide philosophical and scientific support for the Nuṣayrī trinitarian creed. The reason for this explanation may be apologetic, although it is not clear for whom it was intended. After all, his Nuṣayrī rivals also upheld this belief in one form or another. His remarks probably stem from an internal Nuṣayrī need to provide edification, with their opponents in mind. To this end, he equates the Nuṣayrī divine trinity with diverse forms of trinity in philosophy and science that can confirm the truth of belief in the trinity.

The author draws a comparison between the views of the philosophers and those of the Nuṣayrī sages. The philosophers take the view that the creator is necessarily existent by His essence (*wājib al-wujūd li-dhātihī*).¹⁴⁷ It is from Him that the intellect is produced. The intellect enlightens Himself as well as His Creator. The intellect is thus called “contingent, the intellect, the intellectually cognizing subject, and the intellectually cognized object” (*mumkin al-wujūd musamman ‘aql wa-‘āqil wa-ma’qūl*).¹⁴⁸ Defining God in the terms ‘*aql wa-‘āqil wa-ma’qūl*’ is, as is well known, the Aristotelian definition common to the philosophy of the Middle Ages. The author regards the three-fold phrase ‘*aql wa-‘āqil wa-ma’qūl*’ as a concept that corroborates the Nuṣayrī trinitarian belief of “the unity of the triad and the triplication of the One” (*tawḥīd al-thalāth wa-tathlīth al-wāḥid*).¹⁴⁹ In other words, he draws an analogy between the philosophical trinity and the Nuṣayrī trinity, without addressing the issue of how exactly this analogy can be sustained. The philosophical trinity proves that the philosophers, too, support the idea of a trinity. This kind of analogy is familiar also from Christian theology.¹⁵⁰ There is, in fact, a difference between the phi-

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 92b, lines 3–6. Later in his interpretation the author adds that the words *al-raḥmān al-raḥīm* allude to Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. For a slightly different formulation of this idea, where these emanated powers are presented from the point of the gnostic believer in his effort to attain divine knowledge, see *Munāẓara*, p. 149b, lines 3–5. The application of the Nusayri trinity to the *basmala* formula is a recurrent motif in Nuṣayrī literature, both early and late. See e.g. *Kīel*, p. 26; *Catechism*, question 10.

¹⁴⁷ *Munāẓara*, p. 86a, line 4.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 86a, lines 6–7; p. 93b, line 13.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 86a, lines 7–8.

¹⁵⁰ See e.g. Yahyā b. ‘Adī, *Petits traités apologetiques de Yahyā ben ‘Adī*, ed. A. Perier

losophers' concept of trinity and that of the Nuṣayrīs. The philosophers, says al-Nashshābī, "do not deny the manifestation of the deity in form, but they do not apply it to a specific figure, as opposed to our view" (*wa-lā yunkirūna al-ẓuhūr bi-l-ṣūra bal lā yaqā'ūna ma'a al-shakhṣ al-mu'ayyan bi-khilāf madhhabinā*).¹⁵¹ "The philosophers, like us," he adds, "actually define God by way of negation" (*theologia negativa*).¹⁵²

In addition to the analogy between the Nuṣayrī trinity and the philosophical trinity, the author attempts to base the doctrine of the threefold emanation on a motley of "scientific" explanations. In every scientific area where there is a formula of triple division, scientific proof can be found for the Nuṣayrī trinitarian belief: Pythagorean mathematics, geometry, astronomy (the astronomic trinity is founded on the division of the "heavenly" bodies into intellects, souls, and celestial bodies), and medicine.¹⁵³

Finally, the author, well aware of the resemblance between the Nuṣayrī trinitarian creed and the Christian trinity, makes double use of this basic resemblance. On the one hand, he draws a parallel between the persons of the Christian trinity and those of the Nuṣayrī trinity¹⁵⁴ and even provides a detailed analogy that identifies the elements of the Christian trinity so that they correspond to different expressions of the hierarchy of the Nuṣayrī trinity.¹⁵⁵ On the other hand, he draws a parallel between the Nuṣayrī trinity and the Christian trinity in order to accentuate the differences between them and establish the superiority of the Nuṣayrī conception.¹⁵⁶ The Christian trinity, then, if understood correctly and observed through Nuṣayrī eyes is parallel and perhaps even identical to the Nuṣayrī trinity and, in any event, attests to the essential truth of the belief in the trinity. At the same time, if we consider the matter from the point of view of the differences between the two concepts of trinity, without at-

(Paris, 1920), pp. 18–21, pp. 24–26; Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī, *Épître sur l'unité et la trinité...*, ed. M. Allard and G. Troupeau (Beirut, 1960), p. 8 in the French translation with note 1, p. 40 in the Arabic text.

¹⁵¹ *Munāẓara*, p. 86a, lines 11–13.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 89a–92a.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 89a–92a.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 92b, lines 3–5.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 86b.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 95b, lines 5–8. Contrary to the two instances cited in previous notes, where the author draws a full analogy between the elements of the Christian trinity and the Nuṣayrī trinity, the author here presents an essentially different view. According to this view the *ma'nā* does not form part of the trinity but is exalted above it.

tempting to reconcile them by exegetical means, these differences demonstrate the error in the Christian trinitarian belief and, subsequently, the truth and correctness of the Nuṣayrī trinitarian belief.

11. Conclusion

Al-Nashshābī's treatise attests to an atmosphere of polemical theological ferment among 13th century Nuṣayrīs. The theological debates reflect the problematics inherent in the Nuṣayrī dogmas concerning the divinity of 'Alī and the incarnation of the deity in his historical figure and in other human figures. Some of the heretical groups mentioned in the treatise uphold a concept that diminishes 'Alī's divine status, places the hidden aspect of the deity (the *ma'nā*), above him, and advocates the incarnation of the divine entity of 'Alī. This is a somewhat compromising position, one that attempts to solve the tension created by the incarnation doctrine by propounding that 'Alī is indeed a deity although not in its most exalted aspect, and that he may therefore appear as human in the incarnation. Other groups grasp the rope at both ends: they identify 'Alī with the *ma'nā* while at the same time upholding the concept of the incarnation of the *ma'nā* himself. In contrast to these views, al-Nashshābī presents his mainstream position, which in fact goes even further: 'Alī is identical with the supreme hidden aspect of the deity. This identification leads the author to an extremely abstract conception, to a rejection of the incarnation in its fundamental meaning, and to the development of a complicated docetic conception. From a broad perspective, the heretical opinions disputed in the treatise may be viewed as something of a compromise between the moderate Shī'ī outlook, which considers 'Alī to be only human, and the orthodox Nuṣayrī conception, represented by the author, which identifies 'Alī with the supreme aspect of the deity and denies him any human aspect. These principal conceptions also surface when dealing with other questions under discussion: the Nuṣayrī trinity, the incarnation of the deity in historical cycles, and its manifestation in the twelve Imams and even in Nuṣayrī leaders in different generations. The differing positions of the author and his opponents over these issues, and his struggle against them, usually evolve from their basic positions on the question of 'Alī's divinity and the incarnation.

The treatise attests to the author's sound knowledge of the Qur'ān, of Shī'ī traditions (particularly heterodox ones) and of internal sec-

tarian Nuṣayrī texts, as well as to his familiarity with Christian theology and with terms from Arabic Christian literature. It further bespeaks original theological speculation as well as involved and profound attempts to reconcile the difficulties produced by Nuṣayrī dogmas and myths. Acquaintance with al-Nashshābī's treatise thus contributes to a more variegated picture of early Nuṣayrī theology.

CHAPTER TWO

THE THEOLOGY OF *KITĀB AL-USŪS*: AN EARLY PSEUDEPIGRAPHIC NUṢAYRĪ WORK

The treatise studied here, *Kitāb al-usūs* (Book of Foundations), is a lengthy Nuṣayrī theological work contained in the Nuṣayrī Codex, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, fonds arabe 1449 (folios 1–79).¹ It is an eclectic theological work discussing, somewhat erratically, a plethora of Nuṣayrī doctrines. The language of the treatise is “middle Arabic.” The treatise is characterized by grammatical and syntactic phenomena typical of other Nuṣayrī compositions found in this codex as well as in the Nuṣayrī codex, Paris, fonds arabe 1450.² Its date of composition is unknown. However, a reference to it in al-Nashshābī’s 13th-century polemical work, dealt with in the previous chapter, provides us with a *terminus ante quem* for its composition.³ According to the colophon the manuscript was copied in 1206/1791–1792 by al-Shayh Yūsuf ibn al-‘Arīb in the village Ra’s Ba’liya in the region of Ṣafīta, district of Tripoli.⁴

The literary framework of the treatise is pseudepigraphic. King Solomon is said to have received a divine order to write this book. He is therefore declared to be “the foundation (*asās*) of all things pertaining to the knowledge of this book,”⁵ hence the title *Kitāb al-usūs*.

¹ For a brief description of this treatise, see Vajda and Sauvan, *Catalogue des manuscrits arabes, deuxième partie, manuscrits musulmans*, vol. 3, pp. 310–311. Recently, an edition of *Kitāb al-usūs* has been published (J.K. al-Dandashī, *Madkhal ilā l-madhhab al-‘alawī al-nuṣayrī* [Irbid, 2000], pp. 73–156). Though this edition is quite deficient, we have nevertheless referred to it.

² For a description of the linguistic peculiarities of these Nuṣayrī works, see above, chap. 1, p. 10.

³ In his *Munāẓara*, p. 104a, line 4.

⁴ *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 79b, line 8 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 156). The same scribe also copied *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, the second main treatise of the codex. See L. Capezzone’s introduction to his edition of *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, “Il Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ attribuito a Mufaḍḍal ibn ‘Umar al-Ġu’fī,” *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 69 (1995), p. 295.

⁵ *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 1b, lines pp. 8–9 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 73). The term *asās* may reflect Ismā‘īlī influence. In Ismā‘īlī cyclical imamology this term—identical with the terms *waṣī* and *ṣāmī*—denotes the first of a series of silent Imams after the speaking Imam, who interprets the esoteric meaning of religion to the elite.

Solomom's role is further reflected in the alternative title of the work, *Kitāb ma'rifat hikmat Sulaymān ibn Dāwud*.⁶ To compose this book Solomom assembles numerous sages representing the great cultures of the world. These sages are charged by the king to write a book that will parallel the exemplar received by Solomon from God—namely, the *Kitāb abniyat al-kalām* or *Ta'rif abniyat al-kalām* [The Book of Structures of Speech]. The sages produce a dialogue in the form of questions and answers between an anonymous master and disciple. This book, *Kitāb al-usūs*, turns out to be similar to its divine archetype, and the author of the Arabic version identifies the anonymous master and disciple as Seth [son of Adam] and Idrīs [Enoch], respectively.⁷ The book is said to be a translation from the Greek of a work written by King Solomon by divine order.⁸

Kitāb al-usūs, like other Nuṣayrī texts in the Paris codices (fonds arabe 1449 and 1450), is characterized by its unsystematic nature, which may be due to its dialogue format. The connections between the different stages of the discussion are associative; the author does not systematically develop views on any one point. In this analysis of the work we have attempted to put together the pieces of the mosaic and to reconstruct a comprehensive picture of the author's main doctrines. Some of the basic concepts treated in this work are familiar from other Nuṣayrī texts. However, *Kitāb al-usūs* stands out in using certain concepts and terms uncommon in other Nuṣayrī writings. Christian doctrines and terminology, for example, occupy a relatively prominent place and the author frequently advances analogies between Jesus and 'Alī to illustrate various aspects of the Nuṣayrī divine mystery. The work is liberally sprinkled with canonical and apocryphal sayings of Jesus. However the numerous apocryphal references attest to an indirect acquaintance with the canonical Gospels. The role of angelology and prophetology in the theology of *Kitāb al-usūs* is also remarkable. In addition, the author demonstrates an impressive knowledge of the Qur'ān, which he frequently interprets in an innovative and far-reaching manner. Hence the author of *Kitāb al-usūs* emerges as an erudite scholar of Nuṣayrī learning who is also versed in Christian and Muslim

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Pseudepigraphic authorship by Seth is very common in Gnostic literature. See e.g. Epiphanius, *Panarion*, edited by K. Holl (Leipzig, 1922), chap. 39, § 1.1—2.7. For the Nuṣayrī traditions ascribing religious writings to Seth and Idrīs, see Lyde, *The Asian Mystery*, p. 144.

⁸ *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 79a, line 6 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 156).

scriptures or at least in those parts adaptable to his peculiar theological exegesis.

1. *Cosmogony and Cosmology*

Like the presumably earlier proto-Nuṣayrī work *Kitāb al-haft wa-l-aẓilla*, *Kitāb al-usūs* evinces considerable interest in cosmology and cosmogony; indeed, some of the major elements may have been derived from cosmological doctrines found already in *Kitāb al-haft wa-l-aẓilla*. The whole order of creation is conceived of as the result of a voluntary act of God and not of a deterministic or accidental process.⁹ There is a series of emanations, the first of which is the spiritual world. The angels were created¹⁰ and subsequently the spiritual, luminary human beings were created in an angelic form.¹¹ At the conclusion of this spiritual creation the angels and these spiritual beings engaged in contemplation of the deity.¹² This general notion of the creation of the spiritual world does not entirely harmonize with another, mythological cosmogonic concept found elsewhere in *Kitāb al-usūs*. According to this concept God also created a primordial cosmic man who encompassed the whole of the spiritual and physical cosmos.¹³ This second cosmology is founded on the principle of the typological number of seven ruling the cosmos. The cosmic primordial man thus embraces the whole of creation, which is organized in units of seven in the various domains (such as the heavens, the planets and the oceans), including the sevenfold cycles of human reincarnation.¹⁴ After

⁹ Ibid., p. 37a, lines 10–12 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 111).

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 8a–b (=ed. Dandashī, p. 80).

¹¹ Ibid., p. 9a (=ed. Dandashī, p. 81). Our text alludes specifically to the creation of the cosmic spiritual Adam.

¹² Ibid., p. 8a, line 12 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 80).

¹³ The concept of a primordial cosmic man, which plays an important role in Nuṣayrī myth, has a long tradition in religious speculation. It appears in Gnosticism as well as in Jewish mysticism. See e.g. Irenaeus, the second century Church Father, *Adversus omnes Haereses* (=Against Heresies), 1, 30, 6 in B. Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures* (Garden City, N.Y., 1987), p. 176; G.G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York, 1941), p. 215. See also M. Idel, "The Image of Man above the *Sefirot*," *Daat (A Journal of Jewish Philosophy and Kabbalah)* 4 (1980), pp. 41–55 (Hebrew).

¹⁴ *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 27a (=ed. Dandashī, p. 100). This cosmological symbolism seems to derive from *Kitāb al-haft wa-l-aẓilla*, in which the number seven plays a central role, as alluded to in the title of the book *kitāb al-haft wa-l-aẓilla*, where *haft* is the Persian word for seven. See also W. Madelung's review of A. Tamer's edition of

creating this primordial spiritual man in His own image, God engaged in lauding and glorifying Himself for seven thousands years so as to teach the angels and the spiritual humans to imitate Him. The motivation for this divine instruction was God's wish to teach them to describe Him in the proper way without any anthropomorphic tendency.¹⁵

God revealed Himself in His omnipotence to the angels, who subsequently acknowledged His divine sovereignty. He then revealed Himself to the pristine spiritual entities of human beings in their own form and disclosed His signs and knowledge to them, and they acknowledged Him. In return God made a covenant with them which, according to Nuṣayrī interpretation, is referred to in the Qur'ān.¹⁶

The author of *Kitāb al-usūs* is not aware of any cleavage in the creation process between God's creation of the spiritual and the physical worlds. Although he is somewhat vague, it appears that he views the whole of creation as being the result of a single cosmic process encompassing all the constituents of the universe, including heaven and every living creature, all of which he describes in philosophic-scientific terminology.¹⁷ This harmonious view of creation, however, is not consistent with his understanding of human existence in this world. Here the author seems to be unwittingly caught in a cognitive dissonance. On the one hand, human existence is beset by an inherent dualistic tension as a result of a crisis in the divine spiritual world that led to the Fall and materialization of the elect part of humanity, the Nuṣayrīs, who are the "sons of light," as opposed to the rest of humanity, predestined to slavery as the "sons of darkness."¹⁸ On the other hand, the whole cosmic order seems to be preordained and focused around humanity, or rather around the Nuṣayrī elect, as the centre of the universe. This world is indeed a world under

that book (Beirut, 1969²) in *Der Islam* 38 (1963), p. 181. For a German translation of selected passages of this work see H. Halm, *Die Islamische Gnosis*, pp. 246–274. On this work see idem, "Das «Buch der Schatten»".

¹⁵ *Kitāb al-usūs*, pp. 27a–b (=ed. Dandashī, pp. 100–101), and similarly, *Kitāb al-haft wa-l-azilla*, p. 34.

¹⁶ *Kitāb al-usūs*, pp. 68a–b (=ed. Dandashī, pp. 145–146), and see below, note 68.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 63b–67b (=ed. Dandashī, pp. 141–145).

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 57a, lines 7–8 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 135). For this dualistic distinction see also the Nuṣayrī work *Kitāb al-uṣayfir*, attributed to the Imam Ja'far al-Šādiq, Ms. Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale), fonds arabe 1450, p. 21b. The title of this treatise—*kitāb al-uṣayfir*—seems somewhat odd. For a proposal to substitute *uṣayghir* for *uṣayfir*, see H. Hasan, *al-Makzūn bayn al-imāra wa-l-shī'r wa-l-taṣawwuf wa-l-falsafa* (Damascus, 1970), vol. 1, p. 250.

divine providence; but it is all the same a world from which the Nuṣayrī gnostic must escape in order to restore his ideal pristine state in the divine spiritual realm of light. This is not the extreme dualistic cosmos of the ancient gnostics but rather a world where human existence is subject to dualistic tension. Gnosis offers the only path to liberation from the exile and conflict that characterize human existence.

The Nuṣayrī human spirits in the divine world sinned by ignorance and pride. They began to misconceive the true and primordial essence of God, who appeared to them in a spiritual human form. Their punishment was their fall into the material world and their descent into bodies.¹⁹ The Nuṣayrī view of the human fall from the spiritual divine world is expounded in an interpretation of the story of the expulsion of Adam from paradise. Paradise is actually the state of the human soul as a luminary essence in the divine realm of light, and Adam is the prototype of the soul of the Nuṣayrī gnostic. The root of his original sin was that he innocently approached the tree symbolizing the world of heresy²⁰ without possessing full gnosis. Adam's sin is conceived of as grave but not unpardonable, in a fashion reminiscent of the Ismā'īlī concept of Adam's paradisiacal original religion (*ḍīn Ādām al-awwal*); our author maintains that in his ideal state prior to the sin Adam was free of any religious strictures.²¹ It was only after the Fall that Adam was placed in the bondage of the commandments.²² This description of the human condition suggests that our author advocates here a position of antinomian theology, possibly offering scriptural legitimacy for the traditional Nuṣayrī antinomianism regarding the commandments of Islam.²³ It should be noted, however, that in early Nuṣayrī literature familiar to us this antinomianism is never interpreted in a libertine or hedonistic fashion.

Despite the Fall God gave Adam an opportunity to restore his original state in paradise.²⁴ This provides the theoretical basis for the gnostic

¹⁹ *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 68b (=ed. Dandashī, pp. 145–146). On the Nuṣayrī myth of the Fall, see *Kitāb al-haft wa-l-azilla*, pp. 33–37 and *Kitāb al-uṣayfir*, p. 24b. Cf. *Bākūra*, pp. 59–61. See also chap. 3, below, pp. 75–77.

²⁰ *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 49b, lines 2–3 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 127).

²¹ On the Ismā'īlī antinomian concept of paradise and eschatology, see Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. 'Īsā al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq al-shī'a*, edited by H. Ritter (Istanbul, 1931), pp. 62–63. See also W. Madelung, "Fatimiden und Bahrainqarmaten," *Der Islam*, 34 (1959), p. 34; H. Halm, *Die Schia* (Darmstadt, 1988), pp. 203–204 (= *Shiism*, translated by J. Watson [Edinburgh, 1991], p. 169).

²² *Kitāb al-usūs*, pp. 49b–50b (=ed. Dandashī, pp. 127–128).

²³ On Nuṣayrī antinomianism, see e.g. Moosa, *Extremist Shiites*, p. 409.

²⁴ *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 50b (=ed. Dandashī, p. 128)..

to regain the state of Adam before the original sin. After his expulsion from paradise, Adam, or the gnostic, is punished with seven cycles of reincarnation (*takrīrāt*) in retribution for his heretical denial of the seven heavens (*yarjī'u ilā dhālika l-mawḍi' ḥattā ya'rifa rabbahu fī sab'i takrīrāt kamā jahilahu fī sab'i samawāt*).²⁵ However, he eventually returns to the pristine state of liberty where he is free of religious commandments and is rewarded solely for his deeds.²⁶ On the road back to paradise the gnostic is assisted by divine grace (*al-minna*)²⁷ in his individual struggle toward spiritual progress, but only perfection in gnosis of the various emanations of the deity offers the way toward complete liberation from slavery to external religious commandments. "Once the believer attains perfection and achieves gnosis and knows his Lord, his *ḥijābs*, *maqāms*, *bābs*, *yafīms*...,²⁸ he leaves the state of bondage and enters that of the free; his bonds are undone, and all that was forbidden to him becomes permitted" (*idhā kamula l-mu'min wa-balagha l-ma'rifa wa-'arafa rabbahu wa-ḥujubahu wa-maqāmātihi wa-abwābahu wa-aytāmahu... fa qad kharaja min al-'ubūdiyya wa-ṣāra ilā manzilat al-aḥrār wa-rufī'a 'anhu al-āṣār wa-ubīḥa lahu kullu mā kāna mahzūr [!]*)²⁹ The divine gnosis—namely, the correct knowledge of the divine mystery—thus becomes the primary purpose of human existence.³⁰

The author does not elaborate on the connection between the Nuṣayrī myth of the Fall and the appearance of physical human life. It seems that he accepts the traditional story of Adam and Eve for the beginning of the human race without special concern for reconciling the myth of the Fall with the beginning of humanity. Physical existence, however, begins outside paradise, with the procreation of humanity. The author is troubled by the absence of any precedence for the processes of life—pregnancy, birth and nurturing children. How would Eve have learnt these fundamental necessities? The resolution of this difficulty leads to a general principle for understanding the early development of mankind. The first human beings were assisted by God in their early steps in the world. God created for

²⁵ Ibid., lines 2–4 (=ed. Dandashī, *ibid.*)

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 50b–51a (=ed. Dandashī, pp. 128–129)

²⁷ Ibid., p. 61a, lines 6–7 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 129).

²⁸ The author goes on to list the lower degrees of divine emanation.

²⁹ *Kitāb al-usūs*, pp. 55b, line 15–56a, line 4 (=ed. Dandashī, pp. 133–134). For a further discussion of the concept of the gnostic's return and restoration in other Nuṣayrī works as well, see chap. 3, below, pp. 77–83.

³⁰ *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 46b, lines 2–5 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 124).

Eve an image of a woman that demonstrated the act of maternity and was imitated by Eve:

When [God] created him [Adam] and wished to marry him off, He inserted into him a spirit from His body. He then made Eve for him [Adam] and she felt reassured toward him for He created her from his rib, and when Adam went in unto her she conceived and had an easy pregnancy. When she was about to give birth God formed for her an image of a woman in pregnancy, restraining herself until she gave birth, then she [the image] cut her umbilical cord³¹ and tied up her dress and as Eve watched the acts of the image she imitated her. Then Eve regarded the image swaddling her newborn and did the same [with her child]... (*fa-lammā an khalaqahu wa-arāda an yuzawwijahu salaka fihi rūḥan min badanihi fa-ja'ala lahu Hawwā fa-sakanat ilayhi li-annahu khalaqahā min ḍil'ihi; fa-lammā taghashshāhā ḥamalat ḥamlan khafīfan fa-lammā [a]rādāt talidu sawwara llāh lahā ṣūrata unthā lahā ḥamlun; tazjuru fī ḥamlihā ḥattā waladat thumma qaṭa'at surratahā*³² *wa-shaddat qimāṭahā fa-lammā ra'at Hawwā mā šana'at al-šūra šana'at mithlahā...*)³³

The first appearance of death and murder in the world is similarly explained. Cain contemplated an image that appeared to him killing his brother. He imitated the act of murder and then learnt from the image a lesson in burial.³⁴

The structures of the cosmos parallel the earthly existence of the Nuṣayrī gnostics. The seven planets active in the seven heavens have an affinity to the bodies of the Nuṣayrī believers. The cosmos is divided into seven gnostic heavenly veils (*sab' ḥujub li-l-ma'rifa*), which are parallel to seven earthly veils.³⁵ The days of the years—366 (!) in number—are additional veils divided into the luminary and the earthly.³⁶ The luminary veils exist in heaven and belong to the veil

³¹ Literally: the navel.

³² The text reads here *surratahā*.

³³ *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 28b, lines 8–13 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 102).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 29a, line 7–29b, line 2 (=ed. Dandashī, pp. 102–103). The author does not say here that this image was also created by God. It may have been created by creatures opposed to God, such as Satan or Iblīs (*Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 53b, lines 7–8 [=ed. Dandashī, p. 131]). A somewhat similar motif regarding the burial of Abel is expressed in Midrashic and early Muslim sources. In Midrashic sources Adam or Cain learn how to bury Abel from a raven burying its dead rival. See e.g. *Pirkê de Rabbi Eliezer* (*The Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer the Great*), translated and annotated with an introduction and notes by G. Friedlander (New York, 1965), chap. 21, p. 156; and see also Q. 5:31. Cf. A. Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, translated from the German by F.M. Young (Madras, 1898), pp. 80–81.

³⁵ *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 62a, lines 7–9 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 140).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 62b., lines 1–5. (=ed. Dandashī, *ibid.*)

of the Son and the Spirit (*ḥijāb al-ibn wa-l-rūḥ*).³⁷ In the time division of the day the twelve hours also play a symbolic role. They constitute spiritual stations³⁸ where the believers uphold the exemplary models of the twelve Imams of the Shī'a.³⁹ In this symbolic imagery the Messiah (Christ) is depicted as the "supreme eye" (*al-masīḥ al-ʿayn al-aʿlā*) who assembles the Imams—symbolized by the twelve hours of the day—in the figure of the twelve apostles who are "houses" and veils (*ḥijābs*) of flesh and blood (*ithnay ʿashara ḥijāb al-laḥmiyya al-damawīyya*).⁴⁰ This symbolism exemplifies the syncretistic nature of Nuṣayrī theology; in this case the fusion of Christian and Twelver Shīʿī elements.

2. *The Mystery of Divinity*

As in other Nuṣayrī works, the mystery of divinity occupies a major place in *Kitāb al-usūs*. Many of the disciple's queries to his master concern various aspects of the internal dynamics of the godhead. The dialectical tension characteristic of Nuṣayrī discourse between two opposing concepts of God—namely, between a transcendental concept of the deity and an immanent one—is also attested in this work. However, the trinitarian concept of the present work is somewhat peculiar. In other Nuṣayrī works the prevalent view is that the *maʿnā* (the supreme aspect of the deity) and the *ism* (the second aspect) constitute two persons of the trinity. These two persons are sometimes conceived of as identical with God and sometimes as emanations of the supreme deity. The author of *Kitāb al-usūs*, however, depicts God as Himself being both the *ism* and the *maʿnā*, as one person.⁴¹ There

³⁷ It seems that here the author has two different veils in mind: those of the *ism* and the *bāb*, the second and third persons of the Nuṣayrī trinity. He applies to them Christian trinitarian terminology, which is not infrequent in Nuṣayrī theological parlance. On the Nuṣayrī trinitarian doctrine, see e.g. Lyde, *The Asian Mystery*, pp. 118–132; Dussaud, *Histoire et religion des Nuṣayrīs*, pp. 46–72; and Moosa, *Extremist Shiites*, pp. 342–351. See also chap. 1, above, pp. 33–38.

³⁸ Literally: houses (*buyūt*). See *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 63a, line 4 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 141).

³⁹ The concept of twelve or alternately eleven Imams constitutes a central pillar of Nuṣayrī doctrine and, along with other components, attests to the strong affinity of the Nuṣayriyya to Twelver Shīʿism. For a discussion of the role of the Imams in Nuṣayrī religion see chap. 1, above, pp. 30–33.

⁴⁰ *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 63a, lines 2–4 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 141).

⁴¹ This concept is reminiscent of the Sabelian and Patripassian doctrines in early Christianity, which maintained that the Father and the Son are one person. See e.g. Tertullian, *Adversus Praxean*, edited by A. Kroymann, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum*

is nonetheless a distinction within the supreme aspect of the deity where God is identified with the *ma'nā* while His *ism* is identified with 'Alī—the supreme *ism* “who is beyond any other *ism* and prevalent over every *ism*” (*ismuhu 'Alī alladhī 'alā⁴² fawqa kull ism wa-qahara kulla ism*).⁴³

To avoid any misunderstanding about the power of these and other intermediary entities (light, the holy spirit, angels, prophets) the author emphasizes that they are all dependent upon God. “Prophets, peace be upon them, are below God and so are angels; all these perform acts only by permission of God. They are not the actors; act is rather performed through God’s power, His order and His permission.” (*wa-dhālika anna al-anbiyā' 'alayhim al-salām dūna llāh wa-kadhālika l-malā'ika dūnahu wa-lī-kulli hādhihi af'āl bi-idhni llāh fa-laysa hum al-fā'ilūna innamā al-fi'l bi-qudratihi wa-amrihi*).⁴⁴ The author further supports this idea by a statement ascribed to Jesus: “Have you not heard the saying of Christ, peace be upon him, ‘I create through God’s permission and act through God’s permission’....”⁴⁵ The author clarifies that God’s revelation to His creatures does not harm them, nor does His revelation to them harm God (*lan yaḍurra al-makhlūqa al-khāliq idhā nazzala bihi qudratahu wa-lan yaḍurra al-khāliqa nuzūluhu bi-l-makhlūq*).⁴⁶

Furthermore, in order to moderate his transcendental theology the author develops a docetic concept. Despite God’s transcendence He may, out of gracious condescendence toward those of His creatures who failed to perceive His true essence, reveal Himself to them in human form, and allow them to describe Him in anthropomorphic

Latinorum (=CSEL), 47 (1906), pp. 227–289. See also Epiphanius, *Panarion*, chap. 62, § 1 in *Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte*, edited by K. Holl (Leipzig, 1922), p. 31. See also chap. 1, pp. 19–20, where a similar concept is attributed by al-Nashshābī to the Nuṣayrī group of the Zaydiyya.

⁴² The play on the name 'Alī—literally meaning supreme—is noteworthy. The tendency to apply this frequent Qur'anic divine attribute to 'Alī occurs in other Nuṣayrī texts. Thus, for example, “the verse of the Throne” (Q. 2:255), which ends with the words *wa-huwa al-'alī al-'azīm* (He is the supreme and glorious), referring to God, is interpreted as denoting 'Alī. See the Nuṣayrī liturgical text *Bay'at khuṭbat al-dār li-mawḷānā amīr al-mu'minīn*, ms. Manchester (John Rylands Library) no. 124, p. 32a, lines 10–11. For a similar tradition in early Imāmī-Shī'ī sources, see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, “L'Imām dans le ciel. Ascension et initiation (Aspects de l'imāmologie duodécimaine III)”, in *Le voyage initiatique en terre d'Islam: Ascensions célestes et itinéraires spirituels*, edited by M.A. Amir-Moezzi (Louvain-Paris, 1996), p. 103 with note 18.

⁴³ *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 42a, lines 7–8 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 118).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10a, lines 11–13 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 82).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, lines 14–15 (=ed. Dandashī, *ibid.*).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 9b, lines 7–8 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 81)..

terms.⁴⁷ This gracious condescension is a logical implication of the act of creation, when a relationship (*nisba*) between God and His creatures became mandatory. The author's striking interpretation of the Qur'ānic words (42:11) "like Him there is naught" (*laysa ka-mithlihi shay'*) is essential for understanding the relationship between the deity and the creatures. In his opinion this Qur'ānic description of God undoubtedly depicts His essence before creation, when He existed without relation to any thing. At that primordial state "there existed no one to describe Him and had you said 'like Him there is naught' (*laysa ka-mithlihi shay'*) and that He neither had an equal nor a rival, nor that He emerged out of something or entered something nor that He could be described—then you would have meant that He was by Himself and did not describe Himself to His creatures, for they did not [yet] exist."⁴⁸ Moreover, in that state God neither needed (*lam yahtaj*) contact with anybody nor did He have to describe Himself to Himself or to converse with Himself. However, after the creation of human beings, such need on the part of the deity became imperative, and variegated categories of divine attributes were introduced in order to express the forms of relationship existing between God and His creatures.⁴⁹ Since it is impossible for any change to take place in the divine essence (*lā yumkinu an yaḥūla 'an hay'atihi*),⁵⁰ God created an intermediary entity of an external human form through which He communicated with His creatures (*lā budda an yaḥala hay'atan mithla jinsi khalqihi ḥattā yukallimahum minhā*).⁵¹ Further on the author elaborates this idea of intermediary forms and speaks of twelve human-like forms (*kulluhā 'alā ṣūrat al-insāniyya*) through which God reveals Himself to His believers.⁵² This series of anthropomorphic forms may

⁴⁷ A more elaborate discussion of Nuṣayrī docetism is offered in *Munāzarat al-shaykh al-Nashshābī*. See above, chap. 1, pp. 14–28, and cf. *Kitāb al-uṣayfir*, pp. 12a and 17a.

⁴⁸ *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 8a, lines 3–6 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 80). The mythical primordial state of the deity is a concept appearing already in *Kitāb al-haft wa-l-azilla*, pp. 32–37.

⁴⁹ *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 8a, lines 7–11 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 80). By referring to creatures the author undoubtedly envisions the spiritual beings of the primordial created luminous world. See e.g. *Kitāb al-haft wa-l-azilla*, pp. 34–35.

⁵⁰ *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 35a, lines 15–16 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 109).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, line 12 (=ed. Dandashī, *ibid.*). This concept is further elaborated in other Nuṣayrī works, where this external form is termed *al-ṣūra al-mar'iyya* (the visible form). See e.g. *Munāzara*, p. 137b, line 4; *KM*, p. 195, line 11 (=p. 176 in the French translation; Salisbury, p. 257). See also above, chap. 1, p. 19.

⁵² *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 35b, lines 3–4 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 110).

allude to the spiritual archetypes of the twelve Imams.⁵³ Elsewhere, the forms through which God reveals Himself are described as angelic persons appearing in various forms (*inna llāha aẓhara nafsahu ashkhāṣan innahā ka-hay'at al-malā'ika ṣuvaran mukhtaliḥatan*).⁵⁴ There follows a description of three of these appearances—one of which occurs also in al-Adhānī's *al-Bākūra al-Sulaymāniyya*. God first appeared in the form of an old man,⁵⁵ with hoary head and beard (*bi-ṣūrat al-shaykh al-abyaḍ al-ra's wa-l-lihya*), possessed of the qualities of dignity, mercy and reverence (*al-waqār wa-l-raḥma wa-l-hayba*).⁵⁶ In His second appearance God revealed Himself to them in the shape of a young man with a curled moustache (*ka-hay'at al-shābb al-maftūl al-sibāl*), riding upon a lion having the quality of wrath.⁵⁷ Then follows the third appearance, when God reveals Himself in the form of a child (*fi ṣūrat al-ṣabī al-ṣaghīr*).⁵⁸ According to al-Adhānī this triple appearance is interpreted by the Kalāzī Nuṣayrī sub-sect as referring to the three stages of divine lunar manifestation in the cycle of waning and waxing.⁵⁹

The dogma of the incarnation and its varied interpretations in Nuṣayrī theological discourse creates peculiar complexities for any discussion of the topic of the relationship between God and humans.⁶⁰ The author of *Kitāb al-usūs* deals with this issue in various places without achieving a systematic presentation. A question by the disciple re-

⁵³ For the concept of divine archetypes of the Imams see above, chap. 1, pp. 30–33.

⁵⁴ *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 8b, lines 7–8 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 80).

⁵⁵ Dussaud (*Histoire et religion des Nuṣayrīs*, p. 73) suggests that this depiction of God as an old man may attest to Christian influence: The old man reflecting God the Father or perhaps “The Ancient of days” (*ʿatīq yōmūn*) of Daniel (7:22). A similar concept and terminology are firmly rooted in late medieval Jewish mysticism. See e.g. G.G. Scholem, *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem, 1974), pp. 141–143.

⁵⁶ *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 8b, line 9 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 80), and cf. Salisbury, p. 286.

⁵⁷ *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 8b, lines 9–10 (=ed. Dandashī, *ibid.*); Salisbury, *ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 8b, lines 10–11 (=ed. Dandashī, *ibid.*); Salisbury, *ibid.*

⁵⁹ See *Bākūra*, p. 60; and see also Dussaud, *Histoire et religion des Nuṣayrīs*, p. 67. In a poem ascribed to Muḥammad b. Kalāzū, the eponym of the Nuṣayrī Kalāziyya sub-sect (*Bākūra*, p. 63), this triple appearance of the deity is referred to by the initials *hbq*, signifying—according to al-Adhānī's interpretation—the three states of the moon: *hilāl* (crescent), *badr* (full moon) and *qamar* (the moon in its waning, which at times is termed *maḥāq*). The verse from Ibn Kalāzū's poem reads as follows: “I supplicate you, o *hbq*, by an essence which you have revealed, that you may manifest it as a kind among creatures” (*sa'altuka, yā hbq, bi-dhāt aẓhartahā litūjīdahā ka-jīnsin bayna l-barriyya*). In our reading we substitute *litūjīdahā* for the apparently erroneous printed text, which has *linūjīdahā*.

⁶⁰ For opposing concepts of the incarnation among early Nuṣayrī circles, see above, chap. 1, pp. 15–33.

garding the essence of the deity sets the framework for the author's dialectical approach—namely, what is the essence of the deity? In particular, does the divinity ontologically constitute a part of the created order, or is it totally separate from it? In reply the master rejects both options. The divinity cannot be associated with the created beings, since this would constitute a similarity between them. On the other hand, an ontological separation would create an unbridgeable opposition between the deity and the created order.⁶¹

The author employs a series of detailed similes, using the sun and its relationship to the world to illustrate the way God exerts His influence on His creatures.⁶² For example, the sun, though high in the sky, illuminates all objects in the world; in the same way God affects His creatures though He is ontologically separated from them.

Another way the author illustrates the nature of the relationship between the deity and the creatures is by analogy with the relations that existed between Jesus and the Jews. This analogy is presented through a peculiar and original interpretation of certain Qur'ānic verses relating to Jesus or understood as referring to him. Verse 37:158 "and they [i.e. the polytheists] have set up a kinship between him and the jinn" (*wa-ja'alū baynahu wa-bayna l-jinna nasaban*) is interpreted as referring to the kinship (*nasab*) that existed between Jesus and his people. Relying upon the literal meaning of the root *jnn* (to conceal), the author suggests that the word "*jinna* in this [particular] occurrence means [a place] among them where God concealed Himself;Mary thus being a place where God concealed Himself" (*wa-tafsīr al-jinna fī hādhā l-mawḍi' mā istajanna llāh fihim... fa-Maryam bi-mawḍi' istajanna llāh fihī*).⁶³ The second clause of the verse in question, "and the jinn know that they shall be brought forth" (*wa-laqaḍ 'alimat al-jinna annahum lamuḥḍarūna*), is explained as teaching the concept of incarnation. The participle *muḥḍarūna* (those brought forth) is taken to refer to the entrance of the divine aspect of Jesus into his human aspect through the essence of Mary (*dukhūl al-lāhūt fī-l-nāsūt fī-l-maryamiyya*).⁶⁴ Further on the author depicts Mary as a veil by which God conceals Himself

⁶¹ *Kitāb al-usūs*, pp. 4b, line 8—5a, line 8 (=ed. Dandashī, pp. 76–77).

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 5a–b (=ed. Dandashī, p. 77).

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 54b, lines 1–2 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 132).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 54b, line 6. The term *maryamiyya*, rendered here as "the essence of Mary," is typical of the prevalent tendency in Nuṣayrī writings to create abstract nouns from names and terms denoting aspects of the divine realm—e.g. *ma'nawiyya*, *ismiyya*, *bābiyya*, *yafīmiyya*.

[to avoid] the suffering of birth (*wa-Maryam ḥijāb iḥtajaba llāh bihā ‘an ta’dīb al-wilāda*).⁶⁵

As do various heterodox Shī‘ī writings, including other Nuṣayrī works, our author draws an analogy between the figure of Jesus and that of ‘Alī for the sake of demonstrating the logic of ‘Alī’s incarnation.⁶⁶ This is done through an interpretation of the well-known “verse of the covenant” (Q. 7:172).⁶⁷ In Shī‘ī writings this verse is interpreted as referring to a primordial covenant God made with His creatures. Nuṣayrī authors took it to refer to a covenant God made with His chosen, the Nuṣayrī believers, prior to their fall to the terrestrial world of creation, when they were spiritual luminary beings surrounding His Throne.⁶⁸ In our text too this covenant is recorded. However, here God reveals Himself through the figure of ‘Alī, who is referred to by Qur’ānic verses relating to Jesus:

[Prophets] prophesied...that God would reveal Himself and be manifested. Then came ‘Alī [i.e. his incarnation] and revealed his spirit in the shape of [a man] born of a virgin ‘who guarded her virginity so we breathed into her of our Spirit, and she confirmed the words of her Lord, **the ‘Ayn**, and his books, and became one of the obedient’ (Q. 66:12) through the knowledge of God, and he [‘Alī] concealed himself in the essence of Mary (*fā-kāna [al-anbiyā’] yunabbūna bi-dhālika annahu sayakūnu wa-yazharu al-rabb fa-yatajallā fa-jā’a ‘Alī fa-jallā rūḥahu fī hay’at al-mawlūd min al-bikr al-batūl ‘allatī aḥṣanat farjahā fa-naḥaknā min rūḥinā fa-ṣaddaqat bi-kalimāt al-‘ayn[!] rabbihā wa-kutubihī wa-kānat min al-qānītīn’ bi-ma’rifat allāh wa-ḥijaba rūḥahu bi-l-maryamiyya*).⁶⁹

It is noteworthy that the author introduces two substantial modifications in the understanding of this Qur’ānic verse. First, the verse—

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 55a, line 1. Similarly, Moses is described as an abode in which God resides (*Mūsā kāna baytan min buyūti llāhi yanzilu llāhu bihā*) (Ibid., p. 56a, line 5).

⁶⁶ See e.g. chap. 1, above, pp. 21–22.

⁶⁷ This verse reads as follows: “And when your Lord took from the children of Adam, from their loins, their seed, and made them testify concerning themselves, ‘Am I not your Lord?’ They said: ‘Yes, we testify.’” (*wa-idh akhadha rabbuka min banī Ādam min zuḥūrihim dhurriyyatahum wa-ashhadahum ‘alā anfusihim alastu bi-rabbikum; qālū bal shahidnā*).

⁶⁸ On this primordial covenant see e.g. *Kitāb al-ḥaft wa-l-azilla*, pp. 32–35; and see also *Bākūra*, pp. 59–61. On the verse of the covenant, see R. Gramlich, “Der Urvertrag in der Koranauslegung (zu Sura 7,172–173),” *Der Islam* 60 (1983), pp. 205–230, which discusses this verse in detail and also devotes some space to early Imāmī exegesis. See also M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shī‘ism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam*, translated by D. Sreight (New York, 1994), p. 34.

⁶⁹ *Kitāb al-usūs*, pp. 68b., line 14–69a, line 5 (=ed. Dandashī, pp. 145–146). For usage elsewhere of Qur’ānic verses in support of the doctrine of incarnation, see *Kitāb al-uṣayfir*, p. 29b.

originally referring to the birth of Jesus from the Holy Spirit and Mary—is interpreted as being the incarnation of the first person of the divine trinity—namely ‘Alī. Second, in order to supply a decisive textual proof for his understanding, the author goes so far as to interpolate the word ‘*ayn*—a common reference to ‘Alī—into the Qur’ānic verse, thereby inserting an implied equation between God and ‘Alī.

Elsewhere the presence of God among His creatures is more explicitly depicted. After completing the creation, God walks among His creatures in human form. He rules them by setting an example for all to follow.⁷⁰ He does not, however, communicate with them directly but only via the prophets and apostles.⁷¹ The author is careful to avoid an unequivocal statement of a doctrine of divine incarnation by preferring instead a somewhat vague description of the form of the divine presence. However, it seems that he is opting for a type of docetic concept. In its manifestation on earth the deity reveals to its creatures only its powers and attributes—or, in a different terminology, its veil (*ḥijāb*)—and not itself.⁷² Moreover, the divine presence is revealed to humans selectively—namely, to the elect (*khāṣṣ*) and not to the multitudes (*‘āmm*).⁷³ What differentiates the two categories and enables the elect to perceive the divine manifestation is the power of perception and discernment, which prepares the gnostic for the revelation of God within his soul.⁷⁴ The docetic tendencies of the author become further apparent where he adopts an extreme form of docetism—that is, God indeed revealed Himself in a form similar to that of His creatures, namely, in a human form.⁷⁵ However, even if they once behold the manifestation of His ability, they need not witness it a second time⁷⁶ (*idh[ā] arāhum qudratahu marratan wāḥidatan jazāhum an lā yuriyahum thānīyatan*).⁷⁷ According to this concept the divine presence is limited to single momentary manifestations to the elect, which

⁷⁰ Cf. *Kitāb al-uṣayfir*, p. 29a, line 10, where the incarnation is described as an act of divine justice (*‘adlan minhu wa-inṣāfan*).

⁷¹ *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 10a, lines 4–12 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 82).

⁷² *Kitāb al-usūs*, pp. 10b, lines 7–9; 77a, line 2 (=ed. Dandashī, pp. 82, 153).

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 25a, line 3 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 98).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 25a–b; 77a, line 2–5 (=ed. Dandashī, pp. 98, 154).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 35a–b (=ed. Dandashī, pp. 109–110).

⁷⁶ I.e. the impression of the experience will never leave them.

⁷⁷ *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 36a, lines 4–5 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 110).

create a seemingly continuous docetic divine presence in their consciousness.⁷⁸

In view of his concept of divine revelation, albeit in a docetic version, the author of *Kitāb al-usūs* insists on the essential and fundamental differences between God and humans, and he does so through a series of examples and similes designed to preclude any misunderstanding of this doctrine. He devotes a laborious philosophical discussion to human anatomy and to the functioning of the body through its sensory system, as well as to the common material essence of all creatures, with the manifest purpose of establishing the clear distinction between creator and creature.⁷⁹ This general distinction is further elaborated through the categories of substance (*jawhar*) and image (*mathal*). The distinction here is that while the created substance has an image this is not true of the preeternal substance—that is, the deity (*al-farq baynahumā anna al-jawhara al-makhlūqa lahu mathal wa-l-jawhar al-qadīmu lā mathala lahu*).⁸⁰ The author lists various additional differences in this vein. The relationship between God and humanity is likened to that of body and soul, so that the separation between divinity and humanity is conceived of as the separation of the soul from the body by death.⁸¹ In yet another simile God is likened to the sun, which nourishes the universe, and humanity to the vegetation growing on earth. The manifestation of the deity is like a life-breathing wind.⁸²

At a certain point the disciple raises the two cardinal questions: what does God want from humanity? and what does humanity expect of God? (*akhbirmī mā yurīdu llāh min khalqihī wa-mā yurīdu al-khalq min allāh*).⁸³ The master's answer epitomizes the ultimate Nuṣayrī gnostic maxim: The main purpose of human existence is knowledge of God in His decree and speech and His manifestations in His precosmic, cosmic and postcosmic existence (*yurīdu llāh min kalqihī an ya'rifū hukmahu wa-kalāmahu wa-zuhūrahu min awwal al-khalq ilā ākhirihi wa-kawnahu qabla l-khalq wa-kawnahu ba'da l-khalq wa-kawnahu ma'a l-khalq*).⁸⁴ The author further emphasizes that a clear distinction exists

⁷⁸ *Kitāb al-usūs* may be the source for a further development of this peculiar concept in *Munāzarat al-shaykh al-Nashshābī*. See *Munāzara*, pp. 109a–b. Cf. also above, chap. 1, p. 29.

⁷⁹ *Kitāb al-usūs*, pp. 13b–16b; 47a–49b (=ed. Dandashī, pp. 85–88, 124–127).

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 44b, lines 9–10 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 122).

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 46a, lines 11–12 (=ed. Dandashī, ibid.).

⁸² Ibid., pp. 57a, line 12–57b, line 6 (=ed. Dandashī, pp. 134–135).

⁸³ Ibid., p. 46b, line 3 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 124).

⁸⁴ Ibid., lines 4–5. (=ed. Dandashī, ibid.).

between the pursuit of divine gnosis and the worship of God out of fear. Serving God out of fear is conceived of as a form of polytheism. The author applies the familiar concept of “duties of the limbs” (*a‘māl bi-l-jawāriḥ*)⁸⁵—that is, the external form of religion—to characterize religious law. Religious laws follow faith but do not constitute faith. Religious law is defined as the faith of the body, exemplified most amply by Judaism, which represents, according to the author, a typical example of an external form of religion.⁸⁶ This is reminiscent of the Christian Pauline concept of Judaism as the religion of the flesh.

3. Angelology

Angelology occupies a greater place in *Kitāb al-usūs* than in any other Nuṣayrī work known to us. Some aspects of this angelology are classical and have their roots in the Qur’ān and in post-Qur’ānic sources. Other components, however, seem to be the product of original developments that took place within Nuṣayrī theology. The author’s familiarity with the orthodox Muslim doctrines of angelology emerges clearly from his presentation of the subject. However, a superficial examination of the text is sufficient to realize that the general Muslim components provide no more than an external framework into which Nuṣayrī theologians inserted their own peculiar concepts. As in Muslim tradition, at the head of all angels stand the four archangels: Jibrīl, Isrāfīl, *malak al-mawt* (“angel of death” usually known as ‘Izrā’īl) and Mikā’īl.⁸⁷ A great similarity between Muslim and Nuṣayrī sources exists also in the eschatological role played by the archangel Isrāfīl: on the day of resurrection he is the one who will blow the trumpet (*yanfakhu fī-l-ṣūr*) heralding the resurrection and he himself

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 77b, line 10. For a discussion of the common Sūfī pairing of the opposing terms *a‘māl al-jawāriḥ* and *a‘māl al-qulūb* (duties of bodies and duties of hearts), see A. Goldreich, “Possible Arabic Sources of the Distinction between ‘Duties of the Heart’ and ‘Duties of the Limbs,’” *Tēuda* (Studies in Hebrew and Arabic) 6 (1988), pp. 179–208 (Hebrew).

⁸⁶ *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 77b, lines 13–15 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 154). Other references to Judaism in *Kitāb al-usūs* are treated later.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 68b, lines 5–6 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 146). For the main features of Muslim angelology and the roles of these four angels, see e.g. Zakariyā’ b. Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd al-Qazwīnī, *‘Ajā’ib al-makhlūqāt wa-gharā’ib al-mawjūdāt*, edited by F. Wüstenfeld (Göttingen, 1848), pp. 56–59. See also D.B. Macdonald and W. Madelung, “Malā’ika,” *EF*, vol. 6, pp. 216–219.

will resurrect the dead.⁸⁸ On the other hand, Mikā'il plays a role in *Kitāb al-usūs* that in Muslim tradition is assigned to Gabriel. Mikā'il is described as "the master of the 'preserved tablet'" (*ṣāhib al-lawḥ al-mahfūz*). He is further depicted as God's veil (*fa-yaḥtajibu allāh bihi*);⁸⁹ consequently he is the sole angel entrusted with revealing to other angels the secrets concealed in this tablet (*fa-yakūnu huwa lladhī yu'addi tilka l-ghuyūba; lā yu'addiha ghayruhu*).⁹⁰ However, elsewhere the author expresses the more common view that angels in general function as God's veils (*ḥujub*).⁹¹ Furthermore, as in Ismā'īlī doctrine, angels are depicted in various forms whose common denominator is their being emanated entities mediating between the deity and the human world. They serve *inter alia* as tools through which God reveals Himself to prophets.⁹² Realizing God's presence among His angels, prophets are enticed to desire a similar state.

When the Lord is incarnated in him (i.e. a prophet) or wishes to reveal Himself in that prophet and that messenger whom God sent to him [i.e. the believer], He changes His form into another form. Then, if He so desires, He transforms Himself into another shape until he (i.e. the prophet) recognizes that this angel⁹³ is the house of God in which He lodged His power so that the prophet and messenger crave that [God] should single them out, as He singled out that angel by dwelling in him (*wa-idhā ḥalla al-rabb fihi aw arāda an yazhara bi-dhālika al-nabī wa-dhālika al-rasūl alladhī arsalahu llāh ilayhi fa-yughayyiru*⁹⁴ *ṣūratahu ilā ṣūra ukhrā thumma yaruddu ṣūratahu ilā hay'a idhā shā'a ḥattā ya'rifa anna dhālika al-malaka huwa bayt allāh alladhī askana fihi qudratahu... liyaṭma'a dhālika al-nabī wa-dhālika al-rasūl an yakhuṣṣahu bi-mithl alladhī khaṣṣa dhālika al-malaka min al-suknā fihi*).⁹⁵

It emerges then that God's revelation to his angels serves as a model for his prophets. In another passage it is stated that the true believer—that is the gnostic—can also ascend to the degree of angel (*wa-kadhālika al-mu'min yantaqilu ilā manzilat al-malā'ika*).⁹⁶

⁸⁸ For the various roles of Isrāfīl in Muslim eschatology, see al-Qazwīnī, *ʿAjā'ib al-makhlūqāt*, pp. 56–57; see also A.J. Wensinck, "Isrāfīl" in *EP*, vol. 4, p. 211. Cf. however *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 24a, line 8 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 97) where the power of resurrection is described as the privilege of all angels.

⁸⁹ *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 24a, line 2 (=ed. Dandashī, *ibid.*).

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, lines 2–3 (=ed. Dandashī, *ibid.*).

⁹¹ See e.g. *ibid.*, line 3 (=ed. Dandashī, *ibid.*).

⁹² *Ibid.*, lines 5–8 (=ed. Dandashī, *ibid.*).

⁹³ This refers to God's appearance in angelic form mentioned above.

⁹⁴ The text reads here *yataghayyaru*, which seems less plausible.

⁹⁵ *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 23a, lines 8–14 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 96).

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 61b, line 11 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 139).

Angels also serve as archetypal forms for the creation of Adam.⁹⁷ God created him—according to the author—in the shape of the angels in the primordial world. Finally, unlike all other creatures, angels are believed to be exempt from transmigration.⁹⁸

4. *Prophecy*

As has been noted, one of the major roles of prophets, according to the theology of *Kitāb al-usūs*, is mediating between the transcendental divine realm and the world of creatures. God reveals Himself to His elect believers through the mediation of prophets and apostles in a complex docetic form of incarnation. After the Fall from the divine realm of light God sent prophets to His elect to convey the divine truth. Perception of this truth is dependent on a person's level of knowledge. The savants (*ulamā'*) acknowledge the truth; the ignorant (*juhḥāl*) are perplexed; the skeptics (*shukkāk*) express doubt; and the infidels (*kuffār*) reject it.⁹⁹ Before the time of Moses, states the author, there was as yet no divine book and no messenger, and men were guided by reason and by prophets who were granted divine revelations through angels.¹⁰⁰ But God also conferred His dispensed power by way of emanation from the angels to His prophets and apostles, who received some of the divine qualities given to the angels.¹⁰¹ In his discussion of the descent of the divine power by emanation to messengers and prophets, however, the author soon adopts an outright terminology of incarnation. The various veils (*hujub*) of the deity are manifested via the descent of God's power to the prophets and His incarnation in them.¹⁰² Elsewhere the author explicitly states that the prophets are incarnations of the deity (*fahum al-rabbu idhā zahara fī khalqihī*).¹⁰³ However, these statements are qualified by the author's clarification that God reveals Himself and communicates with men

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 9a, lines 1–3 (=ed. Dandashī, pp. 80–81).

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 60b, lines 6–7 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 138).

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 68b, lines 9–11 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 145).

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 33b, lines 3–9 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 107). The author's assertion that no divine book existed before Moses somewhat contradicts the pseudepigraphic attribution of Nuṣayrī writings, including *Kitāb al-usūs*, to pre-Mosaic figures such as Seth.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., lines 7–14 (=ed. Dandashī, *ibid.*).

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 24b (=ed. Dandashī, p. 97).

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 36b, line 9 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 111).

not directly but in the “form of prophets” (*bi-ṣūrat al-anbiyāʾ*).¹⁰⁴ Proof of the divine power of prophets is their knowledge of the hidden and their capacity to resurrect the dead and transform the essence of things—qualities that belong to God and not to the believers.¹⁰⁵ The author further states that it is the duty of the gnostic to recognize God’s manifestation in His prophets as well as His manifestation in other persons.¹⁰⁶

The author of *Kitāb al-usūs* presents a cyclical conception of prophecy. Prophets serve as a medium for the cyclical religious progression of human history. As is well known, this motif has a long history, and ramifications that begin with Manicheism;¹⁰⁷ it was subsequently elaborated by Ismāʿīlī and heterodox groups such as the Druzes¹⁰⁸ and the Nuṣayrīs.¹⁰⁹ Like the Ismāʿīlī doctors,¹¹⁰ the author of *Kitāb al-usūs* stresses the role of the prophets sent in various generations in abolishing the prevailing religion and introducing a new one.¹¹¹ In fact the prophets and apostles are assigned by the author a cosmic role—that of maintaining the delicate balance of justice in the world. They constitute the “scale of justice” (*mīzān al-ʿadl*) or “the tipping of the scale” (*lisān al-mīzān*) that upholds the world order.¹¹² Their paramount role in the evolution of human history merits the possibility of the return of prophets to the world and even the resurrection of their companions.¹¹³

The divine character and role of the prophets makes them a prime target for the forces of evil, who are engaged in a battle for the souls of humanity in this world. These forces—namely, devils, demons (*al-abālisa wa-l-shayāfīn*) and heretics—wish for the death of the prophets. However, the author advocates a monistic providential stance to

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 54a, line 7 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 131).

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 24a, lines 8–9 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 97).

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 10b–11a (=ed. Dandashī, pp. 82–83).

¹⁰⁷ See e.g. G.G. Stroumsa, “Seal of the Prophets: the Nature of a Manichaean Metaphor,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 7 (1986), pp. 61–74.

¹⁰⁸ For the cyclical concept in the Druze religion, see e.g. P.K. Hitti, *The Origins of the Druze People and Religion* (New York, 1928), pp. 37–39.

¹⁰⁹ For the Nuṣayrī concept of historical cycles, see e.g. *RT*, pp. 44ff; *Catechism*, question 5, in chap. 8, below, pp. 173–180. See also Lyde, *The Asian Mystery*, p. 118, and Moosa, *Extremist Shiites*, pp. 352ff.

¹¹⁰ See e.g. Abū Yaʿqūb Ishāq al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb ithbāt al-nubūʾāt*, edited by A. Tamer (Beirut, 1966), pp. 177–180; and al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq al-shīʿa*, pp. 62–63.

¹¹¹ *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 31b, lines 10–14 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 105).

¹¹² Ibid., pp. 35b–36b (=ed. Dandashī, pp. 110–111).

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 55b, lines 9–11 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 133).

explain the problematic question of the existence of evil, manifested through the slaying of the prophets by the forces of evil. This reality must be regarded as an integral part of the divine scheme. The forces of evil are obedient to the divine will even if this may not outwardly seem so. Their will is actually tuned to the will of God. Therefore it is God who willed the death of the prophets in order to perfect and complete their reward, and in order to confound the evil forces and cause them to doubt the divine character of the prophets.¹¹⁴ The author ends with a warning against those who interpret the “books of the prophets” in a whimsical manner according to their liking (*yaqra’u ‘alayka kutuba al-anbiyā’ lā ya’lamu ta’wīlahā fa-yujādiluka fihā bi-shahwatihī wa-yufassiruhā laka ‘alā maḥibbatihī; wa-uḥadhdhiruka dhālika taḥdhīran*).¹¹⁵ The author emphasizes that even Moses erred when he believed that he had received all the gnosis from God when God spoke to him. The disciple is further warned against denying the sayings of the prophets, which may be manifested in various ways.¹¹⁶

5. Theodicy, Divine Retribution and Transmigration

The Nuṣayrī belief in transmigration facilitates the discussion of the otherwise difficult problem of theodicy, or divine justice, so familiar from Jewish, Christian and Muslim medieval theology.¹¹⁷ Thus in *Kitāb al-usūs* the whole issue seems somewhat less troublesome, since the principal solution of transmigration gives a satisfactory answer to the perennial existential paradox of the suffering of the righteous. The

¹¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 73a–b (=ed. Dandashī, pp. 150–151).

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 75a, lines 4–7 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 152).

¹¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 75a, line 9–76a, line 6 (=ed. Dandashī, pp. 152–153). Moses’ sin is discussed in the broader context of a peculiar interpretation of the Qur’ānic account of his encounter with the mysterious figure referred to in *sūra* 18:70 as “one of Our servants,” who is identified in Muslim tradition as al-Khiḍr.

¹¹⁷ On the Nuṣayrī doctrine of transmigration, see Lyde, *The Asian Mystery*, pp. 139–141; Dussaud, *Histoire et religion des Nusairis*, pp. 120–127; R. Strothmann, “Seelenwanderung bei den Nusairi,” *Oriens* 12 (1959), pp. 89–114; R. Freitag, *Seelenwanderung in der islamischen Häresie* (Berlin, 1985), pp. 62–74; Moosa, *Extremist Shiites*, pp. 362–371. For a discussion of transmigration within the context of theodicy in Jewish and Muslim medieval sources, see H. Ben-Shammai, “Transmigration of Souls in Tenth Century Jewish Thought in the Orient,” in *Sefunot (Studies and Sources on the History of the Jewish Communities in the East)*, n.s. 5 (=20), pp. 117–136 (Hebrew); M. Cook, “Ibn Qutayba and the Monkeys,” *Studia Islamica* 89 (1999), pp. 43–74. Cf. G. Scholem, “Gulgul: The Transmigration of Souls” in idem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in Kabbalah*, translated from the German by J. Neugroschel (New York, 1991), pp. 197–250 and 300–312 (notes).

author offers an unsophisticated discourse on some aspects of this subject—such as the suffering of the righteous as against the well-being of the evildoer, the differences in the lifestyles of the believer and the heretic, and the deserts of each in this world and in the hereafter.¹¹⁸

The question of the source of evil in this world, however, is not solved by the doctrine of transmigration. The disciple enquires concerning the essence of divine justice, and the sage elaborates his concept of “original sin,” which is reminiscent of its Christian counterpart. Adam’s transgression introduced sin into the world, and this brought about the human condition of sin into which we are born. The fallen state of humanity, a product of the original sin, is responsible for all manifestations of evil and all catastrophes that beset man.¹¹⁹ However, it should be emphasized that the whole system of divine retribution does not belong to the divine essence. It is actually an external accretion designed to answer for the lower condition of humanity. This principle accounts also for the apparent changes of stance on the part of God—either beneficial or detrimental—regarding certain biblical figures. The change in the fate of the people of Ninveh in contrast to Jonah’s initial prophecy or the delivery of Abraham’s son¹²⁰ from sacrificial death contrary to God’s earlier words to Abraham are offered as examples of God’s retractions of His previous decrees as concessions (*rukhaṣ*) to His creatures.¹²¹ In his treatment of the concept of changes in divine stance the author ignores the well-known doctrine of *badā’*—namely changes in divine will or ruling—but his discussion is essentially reminiscent of this doctrine.¹²²

¹¹⁸ *Kitāb al-usūs*, pp. 29b–30a (=ed. Dandashī, pp. 102–103).

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 32b, lines 4–14 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 106).

¹²⁰ The name of the son—whether Isaac or Ishmael—is not mentioned. As is well known the Qur’ān, unlike the Bible, does not identify the sacrificed son by name. In early Muslim tradition there existed a debate regarding his identity. At a later period it was unanimously accepted that he was Ishmael. On this debate see S. Bashear, “Abraham’s Sacrifice of his Son and Related Issues,” *Der Islam* 67 (1990), pp. 243–277.

¹²¹ *Kitāb al-usūs*, pp. 45a, line 4–46a, line 10 (=ed. Dandashī, pp. 122–123). It is noteworthy that the author unconventionally applies the legal term *rukhaṣ*—commonly denoting religious legal concessions—to his discussion of divine retribution. On the concept of *rukhaṣ* in Muslim jurisprudence, see M.J. Kister, “On Concessions and Conduct: A Study in Early Ḥadīth,” in *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society*, edited by G.H.A. Juynboll (Carbondale, Ill., 1982), pp. 89–107, 214–30.

¹²² On the doctrine of *badā’* see e.g. I. Goldziher (and A.S. Tritton), “*Badā’*” in *EP*, vol. 2, pp. 850–851. See also W. Madelung, “*Badā’*” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 3, pp. 354–355; M. Ayoub, “Divine Predestination and Human Hope: A Study of

Transmigration is the main instrument for effecting divine justice and retribution. This point is illustrated through a series of questions and answers regarding the divine retribution of caliphs, kings and generals. Their retribution will come in the form of transmigration into officials of varying ranks, according to their conduct during their lifetime.¹²³ However, the author does not exclude the possibility of a certain measure of reward already in this life, in the form of longevity. Here again the key to reward is gnosis. The secret of longevity lies in the knowledge of the veil of birth (*hijāb al-wilāda*)—namely, the divine emanated power watching over birth. Knowledge of this secret creates a scale of longevity from the ignorant to the perfectly enlightened,¹²⁴ a rather optimistic notion on the part of the author.

The doctrine of transmigration plays a major role in the theodicy of *Kitāb al-usūs*. Indeed it seems to be something of a favourite topic among Nuṣayrī scholars, possibly reflecting also its underlying existential concern.¹²⁵

Transmigration is a consequence of the Fall. It is viewed as the divine punishment for the primordial sin of pride and ignorance committed by the spiritual human archetypes in the luminary divine world against the supreme deity.¹²⁶ The author defines transmigration as changes that God makes in the forms of His creatures.¹²⁷

The form of the transmigration is a function of the religious worship which God's creatures render unto Him.¹²⁸ In line with the numerical cosmic symbolism typical of Ismā'īlī doctrine, *Kitāb al-usūs* refers to seven kinds of bodies for each type of transmigration.¹²⁹ Similarly the Nuṣayrī believer has seven bodies into which he is trans-

the Concept of *Badā'* in Imāmī Shī'ī Tradition," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 106 (1986), pp. 623–632.

¹²³ *Kitāb al-usūs*, pp. 59a–b (=ed. Dandashī, pp. 136–137).

¹²⁴ *Kitāb al-usūs*, pp. 59b, line 13–60a, line 4 (=ed. Dandashī, pp. 137–138).

¹²⁵ See e.g. the detailed discussion of transmigration in *Kitāb al-ṣirāt*, pp. 109a–124a (=ed. Capezzzone, pp. 339–353).

¹²⁶ See above, p. 47 with note 19.

¹²⁷ A wide range of terms denoting various forms of transmigration is attested in Nuṣayrī texts. *KM*, for example, includes a series of seven different terms (*KM*, p. 183, lines 14–15 [=pp. 163–164 in the French translation]; Salisbury, p. 238). According to al-Adhanī these seven terms are interpreted by the Nuṣayriyya as referring to the seven floors of Hell mentioned in the Qur'ān (15:44) (*Bākūra*, p. 11). For a brief discussion of transmigratory terminology in a broad Islamic context, see Ben-Shammai, "Transmigration of Souls...", pp. 118–124.

¹²⁸ *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 49a, lines 3–15 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 127).

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 61b, line 12–62a, line 10 (=ed. Dandashī, pp. 139–140).

migrated in seven cycles (*li-kull mu'min sab'āt abdān wa-sab' wilādāt*).¹³⁰

The author introduces a series of questions and answers regarding the transmigration of souls, which leads to a detailed discussion of transmigration into various animals and their possible manner of death, as sacrificial animals or otherwise. He discusses the possibility of atonement and shows the relationship between a particular sin (e.g. the murder of God's holy men) and the ensuing transmigration. The Jews, for example, are punished by transmigration into various animals,¹³¹ whereas heretics are punished by transmigration into sacrificial animals.¹³² The author also distinguishes between transmigration into animals and transmigration into natural elements.¹³³

Transmigration into animals and other living things is offered as an explanation for the religious proscription of certain foods, since they may embody transmigrated human souls. The author cites a source, which he terms "the Israelite Book" (*al-kitāb al-isrā'īlī*),¹³⁴ on this point: "It is forbidden to eat any transmigratory food, for example an egg which has no two distinguished sides,¹³⁵ fish with no scales, hare, pig, monkey, and others" (*inna kulla mamsūkh muḥarram akluhu mithl al-bayḍa idh lam yakun lahā ṭarafayn (!) mukhtalifa wa-mithl al-samaka idh lam [yakun] lahā fulūs wa-mithl al-arnab wa-l-khinzīr wa-l-qird wa-ghayru dhālika*).¹³⁶ While all these animals are proscribed by Jewish dietary laws—and pigs and monkeys are conceived of as transmigratory ani-

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 32b, line 14–15 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 106).

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 46a, lines 6–7 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 123). The transmigration of Jews into animals and more specifically into monkeys is derived from the Qur'ān, where a punitive transmigration of the People of the Book into monkeys and pigs is mentioned (2:65; 5:60 and 7:166). This motif is common in other Nuṣayrī sources. See e.g. *Bākūra*, p. 81.

¹³² *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 51a (=ed. Dandashī, pp. 128–129).

¹³³ Ibid., p. 53a, line 5 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 131).

¹³⁴ It is not clear whether the title *al-kitāb al-isrā'īlī* refers to the Bible or to some other Jewish work, or whether it is merely employed to denote an unspecified Jewish tradition. This term is akin to the title *al-kitāb al-'arabī*, frequently applied by the author as a synonym of the Qur'ān. For occurrences of the latter, see e.g. *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 53a, lines 8, 11; p. 54a, line 1; p. 54b, lines 4, 12; p. 55a, lines 2, 7; p. 55b, line 9 (=ed. Dandashī, pp. 131–133). Other, less frequent, titles referring to the Qur'ān are *al-kitāb (!) Muḥammad* (ibid., p. 53a, line 13 [=ed. Dandashī, p. 131]) and *al-kitāb al-'arabī al-Muḥammadī* (ibid., p. 68a, line 14 [=ed. Dandashī, p. 145]).

¹³⁵ See the Talmudic discussion of the characteristics that distinguish clean eggs from unclean ones: "All [eggs] that are arched and rounded, with one end broad and the other end narrow, are clean. Those that are broad at both ends or narrow at both ends are unclean..." (*Hullīn*, p. 64a; the English translation is that of I. Epstein in *The Babylonian Talmud: Seder Kodashim* [London, 1950], vol. 29, p. 347).

¹³⁶ *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 55b, lines 6–8 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 133).

mals peculiar to Christians and Jews respectively, based on Qur'ānic verses—the reason for the inclusion of certain eggs in this list remains somewhat obscure.

6. *Restoration, Gnosis and Antinomianism*

The author of *Kitāb al-usūs* advocates a gnostic theology of restoration. God granted Adam the possibility to return to his original state in paradise. This provides the theoretical matrix for the belief that the Nuṣayrī gnostic may achieve the state which Adam enjoyed in Eden prior to his primordial sin. As we have seen, this state was characterized as one of ideal religious freedom—that is, freedom from the burden of religious precepts and ritual obligations. The gnostic is restored to the pristine reality of religious liberty, where he is free from religious commandments and is rewarded for his deeds.¹³⁷ Adam's road back to paradise is made possible by divine grace (*ukhrija Ādam min al-janna wa-raja' a ilayhā bi-l-minna*).¹³⁸ This principle establishes the possibility that the gnostic may reenter the divine realm. The ascent to paradise, however, can only be achieved through the gradual enlightenment via the seven degrees of faith by which believers may progress.¹³⁹

In a remarkable passage the author idealizes Christian priests and monks as paragons of perfect gnosis of the Messiah—namely, Jesus. The apostles represent for him the perfection of the gnostic-monastic ideal:

Do you not know that priests and monks, once they had achieved the degree of gnosis, withdrew from the world, became wanderers,¹⁴⁰ rejected the world and its vanities in gratitude [toward] God who had bestowed His grace upon them, and had elevated them so that they

¹³⁷ Ibid., pp. 50b–51a (=ed. Dandashī, pp. 128–129). For a more detailed discussion of the concept of gnostic restoration based on other Nuṣayrī sources, see below, chap. 3, pp. 77–83.

¹³⁸ *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 61a, line 7 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 139).

¹³⁹ Ibid., lines 12–13 (=ed. Dandashī, ibid.). It is noteworthy that the author employs the term *bayt al-maqdis* denoting the temple or the city of Jerusalem, as representing the true gnostic knowledge of the divine (ibid., p. 5b, lines 11ff [=ed. Dandashī, pp. 77–78]).

¹⁴⁰ In Arabic: *sā'ihūn*. This term reflects the Ṣūfī ideal of *siyāha*—namely, ascetic wandering. On this concept in the Nuṣayriyya see e.g. Ghālib, *Ta'rikh al-'alawiyyīn*, p. 320, and the treatise *Tazkiyat al-nafs fī ma'rifat bawāṭin al-'ibādāt al-khams*, in A. 'Alī, *Ma'rifat Allāh wa-l-Makzūn al-Sinjārī* (Beirut, 1972), vol. 2, p. 321. We owe the last reference to our friend Tariq Abu Rajab.

gained the full gnosis of the Messiah. The Apostles who secluded themselves in cells and monasteries, out of gratitude and love and not out of fear and avidity, acquired a degree of asceticism unprecedented by other nations (*amā 'alimta anna l-qissisīna wa-l-ruhbāna lammā balaghū darajata l-ma'rifa tazahhadū fī-l-dunyā wa-ṣārū sā'ihūna wa-'jtanabū l-dunyā wa-zukhrufahā shukran an'ama llāh 'alayhim wa-balagha bihim al-daraja wa-'arafū al-masīha kunha al-ma'rifa hattā balagha min sha'n al-ḥawāriyyūna [!] alladhīna ḥabasū anfusahum fī-l-ṣawāmī' wa-l-biyya' wa-balaghū min al-zuhd mablaghan lam yabluḡhu aḥadan [!] min hādhihi al-milal shukran wa-ḥubban lā khawfan wa-lā ṭama'an*).¹⁴¹

The author apparently anticipates the antinomian implication of the state of gnosis as he describes it. He has the disciple pose a question as to the legitimacy of an ideal state where the believer is liberated from the religious law: "Inform me: how is it possible for the believer to be without [religious] duties, with nothing being demanded of him, while remaining among the ranks of the free, nothing being forbidden to him" (*akhbirnī kayfa yajūzu an yakūna l-mu'min bilā 'amal wa-lā farḍ wa-lā yuṭālabu bi-shay' wa-yakūnu yastamirru fī manzilat al-aḥrār fa-lā yuḥarramu 'alayhi shay'*).¹⁴² In a forceful response the master states categorically that perfect gnosis (*ma'rifa*) of all the divine emanations ultimately leads to final liberation.¹⁴³ This statement is further enhanced by the comparison between Moses and Jesus noted above. God revealed Himself in the person of Moses and gave him the Torah and various commandments concerning purity and forbidden foods. Later came Jesus, the incarnate deity itself, and released them (*a'taqahum*)—namely the Jews—from the bonds and limitations legislated by Moses. Jesus said: "God is in no need of your deeds; if you wish—do, and if you wish—do not do, for you understand the sweetness of freedom" (*inna llāha mustaghni 'an a'mālikum; in shi'tum i'malū wa-in shi'tum fa-lā ta'malū idh fahimtum ḥalāwat al-ḥurriyya*).¹⁴⁴

The Christian allusions are clear. The comparison between Moses and Jesus is a traditional Christian theme going back to the roots of Christianity.¹⁴⁵ Here, however, the old Christian motif is grafted onto Nuṣayrī theology in order to legitimize an antinomian stance in the context of Islamic civilization.

¹⁴¹ *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 56b, lines 5–11 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 133).

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 55b, lines 13–15. (=ed. Dandashī, *ibid.*).

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 55b, line 15–56a, line 5 (=ed. Dandashī, pp. 133–134).

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 56a, line 14–56b, line 2 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 134).

¹⁴⁵ See e.g. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Demonstratio Evangelica* in *Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte*, edited by I.A. Heikel (Leipzig, 1913), 2,3,6–30.

7. *Heretics and Believers*

Like other Nuṣayrī writings, *Kitāb al-usūs* advocates a theology of predestination regarding the internal division of humanity. The divine economy has preordained the division of humanity into three principal categories: scholars (*‘ulamā*), ignorant (*juhḥāl*), and heretics (*kuffār*).¹⁴⁶ The author states unequivocally that the ignorant and heretics cannot exceed the limits of their condition. Moreover, scholars are assigned the degree of free men, the ignorant that of slaves, and heretics that of slaves of slaves (*‘abīd al-‘abīd*), who are reincarnated as sacrificial animals but are in fact inferior to other beasts.¹⁴⁷ The author further stresses this distinction in order to accommodate the Nuṣayrī gnostic myth of origin in the divine realm of light. An ontological buffer distinguishes between the gnostic elect—the free sons of light—and the rest of humanity, who constitute the people of servitude.¹⁴⁸

Nonetheless, the author tends to qualify somewhat his extreme deterministic position. The principle underlying the divine predestined classification of humanity is the degree of gnosis—namely, the progress of the initiate in the scale of knowledge of the divinity.¹⁴⁹ In accordance with this concept, the author elsewhere proclaims the universality of divine truth, which is not limited to any particular religion or location: “Truth fortifies the believer and cannot harm him wherever he is and to whatever religion he belongs” (*wa-l-mu’min al-ḥaqqu yazīduhu wa-lā yaḍurruhu ayna-mā kāna wa-fī ayyi dīnan (!) kāna*).¹⁵⁰ At the same time, it seems that the author counts such a believer among the predestined gnostic elect. The author further states that the internal division among believers and heretics according to their degree of gnosis is reflected by the elements of nature and the cosmos.¹⁵¹ There are seven ranks of faith among believers on the ascending ladder to paradise, as well as seven terrestrial bodies and seven heavenly luminary bodies with their astral affiliations.¹⁵² These seven ranks are symmetrically opposed by seven descending degrees of heresy—as-

¹⁴⁶ *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 50b, lines 12–14. (=ed. Dandashī, p. 128).

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 51a, lines 1–8 (=ed. Dandashī, pp. 128–129).

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 57a (=ed. Dandashī, pp. 134–135).

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 38b, line 15–39a, line 2 (=ed. Dandashī, pp. 113–114).

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 58b, lines 3–4 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 136).

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 60a (=ed. Dandashī, pp. 137–138).

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 61a–62a (=ed. Dandashī, pp. 139–140).

sociated with darkness—leading to absolute heresy (*al-kufr al-mahḍ*).¹⁵³ In this scale the Jews are seen as archetypes of heresy.¹⁵⁴

After the Fall God sends prophets to humanity to disseminate the divine truth denied by the heretics.¹⁵⁵ The heretics in fact collaborate with the demons to bring about the death of the prophets.¹⁵⁶ The author ends his book with the sage's teaching to the disciple about how to refute two types of heretics who are distinguished by their position regarding the creation of the world and the unity of God. The first type are believers in the eternity of the world (*ahl al-dahr*), the second are dualists (*ahl al-thanawiyya*).¹⁵⁷ The sage winds up his discourse on heresy with a general admonition to the disciple against various types of heresy and deceptive talk—both of which intertwine truth with falsehood.¹⁵⁸

8. Christian and Jewish Issues

Kitāb al-usūs is marked by a considerable preoccupation with Christian and Jewish motifs. In fact, these notions, particularly the Christian, appear at all levels of discussion and throughout the entire treatise. Moreover, it appears that here, more than in any other Nuṣayrī work, Christian theological issues are firmly integrated into Nuṣayrī theological parlance.

The author associates salient Christian terminology with the divine realm of emanation and with the Nuṣayrī trinitarian doctrine. The third person of the trinity is sometimes referred to as the Holy Spirit (*al-rūḥ al-muqaddasa*),¹⁵⁹ which also serves as a mediator between divinity and humanity. The various heavenly luminary veils (*ḥujub*) belong to the *ḥijāb* of the Son and the Holy Spirit (*ḥijāb al-ibn wa-l-rūḥ*).¹⁶⁰ This

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 61b, line 9 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 139).

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 39b, lines 1–2 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 114).

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 68b, lines 9–11 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 146), and see the section on prophecy, above.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 73a, lines 11–12 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 150).

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 77b, line 13ff (=ed. Dandashī, p. 154).

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 78b, line 12–79a, line 1 (=ed. Dandashī, pp. 155–156).

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 41a, line 14 (=ed. Dandashī, pp. 117). The more common term is *rūḥ al-qudus* (see e.g. ibid., p. 42b, line 7 [=ed. Dandashī, p. 119]). For another identification of the Holy Spirit with the sun as a degree of emanation below the *bāb* and above the moon, see *Kitāb al-uṣayfir*, p. 34a. The *bāb* is identified in the latter work with the Universal Soul or the Holy Soul (ibid., p. 24b, lines 8–9).

¹⁶⁰ *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 62b, line 7 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 140).

apparently refers to the *ḥijāb* of the second person, the *ism*, and of the third, the *bāb*, thus applying the distinctly Christian trinitarian terminology to the Nuṣayrī trinity and identifying the Son with the second person of the Nuṣayrī trinity. Christ (Jesus) is further depicted as the “supreme eye,” gathering the cosmic divine Imams, who are identified with the twelve hours of the day under the figures of the twelve cosmic apostles.¹⁶¹

In support of his view on certain points the author occasionally adduces quasi-biblical quotations. The apocryphal saying of Jesus, “I create through God’s permission...” has already been noted.¹⁶² Elsewhere he cites Genesis 1:26—erroneously attributing it to the New Testament: “Let us create man in our form and image” (*ta’ālāw nakhlūq insānan ‘alā ṣūratinā wa-amthālinā*).¹⁶³ It is Jesus who speaks here, wishing to reveal his power in a form similar to his own (*fa-arāda an yuzhira qudratahu fi-l-ṣūra allatī hiya ‘alā ṣūratihī*).¹⁶⁴ In answer to the question, in whom was God revealed after He had concealed Himself? the author cites—apparently indirectly and possibly from the Gospel (Mat. 1:23)—an interpolated version of the famous verse of Isaiah 7:14, “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a prophet (!),¹⁶⁵ and shall call his name Immanuel.” The author claims that God revealed Jesus to men and announced to them that he would perform great deeds—deeds that were beyond the powers of the prophets.¹⁶⁶

Several paragraphs of the book are devoted to discussions of the figure of Christ, the doctrine of incarnation, Jesus’ suffering at the hands of the Jews and his death. Parts of these discussions are focused on Qur’ānic verses dealing with Christian beliefs concerning the relationship between divinity and humanity as well as the complex relation between the Jews and Christ. The author attributes to the Gospel the verse “O Jesus, I have borne you” (*yā Isā, innī waladtuka*). The author interprets it as referring to Mary—who, according to him, is a divine place where God conceals Himself—and to the

¹⁶¹ See above, pp. 49-50. See also the author’s comparison between Moses and Jesus for the sake of legitimizing his antinomian theology (above, pp. 66-67), as well as the idealization of apostles, priests and monks as models of perfect knowledge of Christ and the embodiment of the gnostic ideal.

¹⁶² See above, p. 51.

¹⁶³ *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 11b, lines 6-7 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 83).

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 11b, lines 7-8 (=ed. Dandashī, ibid.).

¹⁶⁵ Instead of “son” as in the biblical text.

¹⁶⁶ *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 25b, lines 11-12 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 98).

incarnation of Christ,¹⁶⁷ which serves as a model for a divine incarnation through the medium of virginity and the Holy Spirit.¹⁶⁸

The author further comments on the aforementioned Qur'ānic verse 37:158 "and they [i.e. the polytheists] have set up a kinship between Him and the jinn" (*wa-ja'alū baynahu wa-bayna l-jinna nasaban*). He interprets it as referring to John the Baptist and his father, Zecharia, who created a kinship (*nasab*) between Jesus and the demons. Following this assertion the author concludes further that the Jews erroneously conceived of the divine essence as being identical with the demonic essence.¹⁶⁹ The Qur'ān is thus cited as proof that the demons knew they were destined to come to Jesus.¹⁷⁰

The treatise next discusses Christology—namely, the natures of Jesus and the understanding of his messianic role. Here the author offers—albeit without elaboration—a distinction between two aspects of Christ's human nature, his superior, Adamite nature (*ādamiyya*) and his lower, human nature (*insāniyya*).¹⁷¹

Toward the end of the work the author introduces a series of questions and answers regarding Christ as a model of all figures who were concealed and revealed in order to proclaim the unity of God. The disciple raises the question whether such a person is to be perceived as elected (by God) or as persecuted (by men) when he was killed—though [in fact] he was not killed (*hīna qutila wa-lam yuqta*).¹⁷² If one asserts that he was persecuted one must conclude that he was a created being and was executed. However, if he was elected then his murderer must be pardoned—presumably because he acted according to divine will.¹⁷³ The answer states that Christ, the "true truth" (*al-ḥaqq al-ḥaqq*) was persecuted not because he was a created being but because he chose to be persecuted.¹⁷⁴ The sage concludes his

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 54a, line 14–55a, line 2 (=ed. Dandashī, pp. 132–133).

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 55a, lines 11–14 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 133).

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 54a, line 9–54b, line 3 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 132). The author states further that the Jews claimed they had crucified Jesus, until God denied their words in the Gospel and in the Qur'ān (ibid. p. 54b, lines 3–5 [=ed., ibid.]).

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 54b, lines 5–6 (=ed. Dandashī, ibid.).

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. 55a, lines 13–15 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 133). The Adamite nature seems to reflect the primordial spiritual nature of the human creatures who preceded humanity in the divine realm.

¹⁷² Ibid., p. 72b, line 1 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 149).

¹⁷³ A similar deliberation with regard to 'Alī's murder can be found in heterodox Shī'ī circles. See e.g. 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, *Kitāb al-farq bayna l-firaq*, p. 144 (in his chapter on the Sabā'iyya sect).

¹⁷⁴ *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 72b, lines 1–3 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 149).

answer with a statement of the paradox of faith: the mysteries of Christ cannot be apprehended by a man of reason but only by the ignorant.¹⁷⁵

Responding to another question the author proceeds to discuss the revelation of Christ, arguing that his revelation is a sort of test for humanity.¹⁷⁶ This is followed by a discussion of the meaning of the crucifixion and the role of the Jews in Jesus' death.¹⁷⁷ The author focuses on the issue of the compatibility or incompatibility of the wishes and intentions of the Jews and of Christ. The disciple argues that if the Jews acted according to Christ's wish that he be killed by them, then they have, at least outwardly, obeyed him. If, however, they acted contrary to his externally manifested will, their action may serve as evidence against them.¹⁷⁸ The master answers that Jesus did not wish his death to be an offering to God; therefore the will of the Jews (to kill him) was contrary to Christ's will. It is only when both wills (i.e. of Christ and of the Jews) are in harmony that one can speak of obedience (of the Jews to Christ's will). It is actually proper to consider Christ as disobedient because he did not obey the Jews. In fact, Christ did not order them to kill him but actually forbade it. But since the Jews were determined to execute him, he appeared to them as if he were dead and confounded them in knowledge, ability and will. God exalted Christ, the spirit and word (of God) from every inferior being, and he returned to the divine luminescence and omnipotent glory (*wa-nazzaha allāh al-masīḥa rūḥahu wa-kalimatahu 'an kulli daniyya wa-'āda ilā l-nūrāniyya l-ilāhiyya wa-l-jalāl al-jabarūtiyya[!]*).¹⁷⁹

Finally, the incarnation of Christ demonstrates that the divinity may be revealed in different forms. A semi-apocryphal saying of Jesus is adduced to substantiate this concept: "If I come to you hungry, feed me, and if I come to you naked, dress me. Namely, if I appear to you in this form, do not deny that I am your Lord for I appear in whatever form I wish" (*idhā jī'tukum jā'ī an fa-ashbi'ūnī wa-idhā jī'tukum 'uryānan fa-ksūnī ay idhā taṣawwartu lakum bi-hādhihi l-ṣūra fa-lā ta'baw; innī rabbukum fa-innī qad taṣawwartu bi-hā kayfa shi'tu*).¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 72b, lines 7–9 (=ed. Dandashī, ibid.).

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 72b, line 10–73a, line 4 (=ed. Dandashī, ibid.).

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 73a, line 5–74a, line 4 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 150).

¹⁷⁸ For similar arguments in Jewish-Christians polemics, see *The Polemic of Nestor the Priest*, edited and translated by D.J. Lasker and S. Stroumsa (Jerusalem, 1996), vol. 1, p. 143; vol. 2, p. 91.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 74a, lines 1–3 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 151).

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 6a, lines 6–9 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 78). Jesus' first words here reflect his words in Matt. 25:35–36.

Whereas Christian motifs play an important role in *Kūtāb al-usūs*, the author refers only sporadically to Jews; usually in the context of the death of Jesus. Jews are characterized as the model of arch-heretics.¹⁸¹ Following Qur'ānic verses 4:160, 2:217, the author notes that the Jews were punished with certain restrictions. What is noteworthy here is the explanation for their specific punishment: their sin was that "they denied the incarnation of the deity in prophets and [their] heirs" (*inkāruhum ḥulūla al-lāhūt fī-l-anbiyā' wa-l-aṣṣiyā'*¹⁸²).¹⁸³ The reasons for their punishment—that is their reincarnation as animals—are those mentioned in the Qur'ān: the practice of usury and turning their backs on the holy mosque.¹⁸⁴ The conclusion of *Kūtāb al-usūs* includes a general admonition not to follow the way of Judaism, for there is not a single perfect man to be found among the Jews and God has no elect in their midst (*wa-waṣṣiyatī iyyāka an lā tamshī bi-l-yahūdiyya fa-laysa li-llāh fihā khālīṣ wa-lā li-llāh fihā naṣīb*).¹⁸⁵

9. Conclusion

The unsystematic and enigmatic nature of *Kitāb al-usūs* does not detract from its significance as a very valuable source for the study of Nuṣayrī doctrine in its formative stages. Alongside concepts and ideas prevalent in other Nuṣayrī works, our treatise is marked by ideas and terminology not found in—or at least, not developed in—other sources. One of the questions debated by scholars of the Nuṣayrī religion since the beginning of modern research is the weight to be assigned to the Christian components within the complex Nuṣayrī syncretism. As is well known, certain scholars such as Henri Lammens held that Christian influence upon the Nuṣayrī religion—mainly on its trinitarian

¹⁸¹ *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 39a, lines 1–2 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 114).

¹⁸² On the concept of *waṣīyya* (literally “will” or “testament”) and *waṣī* (pl. *awṣiyāʾ*—namely, “heir[s]” or “testamentary executor[s]”), see R. Peters, “*Waṣīyya*,” *EF²*, vol. 11, pp. 171–172; E. Kohlberg, “*Waṣī*,” *EF²*, vol. 11, pp. 161–162.

¹⁸³ *Kūtāb al-usūs*, p. 46a, lines 3–4 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 133).

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 46a, lines 4–5 (=ed. Dandashī, *ibid.*). Other references to Jews in a Christian context were noted earlier—namely, the comparison of Moses to Jesus in the context of establishing an antinomian theology, the forbidden incarnated foods, the claim of the Jews that they crucified Jesus, their mistaking the divine essence for a demonic one (p. 71), and the question as to whether they acted in conformity with Christ's will when they persecuted him and plotted his death (pp. 71–72).

¹⁸⁵ *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 77b, lines 14–15 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 154).

doctrine and liturgy—has been cardinal. Lammens even went so far as to claim that the roots of the Nuṣayrī religion are to be found in Christianity. Although the evidence of *Kitāb al-usūs* does not support the rather extreme position of Lammens, the treatise certainly demonstrates the great affinity of early Nuṣayrī religion with Christian doctrines and terminology. We have seen that this work is also distinguished by other topics, such as its antinomian stance rooted in redemptive gnostic theology as well as a complicated concept of transmigration, which constitutes an essential pillar of the theodicy of *Kitāb al-usūs*.

CHAPTER THREE

THE HEAVENLY ASCENT OF THE NUṢAYRĪ GNOSTIC

The mystical strivings of the Nuṣayrī gnostic combine to lead to a knowledge of the mystery of the divine world of light. According to Nuṣayrī myth, this mystery had been known to the faithful of the primordial world—that is, the world that preceded original sin. On account of his sins, however, man's soul fell from the heights of that world, and it is the duty of the gnostic to return to the primeval state. Thus his mission is to set his soul on the path leading back to the divine world from which it was banished.

In this chapter we shall draw on several Nuṣayrī works to describe the crucial stages along the difficult path the gnostic soul must take to return to its original home.

1. *The Myth of the Fall*

According to an ancient Nuṣayrī myth, the souls of gnostics originated in the divine world of light that existed before the creation of the material world. These souls were originally luminous spiritual entities emanating from the divine world of light and sometimes, more specifically, from the *ḥijāb*.¹ However, the souls of these sons of light fell from the luminous divine world after the sin (*ma'siyya*) of rebelling against the divine will² or succumbing to pride. The common feature of these faults is that they derive from an imperfect knowledge of God.³ Thenceforth God created a veil (*ḥijāb*) in order to sepa-

* We would like to thank Jennie Feldman for translating this chapter from the original French.

¹ On this myth, see *Kitāb al-haft wa-l-azilla*, pp. 33–37; *Kitāb al-uṣayfir*, p. 24b; al-Adhanī, *Bākūra*, pp. 59–61. For a short analysis of the cosmogony of *Kitāb al-haft wa-l-azilla*, of paradise and of the origin of Nuṣayrī souls in the world of light, see Freitag, *Seelenwanderung in der islamischen Häresie*, pp. 56–57.

² See *Kitāb al-haft wa-l-azilla*, p. 41.

³ See *Bākūra*, p. 60, which indicates several manifestations of this fault of pride, such as the arrogance of the Nuṣayrīs, who declared that God created no creatures more perfect than they (*fa-fakkarū bi-dhawātihim annahu lam yakhlūq khalqan akrama minnā*),

rate and distance them from Himself.⁴

Moreover, according to Nuṣayrī theology Adam's expulsion from paradise is to be interpreted similarly to the myth of the fall of souls. In *Kitāb al-usūs*,⁵ paradise represents the divine luminous world and Adam is presented as the archetypal Nuṣayrī soul fallen from this divine world. The essence of Adam's original sin is that he unknowingly approached the tree symbolizing the world of heresy⁶ (*inna Ādam qaruba al-kufra 'alā ghayr ma'rifa*).⁷ Indeed, according to this text Adam's sin was not committed with premeditation (*ghayr ta'ammud minhu*).⁸ Adam—that is to say, the Nuṣayrī gnostic—was subsequently punished and compelled to pass through seven cycles of transmigration (*takrīrāt*) because he was guilty of the sin of heresy against the seven heavens.⁹

Plainly, the myth presented here revolves around two very clear lines of thought: dualism and determinism. Dualism, because there is an ontological division between the Nuṣayrīs, the people of light (*ahl al-nūr*), and the remainder of mankind, people of darkness (*ahl al-zulma*).¹⁰ Moreover, the Nuṣayrīs are presented as liberated beings while the rest of humanity is regarded as being in slavery, thus further underlining the ontological rift between the Nuṣayrīs and other humans. Determinism, because this duality is obviously not the result of man's free choice: it is the inevitable consequence of predestination established by God Himself. In addition, according to the author of *Kitāb al-usūs*, it is God who has personally “purified the free and luminous beings, who has known them, chosen and elected them [by offering them] gnosis” (*wa-ṣafā l-aḥrār al-nūrāniyyīna wa-‘arafahum wa-ntajabahum wa-ṣtafāhum bi-l-ma'rifa*).¹¹ According to this text, the representatives of these exceptional men live dispersed in many countries, assembled in groups of the elected faithful.¹² A statement at-

or that they believed they saw God in His totality since they thought themselves similar to Him (*fa-zannū annahum yarawnahu bi-kullīyyatihi li-zannihim annahu mithluhum*).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 49b, lines 2–3 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 137). On this Nuṣayrī work, see above, chap. 2, pp. 43–45.

⁶ *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 49b, lines 2–3 (=ed. Dandashī, *ibid.*).

⁷ Ibid., line 5 (=ed. Dandashī, *ibid.*).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 50b–51a (=ed. Dandashī, pp. 128–129).

¹⁰ *Kitāb al-uṣayfīr*, p. 21b.

¹¹ *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 57a, lines 7–8 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 135).

¹² Ibid., p. 61a (=ed. Dandashī, p. 139).

tributed to 'Alī gives striking expression to this concept of predestination: "None knows God save he who proceeds from Him or from His own light" (*lā ya'rifu llāha illā man kāna minhu wa-min nūrihi al-khāṣṣ*).¹³

2. *The Gnostic's Return*

The mission of the gnostic believer is thus to recover his primordial state of unity and harmony and become once again the luminous entity that belonged to the divine world of light, a world identified with paradise. However, the road of return is long and arduous, and beset with many dangers for the faithful. This road is clearly interchangeable with the path to perfection along which one progresses according to the degrees of gnosis and which requires both true knowledge and mystical perception. This mystical gnosis will make it possible to re-establish the original pre-Fall state, which is at the same time a return to the lost paradise of light.

In describing the mystic's progress in attaining knowledge, Nuṣayrī literature uses different symbols and images. For the Nuṣayrīs, knowledge means above all a true perception of the mystery of the divine trinity: Salmān, Muḥammad, and 'Alī. This perception grants the faithful access to paradise; indeed, this knowledge is ontologically identified with paradise.

In his polemic treatise (*munāẓara*), the 7th/13th-century Nuṣayrī scholar Yūsuf ibn al-'Ajūz al-Nashshābī,¹⁴ cites a tradition according to which he who knows Salmān and Muḥammad is already in paradise. This follower subsequently rises degree by degree in the spiritual world as he seeks to be completely purified and to follow the instructions essential for a knowledge of God. He will then remember the spiritual garment that was once his, and his entire existence before the Fall. He will subsequently attain happiness (*al-na'īm*) and perfect gnosis.¹⁵

Thus true knowledge comes firstly from the knowledge of the divine name (*al-ism*). Moreover, one of the fundamental functions of this gnosis is to evoke in the soul of the Nuṣayrī gnostic the memory

¹³ *Kitāb al-uṣayfir*, p. 14b, line 9.

¹⁴ On him, see above, chap. 1, pp. 11-13.

¹⁵ *Munāẓara*, pp. 132a-132b.

of its distant past and of the luminous garments it wore before its imprisonment in the body.¹⁶

According to a tradition ascribed to Muḥammad, "After the death of a believer, God created an opening in his tomb so that he could contemplate his place in paradise" (*inna llāha yaftaḥu li-l-mu'min idhā māta fī qabrihi bāban fa-yarā mawḍi'ahu fī-l-janna*).¹⁷ In an allegorical interpretation of this tradition, "the tomb is none other than the body of the devotee, into which will enter the light and winds of paradise" (*fā-l-qabr huwa al-badan alladhī yadkhulu ilayhi nūruhā wa-nasīmuḥā*).¹⁸ It is within these two entities that the believer will be able to see the place that will be his in paradise, and will thus be able to rise toward this place or return to it, according to the degree to which his soul has been penetrated by the holy spirit. The interpretation goes on to describe the evolution of the faithful in the divine world in terms of a hierarchical progression through different stages of the spiritual universe: the spirit (*al-rūḥ*), the brightness of the spirit (*ḍaw' al-rūḥ*), the light (*al-nūr*), the light of prophecy (*nūr al-nubuwwa*), and the spirit of mission (*rūḥ al-risāla*).¹⁹

The first thing removed from man during his ascent is his heart (*fā-awwalu mā yunassaru min al-insān qalbuḥu*),²⁰ so that the divine light can subsequently attach itself to his eye.²¹ Satan would then not be able to enter it except by indirect means from afar (*lam yaṣil Iblīs an yadkhula minhu fī shay' illā bi-l-tamayyul wa-l-takhyīl min ba'īd*).²² The ascent of the soul through the degrees of spiritual knowledge is threatened by Satan and his wiles; but once the believer is enveloped in light, Satan loses all his powers of dominion, and man is entirely protected from his traps. Moreover, according to the same text, if Satan dares to approach the luminous area surrounding the believer, he will be consumed.²³ In *Kitāb al-usūs*, the progress of the believer is described in terms of ascending a ladder with seven rungs of faith, the topmost opening onto the gnostic's paradise.²⁴

¹⁶ On the notion of luminous garments, see *Catechism*, question 80, in chap. 8, below, p. 192.

¹⁷ *Munāẓara*, p. 132b, lines 12–13.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 132b, line 13–133a, line 1.

¹⁹ This is also called "the missionary spirit" (*al-rūḥ al-mursala*). For an overview of this theme cf. *ibid.*, p. 133a, lines 9–11.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 133b, line 7.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, lines 8–9.

²³ *Ibid.*, lines 9–11.

²⁴ *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 61a (=ed. Dandashī, p. 139).

Thus it can be noted that Nuṣayrī gnosis is based on the dualism characteristic of theological thought. Moreover, in contrast to the gnostic path of ascent through degrees of faith, there is a path of fall descending through all the degrees of heresy, to absolute heresy.²⁵

With regard to the bonds that form between the gnostic and the emanation, the mystical elevation of the devotee begins from the time he attaches himself to the lower degrees, and it is confirmed when he raises himself to the level of *bāb*, the place of the universal soul and the divine Logos (*al-naḥs al-kullīyya wa-l-kalima al-ilāhiyya*). When he has proceeded from there to the level of the higher *ḥijāb*, the place of the universal intellect (*al-ʿaql al-kullī*), he can be regarded as having reached the level of the gnostic bound to God and can contemplate the splendour of His power (*al-ʿarīf al-muttaṣil bi-llāh al-mushāhid jalāla jabarūt allāh*).²⁶ Thus the *bāb* is in fact the threshold of superior knowledge of the divine trinity and for this reason is often considered the pinnacle of the gnostic's understanding. This is implied in the following teaching attributed to ʿAlī: "There is no entrance other than through him [i.e. the *bāb*], and all knowledge is thanks to him" (*lā dukhūla illā minhu wa-lā maʿrifata illā bihi*).²⁷

Furthermore, the gnostic's progress in knowledge of the divine is described also in philosophical terms. The *bāb* is identified with the universal soul (*al-naḥs al-kullīyya*), and in this respect it, too, is regarded as the form of the active intellect (*ṣūrat al-ʿaql al-fāʿāl*), this form being itself created from the primary intellect, which is, in turn, the *ḥijāb* of God.²⁸ In these philosophical terms, understanding is acquired through union with the active intellect, which potentially contains every intellectual act.²⁹ The gnostic's soul is at the same time compared to a mirror that the mystic must polish throughout his progression in

²⁵ Ibid., p. 61b (=cd. Dandashī, *ibid.*).

²⁶ *Kitāb al-uṣayfir*, p. 20b, lines 7–8. See also *ibid.*, p. 24b, which gives an allegorical interpretation of certain verses in the Qurʾān that mention the soul, such as 91:9, 89:27–30. See also Q. 2:55, in which we find the ambiguous word *ḥitta*. The latter verse is interpreted in relation to the mystical ascent and the attachment to different degrees of the emanation. Here the mystics are called *sālikūn*, *ʿarīfūn*, and *muwāḥḥidūn* (*ibid.*, p. 12b, lines 6–7). For a discussion of the word *ḥitta*, see U. Rubin, *Between Bible and Qurʾān: The Children of Israel and the Islamic Self-Image* (Princeton, 1999), pp. 83–99.

²⁷ *Kitāb al-uṣayfir*, p. 15a, lines 4–5.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15b, lines 3–5. In this passage, it seems that the primary intellect and the active intellect are regarded as the two aspects of Muḥammad (=ism=*ḥijāb*).

²⁹ *Ibid.*

knowledge, in keeping with a well-known metaphor in Sufi literature.³⁰ However, rational knowledge of the divine mystery is not sufficient, since gnosis is by its very nature supra-rational. To make a distinction between these two forms of knowledge, the author of *Kitāb al-uṣayfīr* uses two different terms: exoteric knowledge, called *‘ilm* (learning), and esoteric knowledge, like that of the mystics, called *ma‘rifa* (gnosis). This second kind of knowledge, which is directed primarily toward an inward comprehension, also encompasses exoteric knowledge, whereas exoterism does not include esoterism (*fa-inna al-ma‘rifa tataqaddamu bi-l-‘ilm li-anna kulla ‘ārif ‘ālim wa-laysa kullu ‘ālim ‘ārif* [!]).³¹ Thus certain Qur’ānic expressions with the root *‘rf* are interpreted in a way that illustrates the difference between these two kinds of knowledge. For example, the “verse of the *a‘rāf*” (Q 7:47): “and on the Ramparts are men knowing each by their mark” (*wa-‘alā l-a‘rāf rijāl ya‘rifūna kullan bi-sīmāhum*) is interpreted as referring to the gnostics (*al-‘ārifūn*).³² Likewise the place name ‘Arafāt signifies true knowledge, gnosis.³³

The highest level of gnostic knowledge is likewise described with the aid of various Qur’ānic expressions, which are employed in the same sense in Sunnī and Shī‘ī exegesis. One can cite, among others, the expressions [*shajarat*] *tūbā* (Q. 13:28),³⁴ *sidrat al-muntahā* (Q. 53:14), and *jannat al-ma‘wā* (Q. 53:15).³⁵ Moreover, the ultimate goal of the gnostic, according to a pronouncement ascribed to al-Sāḍīq, is adherence to God, the only means of attaining perfect knowledge.³⁶ Thus the condition for attaining knowledge is mystical devotion. Furthermore, it is said to be absolutely impossible to communicate (*munājāt*) with God without gnostic knowledge.³⁷ Consequently gnostic knowledge can be achieved only through mystical devotion, which at the same time transforms that knowledge into a perfect gnosis of divinity.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 16a, lines 11–12. On the parable of the mirror in Sufism, see e.g. H. Lazarus-Yafeh, *Studies in al-Ghazzālī* (Jerusalem, 1975), pp. 312–320.

³¹ *Kitāb al-uṣayfīr*, p. 16b, lines 5–6.

³² Ibid., p. 16b, lines 6–7.

³³ See Strothmann, “Esoterische Sonderthemen,” p. 9 (of the German translation) = p. 10 (of the Arabic text).

³⁴ In this verse, however, only the word *tūbā* appears, which many commentators interpret as referring to paradise or the tree that stood in it. Cf. e.g. R. Blachère, *Le Coran* (Paris, 1980), p. 275, note 28.

³⁵ For all three of these Qur’ānic expressions, see *Kitāb al-uṣayfīr*, p. 15a, line 11.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 11a–b.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 12a, line 1.

In the course of this endeavour to reach mystical knowledge, the souls of believers have to abandon their bodies so as to unite with the hidden realities (*bawāṭin*) that come from the world of light.³⁸ For the faithful, the divine light that radiates from the *ḥijāb*—being in principle different from the essential light that emanates from the *ma'nā*³⁹—is the threshold of knowledge. Thus the *ḥijāb* is the point of convergence of all the lesser lights that emanated from it.⁴⁰ The divine light or, more precisely, divine lights are therefore, in effect, a kind of intermediary, a medium that leads to gnostic knowledge. However, certain souls will not be able to enjoy this stream of light that pours onto them because, on account of imperfect knowledge, the souls “may have to turn back and flee as the bat flees the sun” (*fa-tarjī'u 'alā 'aqibiḥā haraban kamā yuqālu yahrubu al-khuffāsh min nūr al-shams*).⁴¹ During this process, the souls contemplate the holy world (*'ālam qudsihī*) and become attached to the divine world of intimacy (*'ālam unsihī*).⁴² The devotee is not truly regarded as a gnostic believer “who is one with God” (*muttaṣilan bi-llāh*) until he moves away from darkness and attaches himself to spiritual light. Only then are the divine verities truly implanted in his soul.⁴³ A teaching attributed to the ancient masters (*al-mawālī*) emphasizes that this knowledge of God through the intermediacy of light protects the faithful against transmigration (*man 'arafa llāha bi-l-nūrāniyya amina min al-musūkhīyya*),⁴⁴ which is the lot of all other human beings.⁴⁵

The soul of the gnostic thus rises through the spiritual heavens in order to reach the source of the superior lights and be transformed into luminous reality (*fa-yaṣīru nūran muttaṣilan bi-yanbū' al-nūr*).⁴⁶ It then attains “the holy divine soul” (*al-naḥs al-quḍsiyya al-ilāhiyya*), which is identified with the *bāb*.⁴⁷ Thus from the moment the soul rises and

³⁸ Ibid., p. 22a, line 2.

³⁹ On this concept, see above, chap. 1, p. 15, note 46.

⁴⁰ *Kutāb al-uṣayfir*, p. 21b, lines 9–10.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 22a, lines 3–4.

⁴² Ibid., p. 21b, line 13. On the theme of the soul that contemplates the divine world, see also ibid. p. 36a, lines 1–2. On the Sufi concept of the *uns* that expresses the mystic's intimate proximity to God, see e.g. A.M. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill, 1975), pp. 32, 92.

⁴³ *Kutāb al-uṣayfir*, p. 21a, lines 5–8.

⁴⁴ Ibid., lines 4–5.

⁴⁵ On the importance of the doctrine of transmigration in the Nuṣayrī religion, see above, chap. 2, p. 62, note 117.

⁴⁶ *Kutāb al-uṣayfir*, p. 23b, lines 7–8.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 24b, lines 8–9.

reaches the world of the divinity, it no longer needs to concern itself with the material world and can contemplate the divine world directly.⁴⁸ The mystic's success in reaching this degree of knowledge redeems him and brings him eternal happiness. This is, in fact, a sublime degree where the gnostic is beyond all doubt⁴⁹ and attains the level of angels.⁵⁰ From this moment, he himself is liable to be called upon by other gnostics to guide them on the mystical path that leads to the world of light.⁵¹ He who has the good fortune to reach such a degree enjoys great privileges, but also has new responsibilities. He may still rise to the level at which he can ask God to reveal to him the mysteries of the universe. Indeed, he has already reached the level of those who know the mystery of the trinity.⁵²

Thus the gnostic's victory consists of a perfect knowledge of the mysteries of the universe and of the divine trinity. However, the road of the Nuṣayrī mystic does not end there, since, as in other esoteric traditions, he then turns to the community or, at least, to other believers who, like him, are seeking the world of light and whom he must henceforth guide and counsel.⁵³

In summary, there emerges from this interpretation of the Nuṣayrī myth of paradise granted by God to man—granted, to be precise, to the archetype of the devotee's soul—the possibility of resuming his primordial state in paradise.⁵⁴ However, his eventual return to this state does not depend solely on his spiritual efforts but also on divine grace (*al-minna*).⁵⁵ The primordial state that the Nuṣayrī gnostic attains is characterized by total freedom with regard to the commandments and the precepts of the Law.⁵⁶ This ideal state is thus antinomian, a characteristic of Nuṣayrī religion.⁵⁷ Indeed, the question of ideal antinomianism has always preoccupied Nuṣayrī theolo-

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 36a.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 11b, lines 1–3.

⁵⁰ *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 61b, line 11 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 139). See also *Kitāb al-mashyakha*, in Lyde, *The Asian Mystery*, p. 251.

⁵¹ *Kitāb al-uṣayfīr*, p. 23b, lines 11–12.

⁵² See al-Mufaḍḍal b. ʿUmar (attrib.), *Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ*, p. 100a, lines 7–8 (=ed. Capezzzone, p. 331).

⁵³ Priests and monks are presented as the ideal model of those who have reached perfect knowledge, while the apostles are regarded as having attained the monastic and mystical ideal (*Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 56b, lines 5–11 [=ed. Dandashī, p. 134]).

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 49b (=ed. Dandashī, p. 137).

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 61a, line 6 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 139).

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 51a (=ed. Dandashī, pp. 128–129).

⁵⁷ On Nuṣayrī antinomianism, see above, chap. 2, pp. 66–67.

gians. A question posed by the disciple to the sage in *Kūtāb al-usūs* clearly underlines his hesitation regarding the possibility of an antinomian attitude: "How is it that the believer can reach a level that allows him to be free from the constraint of precepts, so that no longer is any thing forbidden to him?" And the sage responds that when the believer reaches the highest stage of knowledge of the divine emanations, the divinity, he is delivered from all bondage and thus becomes a free man.⁵⁸ In other words, the ideal state attained by the Nuṣayrī gnostic is that of a radically antinomian freedom.

3. *Negative Theology versus Gnosis and Mystical Union*

In the polemical work of al-Nashshābī cited above, the author shows himself to be in favour of philosophical abstraction, especially as regards the supreme aspect of the divinity—reaching the *ma'nā* directly, through the intellect, even envisaging a certain form of mystical union with it. In other words, one can find in the work of al-Nashshābī the dialectical contradiction of a mode of thought that is resolutely rational, preaching a negative theology, while at the same time accepting the mystical and gnostic impulse.⁵⁹ This intrinsic tension may explain the contradictory statements found throughout his work, especially with regard to the possibility of a direct knowledge of the *ma'nā*. Al-Nashshābī claims, on the one hand, that by denying the divine attributes one is only denying the anthropomorphic aspects of the *ma'nā*; indeed, the esoteric face of the *ma'nā* transcends even the principle of negation. Elsewhere he also declares, paradoxically, that no one can describe, nor even apply negative theology to the esoteric aspect of the *ma'nā* (*lā yumkinu li-aḥadan (!) min al-bashar an yaqdira yaṣifuhu walā yunazzihuhu*).⁶⁰ At the same time, belief in the existence of an esoteric aspect of the divinity is based on "the knowledge of the heart and meditation" (*bi-'aqd ḍamīr al-qalb wa-tadbīr al-fikr*).⁶¹ Therefore the knowledge of God through the negation of attributes concerns only the exoteric aspect of the divinity and does not allow the devotee to progress further, for he cannot in this manner move beyond the anthropomorphic aspects of the divine exoteric.⁶² Nevertheless, the value

⁵⁸ *Kūtāb al-usūs*, pp. 55a, line 11–55b, line 13 (=ed. Dandashī, pp. 133–134).

⁵⁹ See above, chap. 1, p. 26.

⁶⁰ *Munāẓara*, p. 145a, lines 5–6.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, line 6.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 149b, lines 8–12.

and quality of the knowledge of God are directly proportionate to the degree of purity of the devotee's essence and spiritual life (*wa-innamā al-nāẓir ilayhi bi-ḥasab al-ṭāqa wa-kullu 'aql 'alā miqdār ṣafā[!] jawharihi wa-iṣrāf nūr baṣīratihi wa-laṭāfat rūḥāniyyatihi*).⁶³ Consequently, the believer has the real possibility of progressing to the point where his intellect reaches the *ma'nā*: for this, he has only to unite—with the aid of his knowledge—with the different powers emanating from the *ma'nā*, the *ism*, the *bāb*, and the lower levels, the *yaṭīms*. Hence these powers represent the different degrees in the believer's progress toward absolute knowledge. "Know that he who has knowledge of the *ma'nā* through the intermediacy of the *mīm* (namely, Muḥammad), who understands the *mīm* through the intermediacy of the *yaṭīms*, who deduces each thing from another and who understands how things are distinguished from each other, he has truly reached perfect knowledge."⁶⁴

From the moment the devotee reaches the highest degree, he becomes detached from his bodily existence and is transformed into a spiritual entity. Thus he rises to a level of faith characterized by a declaration of faith that is different from that of other believers: "I bear witness that you are my ultimate goal, that you are my *ma'nā* ... that I am you and you are me" (*ashhadu annaka ghāyatī wa-ma'nāya... wa-anta anā wa-anā anta*).⁶⁵ The true *shahāda* thus contains a declaration concerning the spiritual identity of the believer and his mystical union with the *ma'nā*. According to a different tradition, knowledge of the *ma'nā* (= 'Alī=Allāh) as well as devotion to him (rather than knowledge of the *bāb* and the *ism*) are said to be identical with paradise. Hence it is those who know the *ma'nā* who deserve to enter paradise.⁶⁶

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 145b, line 12–146a, line 1.

⁶⁴ *Munāẓara*, pp. 145a, line 11–145b, line 1, and see above, chap. 1, p. 27. In a Nuṣayrī interpretation of the *basmala* attributed to the Imam Ja'far al-Šādiq, there appears an equivalent version on the theme of the gradual progression of the believer who seeks to attain the divine mystery: He who understands the *ism*=Muḥammad=*mīm* (an allusion to the word *ism* which is part of the *basmala*) can envisage the *ma'nā*=*al-rahmān al-rahīm* (*Munāẓara*, p. 149b, lines 3–5).

⁶⁵ *Munāẓara*, p. 137a, lines 8–9.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 132a, lines 11–12. See also above, chap. 1, pp. 27–28.

4. *The Mystery of the širāt*

In *Kitāb al-širāt* the mystery of the return to paradise is given an altogether singular interpretation. This text includes a commentary on the mystery of the *širāt*, which according to Muslim faith is a bridge separating paradise from hell. This bridge, as described in Muslim tradition, is supported by seven arches that, in *Kitāb al-širāt*, are interpreted as seven obstacles (*‘aqaba*, pl. *‘iqāb*) on the eschatological road of the faithful making his way to paradise. In Nuṣayrī gnostic thought, this road and its obstacles are an ideal exegetical framework on which to build a doctrine of ascent toward the gnostic paradise of a knowledge of the divine mystery.⁶⁷ Thus if the traveller is seized with doubt on the subject of one of the *‘iqāb*, he will halt at this stage.⁶⁸ Likewise, the believer who has succeeded in surmounting all these obstacles and has reached the seventh is a liberated and liberating man (*fa-innahu idhā šāra ilā dhālika[!] al-‘aqaba al-sābi’a wa-ḥaṣala fihā fa-qad kharaja ‘an al-ta’abbud wa-šāra ḥurran muḥarriran*).⁶⁹ The knowledge of the faithful reaches its apogee only when he manages to reach the seventh *‘aqaba*:

From the moment that [the believer] attains the seventh degree, stays there and reaches the supreme place..., that he is pure and restored to his essence, then the *ism*, which is the *ḥijāb*, reveals itself to him and [the believer] contemplates it, watches it and discovers its works; then does [the *ism*] instruct him in the knowledge of his creation and his origins, as well as [the mystery of] his transmigration.... Then is [the believer] liberated from everything he was thereto, and [from that moment] he has the [ability] to disappear at will and to appear when he wishes. If he so decides, he can go to the East or the West, [be] on earth or in the heavens, and can know the dwelling place of his master, his *ḥijāb* and his *bāb*. If he desires, he can appear [to men] or remain in whatever place he may choose. If he wants to be in the company of men, he joins them, he knows them and sees them, but they do not know him; to the point where he may be among them and speak to them in their accustomed language, then abruptly leave them without their noticing [his disappearance] or knowing how he left....⁷⁰

⁶⁷ *Kitāb al-širāt*, pp. 92b–93a (=ed. Capezzone, pp. 324–325).

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 94b, lines 2–4 (=ed. Capezzone, p. 326, lines 15–17).

⁶⁹ Ibid., 95b, lines 10–11 (=ed. Capezzone, p. 327, lines 11–12). This teaching is part of an interpretation of the Qur’ānic verses Q. 90:11–12 in which the word *‘aqaba* occurs.

⁷⁰ *fa-idhā šāra ilā l-‘aqaba al-sābi’a wa-ḥaṣala fihā wa-dakhala l-maḥalla l-a’lā... wa-ṣafā wa-takhallaṣa wa-‘āda ilā jawharihi fa-‘inda dhālika yazharu lahu l-ism wa-huwa l-ḥijāb fa-*

When the devotee reaches the end of the obstacle-strewn path, he attains the degree of the divine light and enters paradise (identified with true gnostic knowledge).⁷¹ He who has reached this stage is characterized (as before) by compassion: the desire to share his own experience with the other sons of light. Such a man is liberated from transmigration but is duty-bound, for his part, to help the other believers; it is then that the mysteries of the cosmos are revealed to him.⁷²

Noteworthy once again is this new example of paradox in the supreme mystical concept: the gnostic, feeling a sense of responsibility toward other believers and the desire to share with them his own experience, turns his gaze away from the pinnacle of the divine world and directs it instead toward his fellow men.

5. *Muḥammad's Night Journey*

A short treatise by the Nuṣayrī scholar Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥusayn b. Hārūn al-Sā'igh, includes a detailed commentary on the Qur'ānic verse concerning the night journey (Q. 17:1).⁷³ This verse is once again interpreted within the framework of the process of understanding the divine mystery, according to the concept set out above. The main subject of the treatise is the true knowledge of the mystery of the divinity—namely, knowledge of the *ism* and the *ma'nā*. The nature of this knowledge is described in the course of an allegorical commentary on the night journey. The journey is regarded as the expression of the internal dynamic of the divine world of emanation. Thus it is a description of an ascent, degree by degree, to the interior of the divine world. The traveller who undertakes this is not Muḥammad but the *yafīm* al-Miqdād,⁷⁴ who climbs the steps of the divine world

yū'āyīnuhu wa-yushāhiduhu wa-yashhadu af'ālahu wa-yuṭlī'uhu 'alā 'ilm takwīnihi wa-bad'īhi wa-yu'arrifuhu bi-taqallubihī min ḥāl ilā ḥāl... fa-'inda dhālika yatakhallaṣu min jamī' mā kāna 'alayhi wa-yakūnu lahu in shā'ā yaghību wa-in shā'ā yaḥḍuru wa-in shā'ā yaḥillu sharqan aw gharban aw samā'an aw arḍan wa-ya'lamu ḥaythu yaḥillu mawḷāhu wa-ḥijābuhu wa-bābuhu fa-idhā arāda ḥudūr[!] ḥadara wa-in aḥabba [i]qāmatan bi-makān min al-amākin aqāma wa-in anisa ilā l-bashariyya bāsharahum wa-yu'nisuhum bi-nafsihi wa-ya'rīfuhum wa-yashhadu lahum wa-lā ya'rīfuhu ḥattā yakūna lahu an yaḥlisa bayna aqwām fa-yuḥādithuhum wa-yukallimuhum bi-lisān min al-alsun al-jāriya fīmā baynahum wa-yanṣarifū 'anhum fa-lā yarawhu wa-lā ya'lamūna bihi kayfa madāt (Kutāb al-ṣirāt, pp. 97b, line 4–98a, line 3 [=ed. Capezzzone, p. 329, lines 8–18]).

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 98b, lines 5–7 (=ed. Capezzzone, p. 330, lines 8–9).

⁷² Kutāb al-ṣirāt, pp. 98b–100a [=ed. Capezzzone, pp. 330–331].

⁷³ An edition and translation of the text is given in the next chapter.

⁷⁴ I.e. Al-Miqdād b. Aswad al-Kindī, the first of the five *yafīms*. See above, chap. 1, p. 18, note 66.

under the guidance of his master Salmān, the third person in the Nuṣayrī trinity. At the outset, the *yafīm* al-Miqdād ascends and unites with Salmān, the *bāb*. Thus he becomes identical to the *bāb* and rules over both levels, that of the *yafīm* and that of the *bāb*. This is the true meaning of the ascent from the holy Mosque (*al-masjid al-ḥarām*) to the Further Mosque (*al-masjid al-aqṣā*). Once al-Miqdād has attained the level of the *bāb* and is identified with it, he reaches the outward aspect of the level that overlooks the *bāb*, namely, the *ism* or Muḥammad. In this way he acquires the attributes of the *ma'nā*, the third and highest person in the trinity. This dynamic process thus seems to be a principle that can be applied to all the degrees of the divine emanation when these are considered in relation to the levels immediately above them. In this way the night journey can be interpreted as the journey of Salmān (the *bāb*) and Muḥammad (the *ism*). The journey is regarded as the ascent of Salmān, the *bāb*, to the higher level, that of Muḥammad, the *ism*, and his mystical union with the latter. In the same way, the journey could also be an allusion to the ascent of the second person in the trinity, Muḥammad, or the *ism*, to the Further Mosque, the abode of 'Alī, his master and the eternal *ma'nā*. It is worth noting the author's particular insistence on identifying the divine persons of the trinity with their manifestation in the historical figures of 'Alī, Muḥammad, Salmān, and the *yafīms*.⁷⁵

However, the internal dynamic of the divine realm can also work in the opposite direction. The *ma'nā* can also cause the disappearance of the degree immediately below it, the *ism*, and can unveil itself, through the image of the *ism*, which is the *bāb*, Salmān. This contingency reveals another principle in the dynamic of mutual relations between the different levels of the divine emanation: an equivalence between Salmān and the *ma'nā*, between al-Miqdād and the *ism*, and between Abū Dharr—the second *yafīm*—and the *bāb*.

This dynamic also reveals a progressive process of interiorization and "esoterization." The *ma'nā* is interiorized, thereby raising the degree below it to its own. The process applies equally to the lower triads, in which the other *yafīms* appear. The lowest triad is that in which the second *yafīm*, Abū Dharr, is identical to the *ma'nā*; the third *yafīm*, 'Uthmān b. Maẓ'ūn al-Najāshī, is identical to the *ism*; and the fourth *yafīm*, Qanbar b. Kādān is identical to the *bāb*. This triad is that of

⁷⁵ On the concept of incarnation in Nuṣayrī doctrine, see above, chap. 1, pp. 18ff.

the threshold of revelation; in other words, revelation is granted through the *bāb* of this lower triad.

An understanding of these principles constitutes true knowledge of the divine mystery. The author's purpose is to show how this third level, thanks to which the divine world is revealed to the gnostic, is to be found within the different degrees of the emanation, so that man can envisage the lowest of the divine levels and through them rise to the higher levels. The lower *bāb* is thus the threshold of entry for the Nuṣayrī gnostic in his mystical quest.

The principle of knowing the highest degree by means of the lowest—with no ontological buffer between the two⁷⁶—is strikingly summed up in the opening sentence of al-Ṣā'igh's treatise: "He who serves the *ism* according to the truth serves also the *ma'nā*" (*man 'abada l-ism bi-l-ḥaqīqa fa-qad 'abada l-ma'nā*).⁷⁷

This internal dynamic in the divine realm of emanation underscores the possibilities open to the Nuṣayrī gnostic. He has to ascend the successive degrees of knowledge of the divine mystery in order to unite with this mystery at the end of his soul's night journey.

⁷⁶ On the idea of the absence of an ontological buffer between the different degrees of emanation, see above, chap. 1 pp. 33-35.

⁷⁷ See below, chap. 4, p. 91.

CHAPTER FOUR

A NUṢAYRĪ TREATISE ON THE DUTY TO KNOW THE MYSTERY OF DIVINITY

1. Introduction

The treatise, published here (with an annotated translation) from the codex arabe 1450 of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (folios 176b–179a),¹ gives a concise account of some fundamental doctrines of early Nuṣayrī theology. The literary framework of this text is a report of a few sessions held before the Nuṣayrī sage Abū Muḥammad ‘Alī b. ‘Īsā al-Jisrī.² In the treatise the date of these sessions is given as Ramadan 340/February 952, and the treatise itself is likely to have been written down not long thereafter.

One of the participants in these sessions is Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥusayn b. Hārūn al-Ṣā’igh, the author both of this and of another treatise included in the same collective manuscript.³ The other participant, appearing in the treatise as a companion of the author, is a certain Abū-l-Ḥasan who relates some of the teachings of al-Jisrī. The three personages just mentioned (the author al-Ṣā’igh, al-Jisrī, and Abū-l-Ḥasan) were members of the circle of al-Khaṣībī. Al-Jisrī is well known in the Nuṣayrī tradition as the successor of al-Khaṣībī in the Nuṣayrī golden chain of learning, while the author’s companion Abū-l-Ḥasan is so far known only from this manuscript. Another person mentioned as a transmitter of Nuṣayrī teachings is Yaḥyā b. Ma‘īn, a disciple of Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr.⁴

¹ See Vajda and Sauvan, *Catalogue des manuscrits arabes, deuxième partie, manuscrits musulmans*, vol. 3, pp. 311–314.

² On him, see Ghālib, *Ta’rīkh al-‘Alawiyyīn*, p. 259.

³ Ms. Paris, arabe 1450, pp. 48b–51b. Vajda and Sauvan, who gave the second treatise the title *Masā’il ilā l-Ḥusayn ibn Ḥamdān al-Khaṣībī*, misplaced its end in p. 54. In fact pp. 51b–54b constitute another, independent treatise entitled *Bāb min kitāb ḥujjat al-ma’ārif* by a certain Ḥamza b. ‘Alī b. Shu‘ba al-Ḥarrānī. Al-Ṣā’igh is also the author of an ode to the Nuṣayrī festival *‘īd al-firāsh* (festival of the bed), commemorating the event that occurred on the night of the Hijra when ‘Alī, in order to trick Muḥammad’s enemies, lay in the Prophet’s bed. See *MA*, pp. 104–105. On this festival, see below, chap. 6, pp. 142–143.

⁴ On Ibn Ma‘īn, see e.g. *MA*, p. 117; *KM*, p. 181, line 8 (=p. 162 in the French

This short treatise contains three leaves (176b–179a) in the above-mentioned codex, which includes a series of Nuṣayrī religious writings. It is known to us so far only from this manuscript. Vajda and Sauvan, who described this codex, gave the originally untitled treatise the title *Wujūb maʿrifat al-ism wa-l-maʿnā* (On the Duty of Knowing the *ism* and the *maʿnā*),⁵ only partially reflecting the content of the composition. In a list of the treatises of the codex appended by the copyist, our treatise is entitled *Risālat Abī ʿAbd Allāh b. Hārūn al-Ṣāʿigh bi-l-tawḥīd* (Epistle of... al-Ṣāʿigh on the Unity of God).

2. The Content and Language of the Treatise

The central theme of this short treatise is the correct knowledge of the mystery of divinity—namely, the knowledge of the *ism* and the *maʿnā*. The nature of this knowledge is demonstrated through the allegorical interpretation of the “night journey” (Q. 17:1) discussed in the previous chapter. As we have seen, this journey is conceived of as depicting the internal dynamics within the divine realm of emanation. An understanding of these principles constitutes the correct knowledge of the mystery of the deity. The purpose of this composition is to demonstrate how the third rank, through which the divine realm is made known to the gnostic, arranges itself in degrees of emanation to enable humans to achieve in their human capacity the lower divine degrees and from them to infer what lies beyond. The last *bāb* is the gate of existence open to the Nuṣayrī gnostic.

The principle of apprehending the higher degree through the lower one, between which there exists no buffer (*faṣl*),⁶ is epitomized in the opening maxim of the treatise: “He who truly worships the *ism* has indeed worshipped also the *maʿnā*.”

The anonymous scholar who wrote the preface to the codex noted already the “very incorrect style of the various writings of this volume, with regard to both grammar and orthography.”⁷

translation; Salisbury, p. 235); Strothmann, “Esoterische Sonderthemen,” p. 7 (of the Arabic text); Halm, “Das «Buch der Schatten»,” p. 254.

⁵ *Catalogue des manuscrits arabes*, vol. 3, p. 314.

⁶ No separating entities (*faṣl* or *fāṣila*) exist within the ranks of the divine emanation. See also chap. 1, above, p. 34.

⁷ Ms. Paris, Arabe 1450, p. 4, lines 13–14. The handwritten preface is not paginated; the enumeration given here is ours.

The language of the treatise is Middle Arabic. Like the other compositions found in the codex, this treatise is characterized by grammatical and syntactical phenomena of the kind discussed earlier in detail.⁸

Phonetically, the phenomenon of weakening the *hamza* is frequent; the exchange of *ذ/ت*, *ذ/د*, and *ط/ض* is routine. In spelling, the replacement of *ة* with *ت* which is usual in manuscripts, occurs here quite often. Morphologically, the manuscript generally preserves the classical forms, although there are slips into the vernacular. A noteworthy feature of the syntax is the misuse of case endings and even subsequent hyper-corrections, which are salient characteristics of Middle Arabic. Finally, it should be noted that this sort of language is also typical of other Nuṣayrī manuscripts.⁹ In addition, scribal errors at times render sentences incomprehensible.

In the version of the treatise given here we have reproduced the original Arabic text with its grammatical and syntactical deviations, and have corrected only obvious scribal errors. Interchanges of the above-mentioned consonants and the *ة/ت* have been adapted to classical orthography.

3. The Translation

(176b) In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥusayn b. Hārūn al-Šā’igh said: I was with my master Abū Muḥammad ‘Alī b. Īsā al-Jisrī, in the month of Ramadan, in the year 340 (February 952),¹⁰ when he set forth [certain] issues, and the discussion evolved to the point where he said **(177a)**: “He who truly worships the *ism* indeed [also] worships the *ma’nā*.”¹¹ I was gladdened by his response to the question I had put to him. Then Abū-l-Ḥasan said to me: O Abū ‘Abd Allāh, God, may His name be glorified, only accepts an act [of devotion] from a worshipper after [he has already achieved] knowledge of the *ism* and the *ma’nā*. I asked him: what did we hear [about this question] from our master [al-Jisrī]?

⁸ See above, chap. 1, pp. 9-10

⁹ For examples of these and other grammatical deviations current in this Nuṣayrī codex, see above, chap. 1, p. 10.

¹⁰ Vajda and Sauvan erroneously read this date as 346H.; see their *Catalogue des manuscrits arabes*, vol. 3, p. 314.

¹¹ For a similar but more detailed formulation of this statement by al-Šā’igh, see his other treatise published in chap. 5, pp. 104-105 below.

and he [Abū-l-Ḥasan] replied: I asked him about it, and he told me: this issue and similar [questions] were already raised, and Ibn Maʿīn¹² has related to all the believers the interior [meaning] of this,¹³ while he was asking our master Abū Shuʿayb,¹⁴ peace be from him¹⁵ about the “night journey” (*al-isrāʾ*), which is the straight path (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*). He [Abū Shuʿayb] said: Know that God, may He be exalted, said in His Book (Q. 17:1): “Glory be to Him, who carried His servant by night from the Holy Mosque to the Further Mosque, the precincts of which We have blessed, that We might show him some of our signs. He is the All-knowing, the All-seeing.”¹⁶

Our master Abū Shuʿayb said: O Yaḥyā (i.e. Ibn Maʿīn), know that the person taken in the night journey is the *yafīm* al-Miqdād, and the most common [understanding of] the night journey is ascendance from one degree to another. And al-Miqdād is thus the *yafīmiyya* rank in its fullness. When his patron¹⁷ led him to his interior, not leaving between them any buffer,¹⁸ he [al-Miqdād] ascended to the station of the *bābiyya*, which is the “holy mosque.” He thus became worthy of the rank’s name and attribute, and hence he is now God’s *bāb* and God’s *yafīm* and His [God’s] veil. **(177b)** He is the *bāb* and the *yafīm*. If you like [you may say that] he [al-Miqdād] ascended from the “holy mosque” to the “further mosque,” and this is the rank of the veil, which is the furthest end of letters¹⁹ and their root. And he became worthy of the veil’s name and attributes as well as of the degree of prophecy. Therefore God said to him (Q. 93:6): “Did He not find you an orphan (*yafīm*), and shelter you?” These words²⁰ are the speech

¹² On him, see above note 4.

¹³ The translation here reflects our emendation of the improbable, ذالك to دالت. See below, note 44.

¹⁴ Abū Shuʿayb is a common appellation of Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, the eponym of the Nuṣayrī religion.

¹⁵ This idiom (in Arabic: *minhu al-salām*) is peculiar to Nuṣayrī texts as a variant of the regular expression *ʿalayhi al-salām* (peace be on him), which is also frequent in these texts.

¹⁶ This quotation adheres to the canonical text of the Qurʾān except for a single deviation: our text substitutes *al-ʿalīm* (All-knowing) for *al-samīʿ* (All-hearing).

¹⁷ This patron is apparently Salmān.

¹⁸ See above, note 6.

¹⁹ The author apparently alludes here to the symbolic use of letters representing the various degrees of the divine realm. However, the exact details of this symbolism are not sufficiently clear. Further on he applies this symbolism to the letters of the name Muḥammad. For similar symbolical use of letters applied to the *basmala* formula, see above, chap. 1, p. 27 and cf. R. Strothmann, “Die Nuṣayrī nach Ms. arab. Berlin 4291,” *Documenta Islamica Inedita* (Berlin, 1952), p. 177.

²⁰ I.e. this verse of the Qurʾān.

of the essence to its attribute and to the branch of [the letters].²¹ And He entrusted him [al-Miqdād] with the attributes of the *ma'nā*, with the names of the *bāb* and with the ranks of the *ya'fīm*. Thus Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh (i.e. the Prophet) was the person carried on the night journey according to the masses, but according to the people of truth this person was the revealed al-Miqdād,²² since he [al-Miqdād] inherited his [Muḥammad's] station, which is the second *mīm* and the *hā'*.²³

When the person [Ibn Ma'īn] who asked [this question] beforehand apprehended this knowledge, he asked him [Abū Shu'ayb]²⁴ for more, and he said to him: Salmān is the person carried on the night journey from the rank of the veil which is the holy mosque, to the further mosque which is the station of the patron.²⁵ Thus the station of the night journey is the rank of *bābiyya* and its names and attributes. And when they [Salmān and Muḥammad] reached its interior and its names and attributes he [Salmān] achieved the two degrees²⁶ in their fullness. And [this] similarly applies to the *nāṭiq* [who speaks] through them.²⁷ He [the *nāṭiq*] ascended to the further mosque which is the station of the everlasting *ma'nawī* patron. He became worthy of the station of the degree and its attributes and attained the three degrees: the *ma'nawiyya*, the *ismiyya* and the *bābiyya*. (178a) The revealed 'Alī is the *ma'nā* and the revealed Salmān is the last, namely the attribute of the *mīmiyya*.²⁸ "I am the city of knowledge and 'Alī is its gate."²⁹ The city is the form and the gate is the station of the

²¹ *Wa-fa'uhā*. The pronominal suffix in this word seems to refer to the letters and their root just mentioned.

²² *Al-Miqdād al-zāhir*—namely, the historical appearance of the person al-Miqdād. On the historical incarnation of the divine personages, see above, chap. 1, pp. 28–30.

²³ That is the second *mīm* and *hā'* of the name Muḥammad.

²⁴ The text here is obscure regarding the identity of disciple and master. It seems to us more plausible that the text continues the previous discussion between Ibn Ma'īn and Abū Shu'ayb. It could, however, also be applied to Abū-l-Ḥasan and al-Jisrī.

²⁵ Apparently Muḥammad.

²⁶ That is the *bābiyya* and the *ismiyya*.

²⁷ *Nāṭiq* here is apparently equivalent to Muḥammad the *ism*. This use of the term *nāṭiq* is rare as far as we can judge. Cf. *Munāzara*, pp. 109a–b where this term refers to the historical figure representing the *ma'nā* (see above, chap. 1, p. 29, with note 111).

²⁸ *Mīmiyya* here is apparently equivalent to *ismiyya*, deriving from the first *mīm* of the name Muḥammad. A connecting phrase seems to be missing here before the well-known *ḥadīth* that follows.

²⁹ On this *ḥadīth* see Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kulinī, *al-Uṣūl min al-kāfi*, edited by 'Alī Akbar al-Ghifārī (Tehran, 1377–1381H), vol. 2, pp. 238–239; and Moosa, *Extremist Shiites*, p. 462.

patron.³⁰ Since Salmān is the *walī* the sanctification of the *ḥā'* occurred according to the masses of the Shī'a and their sages.³¹

Muḥammad is the *ism* and the *ma'nā* eliminates its *ism* and reveals itself in its [the *ism*'s] likeness. And the *ism* is al-Miqdād and the *ma'nā* is Salmān. When the *bāb* [Salmān] became *walī*, al-Miqdād became *bāb*. And the *walī* is God. And when He revealed Himself in him, the *ma'nā* became internal, and it (i.e. the *ma'nā*) is the "faithful spirit" (Q. 26:193) in God's place.³² The *ism* became external because the *ma'nā* spoke through it. The soul is thus the eternal *ma'nā*. The lordship, the heart and the soul are the *ism* of the *ma'nā*, since Salmān is *ma'nā* and *bāb*. And al-Miqdād is *bāb* and *yaṭīm*. The *jīm*—namely the *jīm* of *jalla al-jalāl* not the *jīm* of the alphabet³³—is Qanbar. He who has attained and perceived this teaching is rewarded, holds his book in his right hand and crosses the *ṣirāṭ*.³⁴

I rejoiced in the explanation he taught me. Then I perceived the *ma'nā* and the *ism* and their interior as well as the *bāb* and the *yaṭīm* and their exterior.

We assembled in company that day at our master's [al-Jisrī's], peace be upon him. (178b) When we entered and saluted him he ordered us to sit down. He asked me: what happened between you and Abū-l-Ḥasan, O Abū 'Abd Allāh? I said: you already know it, O my master. He [the master] said: I will teach you more so you will remember it. The *ma'nā* is Salmān, the *ism* is al-Miqdād and the *bāb* is Abū Dharr. When the *ma'nā*, which is Salmān, internalised himself, al-Miqdād assumed his [Salmān's] degree, 'Abd Allāh [b. Rawāḥa al-Anṣārī, the third *yaṭīm*] became the *bāb*, Abū Dharr became the *ism* and al-Miqdād the *ma'nā*. Because when Salmān was revealed as *ma'nā* his *ism* transferred to Abū Dharr. Every *bāb* is indeed always a station. And 'Uthman [b. Maẓ'ūn, the fourth *yaṭīm*] is the *ism* and Qanbar is the *bāb* and he is also Riḍwān³⁵ and al-Ḥasan,³⁶

³⁰ Note the inversion of the respective positions of Muḥammad and 'Alī.

³¹ This sentence eludes our understanding.

³² This rendering reflects our reading of the problematic *المحلة*. The latter might also be read as *المحجة* meaning "the way." However, this does not help to clarify the sentence.

³³ This is another allusion to an unspecified letter symbolism.

³⁴ The first of these two well-known eschatological motifs is Qur'ānic. See e.g. Q. 69:19 and 84:7.

³⁵ Riḍwān is one of the angels guarding paradise. In the Nuṣayrī system he occupies a place under the five *yaṭīms*. See Dussaud, *Histoire et religion des Nuṣayrīs*, pp. 126, 173.

and he is the *bāb* of revelation. I have taught you now and you have perceived how the *bāb* arranged itself according to degrees in order to express this being. Understand it thoroughly and know it and you will be blessed. Abū-l-Ḥasan spoke only of us and about us.³⁷ And it [the last *bāb* in the above mentioned hierarchy—Qanbar] is the *bāb* of existence [opened] toward us. O Abū ‘Abd Allāh, you are great among us, and I have already taught you about the question you asked us—namely, that he who truly worships the *ism* indeed worships the *ma’nā* also.³⁸ This is so since the man’s *ism* is an *ism* to himself³⁹ and a *ma’nā* to himself without a buffer between the *ma’nā* and its *ism*. He who knows this principle worships the *ism* according to the truth of the *ma’nā*. For the *ma’nā* is the interior of its *ism* and it is above it [the *ism*], indeed it [the *ma’nā*] is the *bāb al-Salsalī*.⁴⁰ Its [the *ma’nā*’s = Salmān’s] *ism* is the *yatīm al-Miqdād* and its *bāb* is Abū Dharr al-Jundabī.⁴¹ But Allāh cannot be named (179a) and the *ma’nā* is neither comprehensible nor perceptible. The heretics have denied Allāh⁴² and erred a manifest error. He then bowed down. Abū-l-Ḥasan smiled and said: our master has drawn you near to him. Know this, O Abū ‘Abd Allāh. We left him enriched. Praise belongs to God, the Lord of all Being.

4. The Arabic Text of the Treatise

(176b) بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ. قَالَ أَبُو عَبْدِ اللَّهِ الْحُسَيْنِ ابْنُ هَارُونَ الصَّائِغِ: كُنْتُ عِنْدَ سَيِّدِي أَبُو (!) مُحَمَّدٍ عَلِيِّ ابْنِ عِيسَى الْجَسْرِيِّ فِي شَهْرِ رَمَضَانَ سَنَةِ أَرْبَعِينَ وَثَلَاثَ مِائَةٍ وَقَدْ رَتَبَ الْمَسَائِلَ

³⁶ This al-Ḥasan is apparently ‘Alī’s eldest son. The position of the holy family in the divine hierarchy is a well-known feature of the Nuṣayrī system.

³⁷ I.e. about the aspect of the human capacity to attain the lower divine degrees.

³⁸ This is the master’s opening statement at the beginning of the treatise.

³⁹ It is not clear whether the author means here the above-mentioned persons of the hierarchy or just any man.

⁴⁰ *Bab al-salsalī* is here another title for Salmān in his role as *bāb*. Here it is spoken of when Salmān is *ma’nā* in relation to the lower two degrees. On the use of *Salsal* and *Salsalī* as an appellation of Salmān, see e.g. *KM*, p. 188, line 3 (=p. 168 in the French translation; Salisbury, p. 246).

⁴¹ This is another *nisba* of the *yatīm* Abū Dharr (referring to his name Jundab).

⁴² The expression *al-‘ādilūn bi-llāh* is not unambiguous. The *bā*’ should perhaps be related to *al-‘ādilūn* and not to the verb *kadhhdhābū*, in which case the translation might be “the heretics have lied.”

وَأَلْفَهَا وَتَنَاهَى⁴³ القول منها (177a) إلى قوله: «من عبد الاسم بالحقيقة فقد عبد المعنى.» وكنت فرحت مسروراً بجوابه عن سؤاله له. فقال لي أبو الحسن: يا أبا عبد الله إن الله جلَّ اسمه لا يقبل من عامل عمل إلا بعد معرفة الاسم والمعنى. فقلت ما الذي سمعناه من سيدنا؟ فقال سألته عن ذلك فقال لي: هذا طريق قد سأل عنها وعن مُشَاكِلِهَا وقد روى ابن مَعِين لسائر المؤمنين عن باطن ذلك⁴⁴ عند سؤاله لسيدنا أبي شعيب منه السلام لما سألته عن الإسراء وهو السراط (!) المستقيم. فقال: اعلم أن الله تعالى قال في كتابه «سبحان الذي أسرى بعبده ليلاً من المسجد الحرام إلى المسجد الأقصى الذي باركنا حوله لنريه من آياتنا إنه العليم البصير.»⁴⁵ فقال سيدنا أبو شعيب: يا يحيى اعلم أن المُسْرَى به اليتيم المقداد وأوجد الإسراء الارتقاء من درجة إلى درجة فكان المقداد الرتبة اليتيمية بكمالها فلما أوصله مولاه من غير فصل لباطنه رقا إلى مقام البابية وهو المسجد الحرام فاستحقَّ اسم الدرجة وصفتها فكان باب الله ویتيم الله وحجابه. (177b) هو الباب واليتيم إذ أردت. قد رقا من المسجد الحرام إلى المسجد الأقصى فهي رتبة الحجاب وهو أقصى الحروف وأصلها فاستحقَّ اسم الحجاب وصفاته ومنزلة النبوة ولذلك قال الله له: «ألم يجدك يتيماً فأوى.»⁴⁶ وذلك أن هذا خطاب الذات لصفته وفرعها وأولى إليه الصفات المعنوية والأسماء البابية والرُتب اليتيمية وكان محمد ابن عبد الله المُسْرَى به عند كافة⁴⁷ العالم وهو المقداد الظاهر المُسْرَى به عند أهل الحقيقة لأنه قد ورث مقامه وهو الميم الثاني والحاء.

فلما احتتمل السائل هذا⁴⁸ العلم سألته الزيادة وقال له: إن سلمان المُسْرَى به من رتبة الحجاب وهو المسجد الحرام إلى المسجد الأقصى وهو مقام المولى. وكان مقام الإسراء رتبة البابية وأسمائها وصفاتها فلما وصلوا لباطنه وأسمائه وصفاته نال⁴⁹ الدرجتين بكمالها (!) وكذلك صار الناطق منهم ورقا إلى المسجد الأقصى وهو مقام المولى الأزل المعنوي استحقَّ مقام الدرجة وصفاتها فنال الثلاث الدرج المعنوية والاسمية والبابية وكان (178a) علي الظاهر وهو المعنى وسلمان الظاهر وهو الآخر أعني صفة الميمية. «أنا مدينة العلم وعلي بابها» والمدينة الصورة والباب هو مقام المولى

⁴³ وثناها Ms.

⁴⁴ دالت Ms.

⁴⁵ Q 17:1. See above, note 16.

⁴⁶ Q 93:6.

⁴⁷ كفت Ms.

⁴⁸ هذه Ms.

⁴⁹ قال Ms.

فلما كان سلمان الولي جري تقديس الحاء عند كافة⁵⁰ الشيعة وعلمائها.

إن محمد (!) هو الاسم وإن المعنى ليُزيل اسمه ويظهر بمثله وكان الاسم المقداد والمعنى هو سلمان فلما صار الباب ولياً صار المقداد باب والولي فهو الله. فلما أظهر به كان المعنى الباطن وهو الروح الأمين على المحلة (!) الله. والاسم الظاهر لنطق المعنى منه فكان الفؤاد المعنى الأزل. فالربوبية والقلب والفؤاد اسم المعنى لأن سلمان معنى وباب والمقداد باب ويقيم. وكان الجيم جيم جل الجلال لا جيم الحروف قنبر. فمن بلغ إلى هذا القول وعرفه فقد فاز وأخذ كتابه بيمينه وجاز الصراط.

فاستبشرت عند قوله إليّ ذلك وعرفت المعنى والاسم وبطونهما وعرفت الباب واليتيم وظهورهما.

واجتمعنا في صحبة ذلك اليوم عند سيدنا سلام الله عليه فلما (178b) دخلنا وسلّمنا أمرنا بالجلوس. قال لي: ما الذي جرى بينك وبين أبو (!) الحسن يا أبا عبد الله؟ قلت: قد علمته يا مولاي. قال أنا أزيدك زيادة فتحفظها⁵¹ إن المعنى سلمان والاسم المقداد والباب أبو الذر فلما بطن المعنى وهو سلمان وقام المقداد في درجته وكان عبد الله الباب وأبو الذر الاسم والمقداد المعنى لأن أبو الذر عند ظهور سلمان بالمعنوية وقع اسمه عليه. فكل باب فهو مقام والله أبدأ. وكان الاسم عثمان والباب قنبر فهو رضوان فهو الحسن فهو باب الظهور. وقد عرفت كيف ترتب الباب بنفسه لتعبير هذا⁵² الكون فتبيّن أنه أعرف فيه تسعد. ولم ينطق أبو الحسن إلا عناً ومناً وهو هو باب الوجود إلينا وأنت منا يا أبا عبد الله بالكبير فقد عرفت في مسألتك إلينا أنه من عبد الاسم بالحقيقة فقد عبد المعنى وذلك أن الرجل اسمه اسم لنفسه ومعنى لنفسه من غير فصل بين المعنى واسمه فمن عرف هذا⁵³ القول فقد عبد الاسم بحقيقة المعنى لأن المعنى باطن اسمه وهو فوقه والله الباب السلسلي واسمه اليتيم المقدادي وبابه أبو الذر الجندبي. والله لا يسميه (179a) مسمى (!) والمعنى ليس بمدرّك ولا محسوس. كذبوا (!) العادلون بالله وضلوا ضلالاً مبين (!) فسجد بين يديه وتبسم أبا (!) الحسن وقال قد أوصلك سيدنا به فاعرف ذلك يا أبا عبد الله وخرجنا من حضرته غانمين. والحمد لله رب العالمين.

⁵⁰ Ms. كفت

⁵¹ Ms. تحفظه

⁵² Ms. هذه

⁵³ Ms. هذه

CHAPTER FIVE

A NUṢAYRĪ DIALOGUE ON THE RELATION BETWEEN THE MA'NĀ AND THE ISM

1. Introduction

The short treatise published here in its original Arabic (Ms. Paris, arabe 1450) and with an annotated English translation is a dialogue between the eminent Nuṣayrī sage al-Khaṣībī and his disciple Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥusayn b. Hārūn al-Ṣā'igh, the author of this treatise. The latter is the author of another short treatise published in the previous chapter, as well as of a festive ode.¹ The date of composition is not specified in the treatise. However, it must have been written while al-Khaṣībī was still alive or shortly after his death—that is, sometime in the second half of the 10th century.

The treatise bears no title. The Arabic title adopted here (*Masā'il Abī 'Abd Allāh b. Hārūn al-Ṣā'igh*) was given to it by the copyist, who appended a list of titles given to all the works included in the manuscript. The treatise occupies three folios (48b–51b)² in the manuscript. The colophon at the end of the treatise specifies that the copyist copied this treatise from the manuscript of a certain 'Imrān b. Ḥamad, to whom he refers as the “philosopher of his time” (*faylasūf zamānihi*). Like the other treatise by al-Ṣā'igh, it deals principally with the delicate relations between the two higher persons of the Nuṣayrī trinity, the *ma'nā* and the *ism*.

The language of the treatise is Middle Arabic. As the other compositions found in the codex, the dialogue here is characterized by grammatical and syntactical phenomena of the kind discussed earlier in detail.³ We have chosen to omit in the translation the recurring honorary formulas, such as *qaddasa llāh rūḥahu* and *naḍara llāh wajhahu*.

¹ See above, chap. 4, p. 89.

² Vajda and Sauvan (*Catalogue des manuscrits arabes, deuxième partie, manuscrits musulmans*, vol. 3, pp. 311–314) misplaced its end and set it in folio 54 instead of folio 51b. In fact, folios 51b–54b constitute another, independent treatise, entitled *Bāb min kitāb ḥujjat al-ma'ārif*, by a certain Ḥamza b. 'Alī b. Shu'ba al-Ḥarrānī.

³ See above, chap. 1, pp. 9–10; chap. 4, p. 91.

2. *The Content of the Treatise*

The literary setting for the treatise is a study session (*majlis*) conducted under the guidance of the master al-Khaṣībī in which a theological epistle he had composed was read out to him. This occasion stimulated the disciple, al-Ṣā'igh, to present a series of questions to his teacher concerning various difficulties encountered in the epistle. These difficulties pertain primarily to the complex relation between the *ma'nā* and the *ism*.

Underlying this relation is the inherent tension between two polar theological tendencies: the tendency that stresses the transcendence of the deity and strives to avoid attributing any multiplicity to the divine essence; and the opposite tendency, which regards the deity as immanent, drawing it closer to the sphere of human spiritual powers. The interplay of these two currents constitutes the core of the Nuṣayrī mystery of the divinity, various aspects of which we have discussed earlier.⁴

The point of departure for the discussion is the question whether the believer should direct or address himself to the *ma'nā* through the *ism*. This question implies a distinction between these two divine entities. As the dialogue progresses, al-Khaṣībī's position gradually becomes clearer. He discerns that the beginning of the *ism* is in a luminous intermediary entity existing between itself and the *ma'nā*. This postulate, however, entails a serious difficulty, since it is liable to lead to the conclusion that there exists more than one primeval being.

To elucidate his statement al-Khaṣībī formulates a general definition, according to which every entity that derives from another entity constitutes in fact an *ism* of the former entity without any buffer existing between them. The *ism* is therefore not a separate entity from the *ma'nā* but rather one that emanated from within it and maintains a dynamic relation with it. The light is the intermediary between these two entities and is actually a certain aspect of the *ism*. Al-Khaṣībī illustrates his dialectical concept of unity and separation with several well-known similes: the relation between the disk of the sun and its light, or between water in its liquid and frozen form.

The paradoxical relation between these two persons of the Nuṣayrī trinity, as well as the relation between the *ism* and the *bāb*, the third

⁴ See above, chap. 1, and cf. Dussaud, *Histoire et religion des Nuṣayrīs*, pp. 41ff; Moosa, *Extremist Shiites*, pp. 50–65 and 342–351.

person of the trinity, are examined further on in an instructive commentary on the Qur'ānic verse 18:86: "When he reached the setting of the sun, he found it setting in a muddy spring." This verse, which refers to Dhū al-qarnayn (identified in Muslim Qur'ān exegesis with Alexander the Great) is adapted here to describe the intricate relations within the godhead.

The sunset is interpreted as an image of disappearance and concealment taking place within the trinity. When the *bāb* reaches the setting sun—namely, the place of the concealment of the *ism*—it discovers the *ism* setting and disappearing into the light of the *ma'nā*. The *ma'nā*, on its part, withdraws the *ism* into the concealment from which it had initially emanated. This is in fact a description of the dynamics existing between the three persons of the trinity. Al-Khaṣībī warns, however, against a possible misunderstanding of his concept as introducing an identity of the *ism* with the *ma'nā*.⁵

The light emanating from the *ma'nā* might be revealed as two distinct lights. However this duality does not entail any theological difficulty since it expresses the voluntary activity of the *ma'nā* with regard to itself: "it addresses its essence from its essence through its essence" (*da'ā min dhātihī ilā dhātihī bi-dhātihī*). In other words, it is possible to understand the voluntary activity occurring within the *ma'nā* as an act of self-enlightenment or as a self-contemplation of its essence. At any rate, this activity is made possible through the mediation of the light that emanates from the *ma'nā* and returns to it. This is also the light from which the *ism* emanated.

Once the dialectical affinity between the *ma'nā* and the *ism* has been clarified, the pivotal question with which the treatise opened arises again: to which of these two persons should the believer address his worship?⁶ The answer to this question is presented on several levels. It begins with an interpretation of the Qur'ānic verse 17:110: "Call upon God or call upon the merciful, to Him belong the names most beautiful". Since this verse mentions the divine names (of which there are traditionally ninety-nine), the author uses it to say that the divine essence has a thousand names, and that each of them may be addressed by the believer.

⁵ For such a view, see above, chap. 1, p. 20. As for the concept of dynamic relations within the Nuṣayrī godhead, it clearly appears also in al-Ṣā'igh's other treatise dealt with in the previous chapter.

⁶ The question of addressing prayers to a certain entity within the hierarchy is elaborated upon especially in Kabbalistic literature. See e.g. I. Tishbi, *The Wisdom of the Zohar* (Oxford, 1991), vol. 1, pp. 238–240, and vol. 3, pp. 973–975.

Further on the answer is developed on a different level—namely, from the perspective of the believer himself. Al-Khaṣībī emphasizes that the unification of various aspects in the deity, or alternatively their separation, is in the hands of the believer himself. If he unifies them in his mystical perception—that is, if he succeeds in penetrating the mystery of their union—then they constitute a unity, while if he fails to unify them, but rather separates them in his cognition, then they are indeed separate. Al-Khaṣībī defends this idea on the basis of a tradition that may be paraphrased as follows: He who worships the *ism* without the *ma'nā* due to an abstracting tendency toward the *ma'nā* is a heretic; but he who, emphasizing immanence, worships the two of them together, introduces multiplicity into the deity. Only he who worships the *ma'nā* alone through the true understanding of the *ism* can be counted a true monotheist (*muwaḥḥid*). The believer is therefore required to beware of both extremes—that of creating an identity between the two persons and that of degrading the *ism* to the level of the realm of creation.

3. The Translation

(48b) In the name of God the merciful the compassionate. We write down the questions of Abū 'Abd Allāh b. Hārūn al-Ṣā'igh, to his master Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥusayn b. Ḥamdān al-Khaṣībī.

Ibn Hārūn said: I came to my master, Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥusayn b. Ḥamdān al-Khaṣībī. As I was entering an epistle was being read to the people present at (49a) his session.

I said to him: O my master, I wish to ask you concerning something in your epistle that troubled me.

And he said: Ask, O Ibn Hārūn, for questioning is the key to discourse.

I said: O my master, I ask you about those words of yours which troubled me and about what you described in your epistle. And I beseech Him [God] that He may bless His glorious *ism* by which He is addressed. O my master, should the *ma'nā* be addressed by the *ism* which is the *veil* and the *place*?⁷

⁷ The term “veil” (*ḥijāb*) is a common term referring to the *ism*; “place” (*maqām*) here apparently designates an external aspect of the *ma'nā*. In two places the text employs the word *makān* in a similar sense to *maqām*. It is not clear however whether these two terms are interchangeable in our text. We therefore maintain a slight distinction in rendering *place* for *maqām* and “place” for *makān*.

He [al-Khaṣībī] said: O Ibn Hārūn, did the *ism* originate from something other than the *ma'nā*?

I said: No, my master. Had it begun from something other than the *ma'nā*, this other [thing] would have been preexistent.

He said: O Ibn Hārūn, if the *ism* does not originate from something other than the *ma'nā* why do you deny that it is its [the *ma'nā*'s] *ism*? If indeed something comes out of another, then it is its *ism*. There is neither buffer nor mediator between them,⁸ for every essence implies [the existence of] an *ism* and an attribute. Moreover, even if the *ism* originated from the light of the *ma'nā*, the relation between them [the *ism* and the *ma'nā*] is that of connection and not of separation. And the *ism* is one, it is from its [the *ma'nā*'s] light, and it is revealed from it [the *ma'nā*'s light]. O Ibn Hārūn, don't you see that we apply the name "sun" for both its light and its disk although (49b) in speech the difference between light and disk is clear-cut even though they bear the single name "sun." This similarly applies to the *ism* and the *ma'nā*. And if you say *ism* and *ma'nā* you actually say that Allāh is one name for the *ma'nā* [and its] *maqām*. For the *maqām* is the one (*al-wāḥid*) which began from the monad (*al-aḥad*). It is the light from the illuminator, the revealed from the revealer, the power from the omnipotent, the created from the creator, the name from the giver of names and the messenger from the sender. It begins from it [the *ma'nā*] and returns to it. And he read [the verse from the Qur'ān, 18:86]: "When he reached the setting of the sun, he found it setting in a muddy spring." Then he said: O Ibn Hārūn, when the *bāb* arrived at the occultation of the *ism* and its setting, it [the *bāb*] found it [the *ism*] setting into the light of the *ma'nā*. And the *ma'nā* indeed conceals it [the *ism*] in the occultation⁹ where it originated, and it sets in it. This occultation is its root and origin, its senior and its sage.

He [al-Ṣā'igh] said: O my master, if the light is a single light, why did it [the *ma'nā*] kindle in the revelation two separate lights with two *isms* and two attributes?

He said: O Ibn Hārūn, so that it [the *ma'nā*] may address itself from itself through itself.

I said: O my master, do you mean [to say] that it addresses its essence from its essence through its essence?

⁸ On the denial of the existence of any buffer between the various divine emanations, see above, chap. 1, p. 34.

⁹ The Shī'ī term *ghayba* (occultation), which is normally used to denote the occultation of the Imam, is here applied to the relation between the persons of the trinity. Moreover, in some Nuṣayrī texts the *ism* is also called Imam as part of the belief in the divine nature of the historical Imams, see above, chap. 1, pp. 30-33.

He said: O Ibn Hārūn, the *ma'nā* addresses its essence from its light through its light. Indeed the place aimed at and the existent One is the admonishing soul and the supervising eye.

I said: O my master, (50a) if the full revelation occurs in the sublime absolute justice and we behold the eternal *ma'nā* revealed in an *ism* through which it is addressed and in an attribute by which it is known and if we behold its light which is its veil manifesting itself in an *ism* and in an attribute by which it [the light] is known—which of them should we address and to which should we direct ourselves?

He said (Q. 17:110): “Call upon God or call upon the Merciful; whichever you call upon, to Him belong the names most beautiful.” Then he said: O Ibn Hārūn, know that the *ism* is revealed through a thousand names and attributes. All these names and attributes by which the *ism* is revealed belong to the *ma'nā*, since the *ma'nā* is the one who is revealed through them and is named by them.

I said: O my master, to whom belong the will and the true worship?

He said: O Ibn Hārūn, if you separate them they are separated and if you link them together they are united. Have you not heard the clear, renowned, and truly transmitted tradition?

I said: What is it O my master?

He said: [I refer to the tradition] that we transmitted from our supreme patron¹⁰—may his peace, blessing, and honour be upon us—who said: He who worships the *ism* without the *ma'nā* has apostatized; he who worships the *ism* with the *ma'nā* is a polytheist; he who worships the *ma'nā* through the truth of the *ism* is indeed a unitarian.¹¹

I said: O my master, what is the proof for this—namely, that the worship (50b) of the *ism* is linked to the *ma'nā*?

He said: O Ibn Hārūn, do you not agree with me that the *ism* originated from the light of the *ma'nā*?

I said: Surely my master.

He said: O Ibn Hārūn, if you were commanded to worship the water even in the form of snow, would you obey this commandment?

I said: Certainly my master.

He said: Why [would you do] it?

I said: Because snow came about and was formed from water and eventually returns to water.

¹⁰ The identity of this patron is unclear.

¹¹ For a similar formulation of this statement, see above, chap. 4, p. 91.

He said: In the same way the *ism* originated from its *ma'nā* and returns to it. The beginning of the *ism* from the *ma'nā* is separation and its return is rejoining. Even if it [the *ma'nā*] revealed the illumination of separation, nevertheless in truth its [the light's] meaning is that of rejoining. Their relation is like the relation of the radiation from the disk [of the sun] to the disk. And he (al-Khaṣībī) added: [it is also], like the [relation] of the flame to the fire, movement to rest, speech to speaker, and vision to the observer—they are connected by light and separated by the external appearances that are witnessed.

I said: O my master, is it permissible to say that the light is a single light?

He said: O Ibn Hārūn, it is not permissible to call a servant master nor the *ism*—*ma'nā*, and it is not permissible to equate servant with master nor the *ism* with its *ma'nā*.

I said: O my master, how is it so? You say that the light is a single light and that the *ism* (51a) is a single *ism* while you claim that it is not permissible to call the *ism*—*ma'nā*.

He said: O Ibn Hārūn, know and understand that the *ism*, although it originated from the light of the *ma'nā*, and it is a light brought into being—and everything brought into being belongs to the realm of creation (*ḥadath*)—nevertheless it [the *ism*] is [also] a creator like the preexistent one [i.e. the *ma'nā*].

I said: O my master, if it [the *ism*] is formed then it is created.¹²

He said: O Ibn Hārūn, the light of the *ma'nā* should not be defined as created.

I said: O my master, what then is the meaning of “brought into being”?

He said: “brought into being” means that its *ma'nā* encompasses it, for everything encompassed falls under the category of coming into being.

I said: O my master [from here on] I will say “brought into being” and not “created.”

He said: O Ibn Hārūn, why did the master, the *mīm*,¹³ ask about it, saying: certainly I should say “created,” for God the *ma'nā* is above

¹² In this passage the author explicitly distinguishes between the verbs *kawwana* (form) denoting emanation and *khalāqa* signifying creation. In other places he seems to overlook his distinction and invariably uses also the verbs *bada'a* and *aḥdatha* to denote creation or emanation.

¹³ The letter *mīm* is commonly used to denote Muḥammad, who is identified with the *ism*. However, it is not clear whether the reference here alludes to a certain saying attributed to Muḥammad.

it. O Ibn Hārūn, the preexistent one is forever above the created, and the encompasser and former is above the place.

I said: O my master, if we aim at the preexistent and everlasting one, at the former rather than the place, how should we address Him so that we attain our target and do not miss it, and so that we arrive at it rapidly and without delay?

He said: When you aim [at the *ma'nā*] you should say: O monad (*aḥad*) and when you address the *ism* you should say: O one (*wāḥid*).

I said: O my master, you have just said that the *ism* is one *ism* and now you claim that there are *ma'nā* and *ism*!

He said: The knowledge of these two names (51b) is given to the people of erudition, so that they may distinguish between eternity and the eternal, everlastingness and everlasting, preexistent and creator, name and giver of names, messenger and sender, power and omnipotent. Now you say that it [the *ism*] is the *ism* of the *ma'nā*—namely, its names and Veil when it [the *ma'nā*] brought it [the *ism*] into being.

He said: If you say “Allāh” thereby intending the *ma'nā* you have hit the target, since it is a name¹⁴ bestowed with the grace of the greatest name and the most illuminating light—namely, it is a name of the *ma'nā* and its Veil. Understand it, and know it for this is the wisdom of religion and the way and salvation of the Gnostics. Praise belongs to God, the Lord of all Being.

4. The Arabic Text of the Treatise

مسائل أبي عبد الله بن هارون الصائغ

(48b) بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ.

نكتب مسائل أبي عبد الله بن هارون الصائغ قدس الله روحه عن شيخه أبي عبد الله الحسين بن حمدان الخصيب رضي الله عنه.

قال بن هارون: دخلت على سيدي وممدي بنور الله رحمه الله الشيخ أبي عبد الله الحسين بن حمدان الخصيب أحسن الله إكرامه وشرف مقامه والرسالة تُقرأ على من بحضرة (49a) مجلسه نضر الله وجهه. فقلت له: يا سيدي أسألك عما جرى بخاطري مما سمعته في رسالتك أدام¹⁵ الله سلامتك.

¹⁴ It seems that al-Khaṣībī is playing here with the double meaning of the word *ism*, meaning both “name” and the specific technical term *ism*.

¹⁵ Ms: دام.

فقال نضر الله وجهه: إسأل يا بن هارون فإن السؤال مفتاح المقال. فقلت: يا سيدي [أ]سالك عما جرى في خاطري عن قولك وما وصفته في رسالتك وأسأله أن يصلي علي اسمه الأجل الذي به يُدعى. يا سيدي: هل يُدعى المعنى عزَّ عزَّه بالاسم الذي هو الحجاب والمكان؟

فقال نضر الله وجهه: يا بن هارون، فكان الاسم من غير المعنى بدأ¹⁶؟

فقلت: لا يا سيدي ولو أنه كان من غير المعنى بدأ لقد كان يكون ذلك الغير قديماً.

فقال نضر الله وجهه: يا بن هارون إذا لم يكون (!) الاسم من غير المعنى بدأ فلم تنكر أن يكون اسمه؟ وإذا بان الشيء من الشيء فهو اسمه لا نفرق بينهما بفاصلة أو واسطة فيحصل كل ذات اسم وصفة وإن كان الاسم من نور المعنى بدأ وهو منه بمعنى الاتصال لا بمعنى¹⁷ الانفصال فالاسم واحد إذ هو من نوره ومنه ظهوره. يا بن هارون: لا ترى إلى قولك الشمس اسماً واحداً لنوراً (!) وقرص وإن ثبت (49b) في اللفظ الفصل نوراً وقرص فإن الاسم لها واحد بأن تقول شمس؟ وكذا الاسم والمعنى وإن قلت اسم ومعنى فإن قولك الله هو اسماً واحداً للمعنى [و]مقامه. إذا المقام هو الواحد الذي بدأ من الأحد وهو النور من المنير والظاهر من المظهر والقدرة من القادر والمحدث من المحدث والاسم من المسمي والرسول من المرسل. بدأ منه وعاد إليه. فقرأ نضر الله وجهه: «حتى إذا بلغ مغرب الشمس وجدها تغرب في عين حمئة»¹⁸. ثم قال: يا بن هارون، لما بلغ الباب إلى غيبة الاسم وغروبه وجده يغرب في نور المعنى: إذا المعنى عزَّ عزَّه يغيبه غيبة الذي منها بدأ ويغرب فيها وهي أصله وفصله وقديمه وحكيمة. قال: قلت سيدي إذا كان النور نوراً واحداً فلم أؤرى في الظهور نورين منقسمين باسمين وصفتين؟

فقال نضر الله وجهه: يا بن هارون، ليكون داعياً من نفسه إلى نفسه بنفسه.

فقلت: يا سيدي، دعا من ذاته إلى ذاته بذاته؟

قال نضر الله وجهه: يا بن هارون، المعنى دعا من نوره إلى ذاته بنوره، إذا المكان المقصود والواحد الموجود وهو النفس المحدرة والعين الناضرة.

قلت: يا سيدي (50a) فإذا وقع الظهور الكامل في العدل السنّي الشامل ورأينا المعنى الأزل عزَّ وجلّ ظاهراً باسم يُدعى به وصفة

¹⁶ Here and elsewhere the ms. reads: بدأ

¹⁷ Ms: معنى

¹⁸ Q. 18:86.

يُعرَفُ بها ورأينا نوره الذي هو حجابُه ظاهرًا باسم وصفة يُعرَفُ بها فأيُّهما ندعو وإلى أيُّهما نشير؟
فقال نضر الله وجهه، قال: « ادعوا [أ] الله أو ادعوا الرحمن أيًا ما تدعوه¹⁹ فله الأسماء الحسنَى. »²⁰ قال نضر الله وجهه: يا بن هارون، اعلم أن الاسم يظهر بألف اسم وألف صفة، لم تكن تلك الأسماء والصفات التي يظهر بها الاسم إلا للمعنى لأنه الظاهر به والمسمَّى بها.

فقلت يا سيدي: فإلى من تكون الإرادة وحقيقة نفس العبادة؟ قال نضر الله وجهه: يا بن هارون، إن فصلت²¹ انفصلت وإن وصلت اتصلت؛ أولم يأتِكَ (!) الخبر²² المأثور الواضح الصحيح المشهور؟ فقلت: ما هو يا سيدي؟

قال: ما رويناه عن المولى الأعلى الرفيع علينا سلامه وتحيته وكرامه وقد قال: « مَنْ عبد الاسم من دون المعنى فقد كفر ومن عبد الاسم والمعنى فقد أشرك ومن عبد المعنى بحقيقة الاسم فقد وحد... »²³

فقلت: يا سيدي، فما الدليل على ذلك؛ على أن عبادة (50b) الاسم واصلة بالمعنى؟

زقال: يا بن هارون أليس تجمع معي على أن الاسم من نور المعنى بدأ؟

قال: فقلت بلى يا سيدي.

قال قدس الله روحه: يا بن هارون، فلو أنت (حتى)²⁴ يُفرضُ عليك عبادة الماء حتى ترى الثلج هل كنت تقضي فرضاً به أم لا؟ قلت: بلى يا سيدي.

قال: ولم ذلك؟ قلت: لأنه من الماء تَكُونُ وبدأ وإليه عاد و[أ] انتهى.

فقال نضر الله وجهه: وكذا الاسم من معناه بدأ وإليه عاد و[أ] انتهى وكان بدؤه منه انفصال ورجوعه إليه اتصال فإنه ولو أظهر نورية الانفصال فإنه بنفس الحقيقة بمعنى الاتصال كإشعاع القرص من القرص، فقال نضر الله وجهه: وكالضوء من النار والحركة من السكون وكالناطق من الناطق وكالنظر من الناظر، موصول بالنور، منفصل بمشاهدة الظهور.

فقلت: يا سيدي، يجوز أن يُقالَ النور نوراً واحداً؟

¹⁹ Instead of تدعوا in the canonical text of the Qur'an.

²⁰ Q. 17:110.

²¹ Ms: أفصلت

²² The text reads here: أولم يأتِكَ تبلغ الخبر... However the verb تبلغ seems to be superfluous.

²³ For a similar formulation of this traditon see above, chap. 4, p. 96.

²⁴ This word seems superfluous.

فقال : يا بن هارون، لا يجوز يُقال للعبد مولى وللإسم معنى ولا يجوز أن يساوي العبد مولاه ولا الاسم معناه.
 فقلت: يا سيدي، ولم ذلك وأنت تقول أن النور نوراً واحد والاسم (51a) اسماً واحد ثم تقول لا يجوز يقال للإسم معنى؟
 فقال قدس الله روحه: يا بن هارون، اعلم وافهم أن الاسم، وإن كان من نور المعنى بدأ وأنه نوراً مُكوّناً وكلما كان مُكوّن فهو داخل في الحدث، فيكون محدث كالقديم.
 فقلت: يا سيدي، فإذا كان مُكوّن فهو مخلوقاً.
 فقال: يا بن هارون، لا يقال لنور المعنى مخلوق.
 فقلت: يا سيدي، فما معنى مُكوّن؟
 فقال: مُكوّن - إن معناه محيط به وكل محاط به داخل تحت التكوين.

قلت: يا سيدي، أقول مُكوّن ولا أقول²⁵ مخلوقاً.
 فقال نضر الله وجهه: يا بن هارون، ولم سأل السيد الميم عن ذلك؟ قال: لا أقول²⁶ مخلوقاً بل الله المعنى فوقه؛ يا بن هارون، لم يزل القديم فوق المحدث والمحيط والمكوّن فوق المكان.
 فقلت: يا سيدي، فإذا أردنا الأزل القديم المكوّن لا المكان،²⁷ ماذا نقول حتى نصيب ولا نخطئ ونسرع ولا نبطئ؟
 قال نضر الله وجهه: تدعو وتقول: يا أحد؛ إذا أردت الاسم تقول: يا واحد.

فقلت: يا سيدي، الساعة قلت أن الاسم اسم واحد والآن معنى واسم؟
 قال نضر الله وجهه: هذين الاسمين التعرفة (!) (51b) عند أهل الخبرة وليُعرف الأبد من الأبدى والأزل من الأزلي والقديم من المحدث والاسم من المسمي والرسول من المرسل والقدرة من القادر والآن²⁸ تقول فإنه اسم المعنى أسمائه وحجابه عند تكوينه إيّاه. قال: إذا قلت الله وأردت²⁹ به المعنى فأنت مصيب لأنه اسماً موهوباً بحباية الاسم الأكبر والنور الأنور أي أنه اسماً للمعنى اسماً (!) وحجابه. فافهمه واعلمه فإنه فقهاً في الدين وطريق ونجاة العارفين والحمد لله رب العالمين.س

²⁵ Ms: تقول.

²⁶ Ms: لأقول.

²⁷ Ms: للمكان.

²⁸ Ms: والآن.

²⁹ Ms: وردت.

CHAPTER SIX

THE NUṢAYRĪ CALENDAR: ALLEGORICAL AND ANTINOMIAN INTERPRETATION OF MUSLIM FESTIVALS

1. Introduction

An independent calendar is a significant feature in the self-definition of a religious group. Religious sects dissociating themselves from their parent religion would often reject their original calendar and adopt a new one reflecting their peculiarities, and redefine the cultic boundaries through the focus of religious practice and solidarity associated with the ritual calendar. This feature clearly characterizes the Nuṣayrī calendar, which differs from the Muslim calendar both in the order of the months and in the festivals included. Moreover, the unique calendar of the Nuṣayrī religion is a mirror reflecting some of the distinctive aspects of this religion. The variety of festivals—emerging from Persian origins, from Christianity, and from Islam (both Sunnī and Shīʿī)—attests to the syncretistic nature of the Nuṣayrī religion. Nuṣayrī allegorical and antinomian tendencies, a recurrent feature of heterodox sects, are also clearly reflected in this calendar, demonstrating the means applied by Nuṣayrī theologians in their endeavour to fuse their eclectic calendar into a new theological and liturgical system.

Our two sources for the Nuṣayrī calendar differ considerably from each other in their nature and focus, and a huge gap of time separates them. Nevertheless, they complement each other. The first is *Majmūʿ al-a'yād* (=MA), the well-known work by the Nuṣayrī doctor Abū Saʿīd Maymūn b. al-Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī (d. 426/1034).¹ This is an account of Nuṣayrī festivals based, according to the author, on a

¹ A critical edition, based on three manuscripts, was published by R. Strothmann in *Der Islam* 27 (1946). General accounts of the Nuṣayrī festivals are offered by some modern scholars. See e.g. Lyde, *The Asian Mystery*, pp. 175–182; Dussaud, *Histoire et religion des Noṣairīs*, pp. 136–152; Moosa, *Extremist Shiʿites: The Ghulat Sects*, pp. 382–397; Ḥarīrī, pp. 133–162; A. al-Dujaylī, *Kitāb majmūʿ al-a'yād wa-l-ṭarīqa al-khaṣbiyya*, in *Majallat al-majmaʿ al-ʿilmī al-ʿirāqī* 4 (1956), pp. 618–629.

treatise by al-Ḥusayn b. Ḥamdān al-Khaṣībī named *al-risāla al-rāstbāshiyya* and referred to several times in *MA*.² The other, rather brief account of Nuṣayrī festivals is included in al-Adhanī's *Bākūra*. This work, although late, reflects first-hand knowledge of early Nuṣayrī texts and traditions.

MA includes a detailed survey of the Nuṣayrī festivals known in the days of the author, their rituals and sectarian doctrinal interpretations. When dealing with certain festivals of Muslim origin, the author often points to the differences in content and interpretation between the way these festivals are celebrated by Nuṣayrīs and by non-Nuṣayrīs and offers the Nuṣayrī alternative interpretation. Non-Nuṣayrīs are often presented as ignorant of the inner aspects of a festival and as celebrating only its exoteric aspects. In contradistinction to the Nuṣayrīs, these groups are usually labelled *‘amma* (the masses—a term commonly used in Shī‘ī sources to denote the Sunnīs)³ and *ẓāhiriyyat al-shī‘a* (the external Shī‘īs, referring to other Shī‘ī groups but particularly to the Imāmīs or Twelver Shī‘īs). Moreover, in certain cases—as will be seen—the author presents a similar esoteric-exoteric dichotomy within the Nuṣayrī religion itself. When describing certain festivals and their ritual practices and sermons, the author will offer two different sets of texts—one addressed to the masses, the other to the initiate.

In his introduction to *MA* al-Ṭabarānī classifies the Nuṣayrī festivals into two groups: those of Arabic origin (*al-a’yād al-‘arabiyya*) and those of Persian origin (*al-a’yād al-fārsiyya*). However, the correlation between what is presented in the introduction and what appears in the work itself is not complete. Certain important festivals dealt with at length throughout the book are not included in the introduction; on the other hand, the introduction lists some festivals not dealt with in the book itself. Among those treated in the book but not included in the introductory presentation is Christmas.

The Arabic festivals include those common to the general Muslim heritage: *yawm al-jum‘a* (Friday), *‘īd al-fīṭr* (the festival of breaking the fast [of Ramadan]) and *‘īd al-aḏḥā* (the sacrificial festival). Also represented are the Shī‘ī festivals of *‘īd al-ghadīr* (the day of Ghadīr Khumm marking ‘Alī’s divine nomination as Muḥammad’s heir) and

² The Persian title *rāstbāshiyya* is derived from the imperative *rāst bāsh* (be honest). This work, ascribed to al-Khaṣībī, is thus far known to us only from quotations in *MA*, p. 12, line 10, and p. 154, line 10.

³ See E. Kohlberg, “*‘Amma*,” *Encyclopædia Iranica*, vol. 1, pp. 976–977.

‘īd ‘āshūr (the day commemorating Ḥusayn’s martyrdom). In addition, *MA* includes a number of special days commemorating certain events in the history of Shī‘ism and the lives of the Imams.

Under those of Persian origin the author enumerates the well-known festivals *yawm al-nawrūz* (the Persian festival of the New Year beginning at the vernal equinox) and *yawm al-mihrajān* (the Persian festival of the autumn equinox).

In addition to major festivals, the Nuṣayrī calendar is replete with holy days consecrated to various persons (*ashkhāṣ*) apotheosized in the Nuṣayrī divine realm of emanation. The author reinforces this plethora of holy days by Qur’ānic exegesis. Verses in which the word *yawm* (day) occurs are taken to allude to holy days in the Nuṣayrī calendar. This concept of various days in the year related to certain holy persons of the divine realm, also considered as patrons of these days, is reminiscent of the Christian calendar’s repletion with days dedicated to patron saints.

The chapters on the festivals are in many cases followed by two types of liturgical units: a sermon (*khuṭba*) and a prayer (*du‘ā*); where more than one sermon is included, the first is sometimes of a general Muslim character and the other specifically Nuṣayrī.

Most of the festivals described by al-Ṭabarānī are also included in al-Adhanī’s mid-19th-century listing⁴ and in a list appended in ms. Paris, arabe 6182 (pp. 37b–39a), and seem to attest to a continuity in their celebration. Al-Adhanī’s survey encompasses some additional festivals—seemingly unknown to early Nuṣayrīs—all of which undoubtedly emerge from a Christian background. In addition to Christmas—the only Christian holiday mentioned in *MA*—these include the following: ‘īd al-Barbāra (Saint Barbara’s Day), ‘īd al-ghuṭās (Epiphany), ‘īd Yuḥannā al-Ma‘madān (Saint John the Baptist’s Day), ‘īd Yuḥannā fam al-dhahab (Saint John Chrysostom’s Day), ‘īd al-sha‘ ānīn (Palm Sunday), ‘īd al-‘anṣara (Pentecost), and ‘īd Maryam al-Majdalāniyya (Saint Mary Magdalene’s Day). Furthermore, al-Adhanī supplies information regarding the ritual of the *quddās* (the Nuṣayrī mass), which undoubtedly attests to increasing Christian influence in later times, apparent also from the Nuṣayrī catechism included in this volume. However, al-Adhanī’s account is rather cursory and does not amount to much more than a list of festivals and memorial days.

In his account of the Nuṣayrī liturgical calendar al-Ṭabarānī advocates a scheme whereby he presents first the general Muslim holi-

⁴ See *Bākura*, pp. 34–36.

days, then Shīʿī festivals and memorial days, and subsequently some festivals derived from Christian and Persian traditions. The Nuṣayrīs seem to have derived their new liturgical calendar from the Muslim lunar year. In this calendar Ramadan becomes the first month of the year.⁵

This study focuses on the Muslim component—forming the major part of the Nuṣayrī calendar—and its adaptation to the Nuṣayrī liturgical and theological system.

2. *Nuṣayrī Holy Days of General Muslim Origin*

2.1. *The Month of Ramadan*

Al-Ṭabarānī's discussion of the fast of Ramadan is founded on al-Khaṣībī's epistle *al-risāla al-rāstbāshiyya*. Al-Ṭabarānī quotes a passage from the epistle in which a disciple asks his master to identify the persons of the holy days of the year and its months, and particularly the month of Ramadan. The question specifically refers to the persons of the days of the month, rather than of its nights—a distinction that becomes clear further along in the author's discussion of Ramadan.⁶ The author emphasizes that these things should not be kept secret—reflecting a certain apologetic stance, since he is obviously about to reveal in writing some of the sectarian esoteric teachings, albeit addressed to an exclusive inner circle of initiates.

The fast of Ramadan is essentially regarded as abstinence from speech rather than from food. Al-Ṭabarānī anchors this interpretation in a tradition describing 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, the father of Muḥammad, maintaining silence during the month of Ramadan. This understanding of the fast further relies on Q. 19:26, referring to Mary's vow of fasting and silence, and to the avowed silence of Zecharia, father of John the Baptist (Q. 3:42, and 19:10-11). All commentators are unanimous that according to the context of the Qur'ānic verse this fast refers to Mary's silence. In other words, al-Ṭabarānī's stance here is an explicit case of antinomian interpretation of the fast. A similar antinomian interpretation of the fast was advocated somewhat later in Druze writings.⁷ According to al-Khaṣībī

⁵ *MA*, p. 19, lines 13–14.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 12–13. For the concept of persons controlling time division in the world and its astrological connotations, see above, chap. 2, pp. 49–50.

⁷ See epistle VI (*al-kitāb al-ma'rūf bi-l-naqd al-khaṣībī*) of the Druze canon. For an

and al-Ṭabarānī, ‘Abd Allāh demonstrated in his behaviour the various common observances practised during Ramadan anticipating the revelation of “the great master Muḥammad” (*al-sayyid al-akbar Muḥammad*), who is identified here with the Qur’ān.⁸ Two interpretations of the significance of the persons of ‘Abd Allāh and Muḥammad within the context of Ramadan are advanced by the author. The first proposes to identify ‘Abd Allāh as the “person” of the month and Muḥammad as the Qur’ān⁹—clearly a moderate interpretation falling within the general scheme of persons controlling the temporal divisions. The second interpretation reflects the antinomian stance: ‘Abd Allāh represents the proscriptions of the month, namely the orthodox aspects of the fast, whereas Muḥammad now stands for the breaking of the fast (*fiṭr*).¹⁰ In other words, Muḥammad stands for the antinomian abolition of the religious proscriptions of the holy month.

The individual days of Ramadan are also identified with specific members of the Prophet’s family and his close followers, the days being identified with the males, the nights with female members of the holy family.

Among the male persons identified with the days of Ramadan are three sons of Muḥammad by his wife Khadija: al-Qāsim, al-Ṭāhir, and ‘Abd Allāh, and Ibrāhīm, the son by his wife Mary the Copt.¹¹ Among the supporters are included the five *yatīms* of Muḥammad,¹²

unpublished critical edition of this epistle, see D.R.W. Bryer, “The Origins of the Druze Religion: An Edition of Ḥamza’s Writings and an Analysis of his Doctrine,” D. Phil. diss. (University of Oxford, 1971), vol. 2, pp. 31–50 (the Arabic text), and vol. 1, pp. 226–227 (a discussion of the text.). See also, S. De Sacy, *Exposé de la religion des Druzes* (Paris, 1838), vol. 2, p. 673.

⁸ The theological notion of identifying Muḥammad, the second person of the trinity, with the Qur’ān as the word of God—a concept reminiscent of the Logos of Christian theology—is not familiar to us from other Nuṣayrī texts. Yet, it may be conceived of as complementary to the various terms denoting the *ism*.

⁹ *MA*, p. 13, line 8. Here the text has the word *fuṣṣūḥ* (literally: salvation), a synonym for the Qur’ān. The other months of the year are subsequently identified with members of the Prophet’s family, including his two sons, Ibrāhīm and al-Qāsim. This identification may reflect the Nuṣayrī concept of the Muslim holy family as forming part of the realm of divine emanations. See above, p. 37, note 144. Some of the persons, however, are also referred to derogatorily.

¹⁰ *MA*, p. 13, lines 10–12. On this role of Muḥammad, see the discussion of ‘*id al-fiṭr*’, below.

¹¹ *MA*, p. 14, lines 1–2. The names al-Qāsim, al-Ṭāhir and Ibrāhīm are mentioned by Ibn Hishām in his biography of the Prophet, but whereas Ibn Hishām names the fourth son al-Ṭayyib, *MA* has the name ‘Abd Allāh. See *Sīrat sayyidinā Muḥammad rasūl Allāh*, edited by F. Wüstenfeld (Göttingen, 1859–1860), p. 121.

¹² For the concept that Muḥammad, the *ism*, also has his own five *yatīms*, distinct

the regular *yatīms* of the *bāb*, and the twelve *naqībs*.¹³ The thirty nights of Ramadan are identified with Muḥammad's mother, Āmina, and other women in his family, including his daughters and some of his wives. It is noteworthy that two of his wives are missing from this list: 'Ā'isha and Ḥafṣa, the daughters of the caliphs Abū Bakr and 'Umar, respectively.¹⁴ Muḥammad's daughter, Fāṭima, the mother of 'Alī's sons, is credited with a special status as part of the holy family. Fāṭima is considered the patroness of the nineteenth and twenty-third nights of Ramadan, and according to another tradition the patroness of the twenty-seventh night, the "night of power" (*laylat al-qadr*).¹⁵

According to the author of *MA*, Ramadan is not simply one more month of the year that comes and goes. It is a supra-temporal entity of which the calendar month is merely a representation. There exists therefore, a certain undefined obligation toward the days and nights of the month (*wa-ja'ala ayyāma shahr ramadān kullahā farḍan mafrūḍan wa-ḥatman wājiban wa-ja'ala layāliyahū qānūnan lāziman*).¹⁶ Thus the special night of the month, *laylat al-qadr*, is something of a cosmic night. On this night not only was the Qur'ān revealed, but also script and speech were invented (*wa-'ullīfat al-ḥurūf wa-minhu ḥarf al-nuṭq*).¹⁷

The special status of the month is reflected in the ritual practice of the fast. However, the fast is not complete without the observance of the vow of silence, which is the distinct mark of the "people of knowledge and understanding" (*ahl al-'ilm wa-l-fahm*).¹⁸ The import of the author's statement here is not entirely clear. Although there is strong emphasis on the vow of silence as a prerequisite for the full performance of the fast, it seems that the author does not advocate here an abolition of abstinence from food but merely de-emphasizes its importance in comparison with the central requirement of silence. The author actually notes the importance of the fast as well as the movements of the prayer by which observance of the religious duty may be discerned. At any rate, in the author's eyes the main signifi-

from the five commonly known *yatīms* of Salmān, see also p. 190, below.

¹³ *MA*, p. 14, lines 3–13.

¹⁴ On the Shī'ī attitude toward these two wives of the Prophet, see. e.g. Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, pp. 40–44.

¹⁵ *MA*, p. 15, lines 12–14. Fāṭima also seems to be identified with the night of mid-Sha'bān discussed below, pp. 143–145.

¹⁶ *MA*, p. 16, lines 9–10.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, lines 11–12.

¹⁸ *MA*, p. 17, lines 14–15.

cance of the month is that it symbolizes the spiritual progress of the believer toward a divine gnosis. During this month of silence the believer symbolically advances from an initial testimony of his faith to the divine realm and finally, at the end of the month, to the stage where he achieves gnosis (*awwaluhu shahāda, wa-wasatuhu riḡā'a wa-ākhiruhu ma'rifā*).¹⁹ In light of this symbolism, the month of Ramadan is also identified with a row of luminary divine entities, among which are the *ḥijāb* and the Holy Spirit.²⁰ The discussion of Ramadan is followed by a special prayer (*du'ā'*) for the month briefly incorporating the concepts treated previously.

2.2. *The Festival of Breaking the Fast* (ʿīd al-ḥiṭr)

In the Nuṣayrī liturgical calendar ʿīd al-ḥiṭr, marking the end of Ramadan, became the first festival of the liturgical year. As noted earlier, Muḥammad is identified as the person of the festival. This means that Muḥammad as a personal name of the *ism*, is the divine cosmic patron of the festival. But in fact the festival itself is now identified with Muḥammad, the *ism*, who represents the first emanation of the godhead and hence the beginning of the whole process of emanation in the divine realm. This is clearly expressed by quotations from al-Khaṣībī reminiscent of Pythagorean speculations. According to al-Khaṣībī, ʿīd al-ḥiṭr, the first festival of the year, is identified with Muḥammad, who is the first of the numbers; "He is the One and the numbers begin from him and return to him" (*wa-huwa al-wāḥid wa-l-a'ḍād bad'uhā minhu wa-awduhā ilayhi*).²¹ Muḥammad is capable of division and therefore falls under the category of numbers and division (*wa-l-sayyid Muḥammad yanthanī wa-yadkhulu fī-l-a'ḍād*).²² This means that the *ism* constitutes the beginning and the end of human epistemology. Beyond that is the supreme aspect of the godhead, the *ma'nā*, who is beyond any aspect of division and cognition. The theological establishment of ʿīd al-ḥiṭr as the first festival derives from the notion of Muḥammad as the first number, and the identification of ʿīd al-ḥiṭr with Muḥammad postulates its primacy.²³ This may seem a somewhat circular and forced explanation, but it shows the focus of theological orientation in the understanding of the ritual.

¹⁹ *MA*, p. 16, line 15.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 17, line 5.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 21, line 6.

²² *Ibid.*, lines 6–7.

²³ *Ibid.*, lines 7–8.

The symbolism of 'īd al-ḥijr as the first manifestation of plurality and division in the divine realm draws also from the root of the word *ḥijr* itself, denoting beginning of generation.²⁴ To demonstrate a symbolic nexus of the feast, al-Ṭabarānī cites a few stanzas from an ode by al-Jillī, their thrust being that Muḥammad represents the external, ceremonial aspects of the festival—hinting apparently at the concealed aspect of the divinity, the *ma'nā*, as its esoteric kernel.²⁵

The tendency to focus on the allegorical and symbolic meaning of the festival in the framework of trinitarian theology is further enhanced by a subsequent discussion of the trinity in terms deriving from the root *whd*—*aḥad*, *wāḥid*, *waḥdāniyya*—each denoting one of the persons of the trinity.²⁶ The entire discussion of the theological symbolism of 'īd al-ḥijr leads to the general and more institutionalized conclusion that the essence of 'īd al-ḥijr is the revelation of religion to the believers. Hence the festival commemorates the day on which the religion was revealed in both its exoteric and esoteric aspects. Al-Ṭabarānī, however, does not identify this day with a specific day in the early history of Islam. It is the idea behind this festival that is significant here, rather than a particular historical event.

The discussion of 'īd al-ḥijr is followed by a special sermon (*khutba*) for the festival. This sermon further reveals the eschatological aspect of the festival, namely that in the eschatological era 'īd al-ḥijr will be the day of abolition of secrecy—in other words, the day when Nuṣayrī believers will be able to declare their religion openly (*yawma yu'adhdhanu li-l-mu'minīna bi-l-īlān wa-yurfā'u 'anhum al-taqiyya wa-l-kitmān fā-lā yū'badu llāh sirran wa-yuṣarraḥu bi-tawḥīdihi jahran*).²⁷

Thus in the eschatological scene the full scope of the festival comes to fruition. In its variegated symbolism the festival entails a triple division of Nuṣayrī cosmic time: (a) in the preexistential stage it signifies the beginning of revelation through emanation in the divine world by the first instance of plurality and division, manifested in the *ism* symbolizing the external aspect of religion; (b) in history it con-

²⁴ The author further interprets the word *ḥijr* as associated with *ḥijra* (*MA*, p. 22, line 3). The meaning of the root *ḥijr* as "beginning" is reflected in such derivatives as *ḥijr*, denoting the Creator, and *ḥijra*, denoting creation as well as the state of conformity of an infant to its natural embryonic constitution. This sense of the root is reflected also in Hebrew and in other Semitic languages. On the concept of *ḥijra* in Muslim thought, see D.B. Macdonald, "Ḥijra," *EF*, vol. 2, pp. 931-932.

²⁵ *MA*, p. 21, lines 10-14.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 22, lines 1-2.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, n. 23, lines 7-8.

notes the revelation of religion to humanity—Islam as the external form of religion and the Nuṣayrī faith as its esoteric truth; (c) in eschatology it signifies the ultimate revelation of the true religion to the whole of humanity through shattering the protecting walls of secrecy.

The sermon ends with a prayer to Muḥammad, the person of this important day, as well as to the *bāb* and the *yatīms*.²⁸ It is then followed by a special prayer for the festival, incorporating in the form of prayer the main points of the author's discussion of the festival. This includes a prayer expressing the wish to be counted worthy of arriving at the day of the great 'īd al-*fiṭr*, apparently referring to the eschatological 'īd al-*fiṭr*.²⁹

2.3. The Sacrificial Festival ('īd al-aḍḥā)

The discussion of 'īd al-aḍḥā contains elements similar to those of 'īd al-*fiṭr*, offering a Nuṣayrī esoteric understanding of the feast on three levels. Al-Ṭabarānī opens by drawing a distinction between the manner of celebrating the festival by "Sunnīs and outward Shī'īs" (*al-āmma wa-zāhiriyyat al-shī'a*),³⁰ i.e. those who perform the rituals of the day according to their literal meaning, as opposed to the "interior believers" (*ahl al-bāṭin*), those who perceive the esoteric meaning of the day. The latter understand the festival as the day on which the person of the festival was revealed. The person of 'īd al-aḍḥā is now identified with the expected redeemer (*qā'im*). This eschatological day is believed to be the time when the religion of truth (*dīn al-ḥaqq*) will be revealed to the Muslim masses.³¹ The motif seems similar to the open publication of the secrets of religion in the eschatological 'īd al-*fiṭr* discussed above. Here, however, it is specified that the revelation will be to Muslims, and that this will also be the day of resurrection.³² Here the eschatological context of the festival is more pronounced than in the case of 'īd al-*fiṭr*. The eschatological person of the *qā'im* is identified with Muḥammad, and his campaign includes a holy war against heretics.³³

²⁸ Ibid., lines 9–10.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 24.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 25, line 6.

³¹ Ibid., lines 7–12.

³² Ibid., line 11.

³³ Ibid., lines 1–3. The author cites here a well-known eschatological tradition depicting the heretics seeking refuge behind walls; in the original tradition, however, the word "heretic" is substituted for the word "Jew." For the original tradition, see Ibn Māja, *Sunan* (*kitāb al-ḥajj*, 33) (Cairo, 1373/1953), vol. 2, p. 1361.

The festival of *'īd al-aḏḥā* is associated also with the mythological, precosmic existence of the Nuṣayrīs in the divine realm before the Fall.³⁴ Al-Ṭabarānī adduces a tradition, ascribed to 'Alī's disciple al-Aṣḥab b. Nubāta, in which *'īd al-aḏḥā* is presented as the day of covenant between God and believers in the luminary divine realm. The believers responded to the summons of God but rejected the call to acknowledge the *ḥijāb*. By way of admonition and punishment God "turned them backwards and swore to relegate them to [a state of] denial... and to have them taste the burning [pain] of iron—namely, the [festive] sacrifice" (*raddahum 'alā a'qābihim wa-ālā bi-nafsihi an yaruddahum ilā l-inkār... fa-yudhūqahum ḥarra l-ḥadīd wa-huwa al-naḥr*).³⁵ This tradition is clearly associated with the myth of the Fall and the creation of the universe as a consequence. Here the new harsh reality is represented by iron, the metal of the sword of sacrifice and slaughter.

In accordance with the overall pattern of the work, the discussion of *'īd al-aḏḥā* is followed by a prayer for the festival that incorporates the fundamental creeds of the Nuṣayrī faith, the title of the prayer and its conclusion containing practical instructions for its performance.³⁶ And the prayer is followed by a sermon for the holiday³⁷ mostly expressing thanks to God and to His various divine emanations³⁸ but also providing a commentary on the sacrifice of Ishmael, the traditional core of the Muslim festival.³⁹ However the motifs depicting the sacrifice of Ishmael are adopted from Sunnī and Shī'ī traditions without any particular Nuṣayrī elaboration.

3. Nuṣayrī Holy Days of Shī'ī Origin

3.1. The Day of *Ghaḏīr Khumm* (*'īd al-ghaḏīr*)

Among the festivals of Shī'ī origin adopted into the Nuṣayrī calendar, *'īd al-ghaḏīr* is of major importance. *Ghaḏīr Khumm* (the pool of

³⁴ On the Nuṣayrī myth of the Fall, see above, chap. 3, pp. 75-77.

³⁵ *MA*, p. 26, lines 7-8.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-28.

³⁷ Between the prayer and the sermon the author has inserted an independent treatise discussing the well-known Muslim eschatological tradition of the seventy sects, which does not seem to belong directly to the discussion of the festival (*MA*, pp. 28-49). On this tradition, see Gimaret's introduction to Shahrastānī, *Livre des religions et des sectes*, pp. 31-36.

³⁸ *MA*, pp. 49-51.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 51-53.

Khummm, situated between Mecca and Medina) became famous in Muslim history on account of a statement in favour of 'Alī that, according to tradition was pronounced by the Prophet at the site. As reported by many sources, both Sunnī and Shī'ī, the Prophet on returning from his last pilgrimage to Mecca—known as the “farewell pilgrimage” (*ḥijjat al-wadā'*)—gathered his followers at the pool of Khumm and delivered a sermon in which *inter alia* he addressed to 'Alī one of the best-known utterances in the history of the Shī'ī-Sunnī controversy: “He of whom I am the *mawlā*, 'Alī is also the *mawlā*. O God, be the friend of him who is his friend, and be the enemy of him who is his enemy” (*man kuntu mawlāhu fa-'Alī mawlāhu, allāhumma wālī man wālāhu wa-'ādī man 'ādāhu*).⁴⁰

While there is Sunnī-Shī'ī unanimity concerning the circumstances in which this utterance was made, there is disagreement regarding the meaning of *mawlā*, the key word in this account. In Sunnī sources *mawlā* is taken to mean “a friend” or “kin.” Hence in the Sunnī interpretation, the Prophet did not mean to express any political or religious stance regarding the status of 'Alī, but simply wanted to urge his followers to hold his cousin and son-in-law in high esteem. Shī'ī tradition, in contrast, relying on another meaning of *mawlā*—namely, “patron” or “leader”—interprets the Prophet's words as an explicit nomination (*naṣṣ*) of 'Alī as his successor and hence claims that this sentence should be rendered as: “Of whom I am a *patron*, 'Alī is also a *patron*.”⁴¹

Turning now to al-Ṭabarānī's discussion of the Ghadīr Khumm account, the far-reaching interpretation it has been given in Nuṣayrī tradition is quite striking. As noted earlier,⁴² al-Ṭabarānī claims that the version of the statement cited above is merely that of “all the

⁴⁰ There exists a vast literature describing this event and commenting on its religious and political implications. The voluminous work of 'A.A. al-Amīnī, *al-Ghadīr fī-l-kitāb wa-l-sunna wa-l-adab* (Tehran, 1372/1952) exemplifies the major place the Ghadīr Khumm event occupies in Shī'ism. For a summary of the Shī'ī-Sunnī debate concerning Ghadīr Khumm, see e.g. S.H.M. Jafri, *The Origins and Early Development of Shī'a Islam* (Beirut, 1979), pp. 19–21; L. Veccia Vaglieri, “Ghadīr Khumm,” *EF*, vol. 2, pp. 993–994. See also W. Madelung, *The Succession to Muḥammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 253.

⁴¹ In contemporary Iran, the Ghadīr Khumm festival is celebrated by preparing three pastry figurines filled with honey representing the three first caliphs, and by stabbing them with knives. The honey which comes out symbolizes the blood of the three hated usurpers. See Veccia Vaglieri, “Ghadīr Khumm,” *EF*, vol. 2, p. 994.

⁴² See above, chap. 1, pp. 36–37.

deficient Shī'īs" (*kāffāt al-shī'a al-muqaṣṣira*).⁴³ The version transmitted and verified by the true unitarians (*ahl al-tawhīd*)—i.e. the Nuṣayrīs—is however essentially different. The Prophet is said to have pronounced these words in favour of 'Alī: "*man kuntu mawlāhu fa-'Alī ma'nāhu*."⁴⁴ In other words, in gathering his believers at Ghadīr Khumm, the Prophet intended not only to distinguish 'Alī from the rest by nominating him as Imam, as Shī'īs believe, but also to declare him the *ma'nā*. The significance of 'īd al-ghadīr lies therefore in the belief that on this day "[Muḥammad] elucidated the divine essence of our lord, the Commander of the Faithful [= 'Alī]—peace be from him"⁴⁵—for that is the day in the Muḥammadan cycle on which the deity manifested and revealed itself" (*fa-bayyana wa-awḍaḥa ma'nawīyyat mawlānā amīr al-mu'minīna minhu al-salām, li-annahu yawm zuhūr wa-kashf... fī-l-qubba al-muḥammadiyya*).⁴⁶ The author proceeds to describe the trinitarian revelation of the deity, offering one of the earliest attestations of Nuṣayrī trinitarian theology: "For on this [day] the *ma'nā* reveals itself through its essence, and its *ism*, Muḥammad, is revealed with it (the *ma'nā*), summoning it and pointing to it, and his *bāb*, Salmān, summons it (the *ism*), guiding people to it (the *ma'nā*) and testifying for and against them."⁴⁷

The importance of this day in the Nuṣayrī calendar is further illustrated in *MA* by an ode entitled *al-qaṣīda al-ghadīriyya*, ascribed to al-Khaṣībī. Many of its verses describe the scene at Ghadīr Khumm and Muḥammad's alleged teachings concerning 'Alī's deity on this occasion. However, the ode is not limited to the Ghadīr event; it includes also a cursory mention of other Nuṣayrī motifs. We will concentrate on the verses that deal with the deification of 'Alī and his manifestation as the *ma'nā*, constituting, as noted, the essence of 'īd al-ghadīr. Pointing to 'Alī, Muḥammad is said to have made the following declarations:

This is your creator, so know him / this is the shaper of creation
(inna hādhā bārīkum fa-'lamūhu / inna hādhā muṣawwiru al-taṣwīri)

⁴³ *MA*, p. 54, lines 8-9. Literally, the term *muqaṣṣira* in Shī'ī texts means "shortcomers." It refers to those who "fell short in recognizing the true nature of the Imam." See H. Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shī'ite Islam* (Princeton, 1993), p. 29, 35-37.

⁴⁴ *MA*, p. 54, lines 9-10.

⁴⁵ For this Nuṣayrī variation of the more common "peace be upon him" ('*alayhi al-salām*'), see above, p. 92, note 15.

⁴⁶ *MA*, p. 54, lines 10-11.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, line 11—p. 55, line 1.

This is your God, so be cognizant of him / this is the object of your worship throughout the ages

(inna hādhā ilāhukum fa-‘rifūhu / inna hādhā ma‘būdukum fī-l-duhūri)

This is a lord for you, worship him alone / He is exalted above any like or similar being

(inna hādhā rabbun lakum waḥḥidūhu / qad ta‘ālā ‘an mushbihin wa-naẓīri).⁴⁸

The ode proceeds to list other recurrent divine attributes of ‘Alī, followed by verses describing his position in relation to Muḥammad:

I am his servant, the messenger [sent] to you / with a revealed written book

(wa-anā ‘abduhu al-rasūlu ilaykum / bi-kitābin munazzalin maṣṭūrī)

He [‘Alī] said: inform⁴⁹ my servants about me / I am their protector and best helper

(qāla balligh ‘annī ‘ibādī fa-innī / anā mawlāhum wa-khayru naẓīri)⁵⁰

The concept spelled out in the second verse, that the deity revealed itself in all eras on the day of Ghadīr Khumm, is further elaborated in a special prayer to be recited on this day. On this unique day which stands beyond time (“for no day preceded it nor followed it”),⁵¹ God summoned all His creatures to know Him. The author further expounds the recurrent Nuṣayrī concept that the deity reveals itself to peoples and individuals according to their power of perception:

You did not fall upon their doubtful minds nor upon their narrow-minded souls, nor upon their despicable persons but only according to their capacity to grasp your great divinity (*lam tahjum ‘alā ‘uqūlihī al-murtāba wa-la anfusihī al-ḍayyīqa wa-lā ashkhāṣihī al-mahīna illā bi-mā ḥtamalūhu min ‘aẓīm lāhūtiyatika*).⁵²

The essential difference in people’s natures explains why the dull-minded (*ahl al-kadar*) upon hearing the Prophet’s words, understood them as proclaiming the Imāma of ‘Alī, while the believers—i.e. Nuṣayrīs—perceived them properly, that is, as a reference to his

⁴⁸ MA, p. 56, lines 6–8.

⁴⁹ The verb “inform” or “deliver,” rendering the Arabic *balligh*, alludes to Q. 5:67: “O Messenger, deliver that which has been sent down to you from your Lord, for if you do not, you will not have delivered His message” (*yā ayyuhā l-rasūlu balligh mā unẓila ilayka min rabbika wa-in lam taf‘al fa-mā ballaghta risālātahu*). The significance of this verse is clearly attested at the beginning of al-Ṭabarānī’s discussion of the event of Ghadīr Khumm, where the verse is interpreted as encapsulating Muḥammad’s role in the event. Moreover, whereas in the Qur’ān God orders the Prophet to deliver a message, here the order is given by ‘Alī.

⁵⁰ MA, p. 56, lines 14–15.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 60, lines 2–3.

⁵² Ibid., lines 11–12.

deity.⁵³ Each creature, adds the author, is addressed through a divine *maqām* (degree) “corresponding to his nature and his language” (*mithālan minhu wa-mujānisan li-kawnihi wa-khāṭabta kullan bi-lisānihi*).⁵⁴ Responding to the divine summons to know the deity is the means to achieve redemption; denying it is punished by transmigration.⁵⁵

Various types of transmigration into different animals are specified.⁵⁶ Our text is marked, however, by its graphic description of the process and by a pronounced predilection for frogs. Ignorant souls are punished by continuous transmigration into frogs expelled to earth while riding on rain clouds. On earth, frogs croak praises to ‘Alī and glorify him, in repentance for their primordial sin.⁵⁷

Like Shī‘ī Islam, Nuṣayrī tradition interprets the scene of Ghadīr Khumm also as a reconfirmation in this world of a preexistential covenant with Muḥammad and his holy family. In *MA* it is further incorporated into a cosmogonic theology.⁵⁸

In another tradition the Ghadīr Khumm scene is described as taking place simultaneously in heaven and on earth. When the Prophet summoned people to acknowledge the divinity of ‘Alī, states the author, “all heavenly and earthly creatures in the kingdom [of God] who fell short of recognizing the unity of the Lord of all Beings were confused, while the gnostics’ certainty increased” (*fa-dṭaraba kullu man fī-l-mulk min ahl al-samawāt wa-l-araḍina mimman qaṣṣara ‘ilmuhu bi-tawḥīd rabb al-‘ālamīn wa-zdāda ahl al-ma’rifa bi-dhālika yaqīnan*).⁵⁹

The notion of redemptive knowledge highlights the gnostic nature of the mythic account of Ghadīr Khumm. It is only through proper knowledge of the mysteries of divinity that the gnostic can gain redemption and return to his divine homeland. However, as is known from other Nuṣayrī texts of a gnostic character, on his way to redemp-

⁵³ Ibid., p. 64, lines 5–7: *fa-waṣala hādha l-qawlu ilā kullī aḥad bi-qadri mā staḥaqqa fa-ahl al-kadar sami’ū l-qawla bi-anna hādha ‘Alīyyan imāmun wa-l-mu’minūna sami’ū anna hādha bārī’ukum fa’rifūhu wa-mawlākum fa-lā tunkirūhu*.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 60, line 13.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 66.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 71–72. See also verses 30–34 of the *qaṣīda al-ghadīriyya* (ibid., p. 57, lines 12–16).

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 60–61. The *ism* is conceived of as revealing the supreme divine essence (*ma’nawīyya*) in five forms of primordial existence, named here by the author as *nūrānī*, *jawharī*, *rūḥānī*, *hawā’ī*, and *mā’ī*. This cosmogony, peculiar to *MA*, may reflect the archetypal elements of the physical cosmos. The numerical symbolism may allude to the five persons of the holy family or alternatively to the five major *yafīms*.

⁵⁹ *MA*, p. 71, lines 18–19.

tion the believer must overcome various obstacles,⁶⁰ one being temptation by the devil. In the primordial worlds, the devil took possession of God's creatures, causing them to forget God (*wa-qad istahwadha 'alayhim al-shayṭān fa-ansāhum dhikraka*).⁶¹ As is recurrent in gnostic myths, the soul's forgetfulness of its principal vocation, to know the deity, is the reason for its fall from the divine realm.

Like other days in the Nuṣayrī calendar, the day of Ghadīr Khumm has acquired an eschatological dimension in Nuṣayrī doctrine. Qur'ānic verses, traditionally taken as referring to the Day of Judgement, are employed in an eschatological context. Thus for instance the day referred to in the Qur'ān (11:103) as "a day unto which mankind shall be gathered together, a day to witness" (*dhālika yawm majmū' lahu al-nās wa-dhālika yawm mashhūd*) is identified with the day of Ghadīr Khumm in the Messianic era. On this day the redeemer, identified—as in the general Shī'ī tradition—with a descendant of the Prophet (*qā'im āl bayt Muḥammad*), will appear. The *mawlā*, that is 'Alī as the supreme deity, will be revealed. His *ism*, Muḥammad, will build a stone pulpit in al-Juhfa in the vicinity of Ghadīr Khumm around which all heavenly and earthly creatures will be gathered including "the first, the second and the third" (*al-awwal wa-l-thānī wa-l-thālith*)—namely the first three caliphs.⁶² Revenge will be meted out to all enemies of 'Alī, headed by "the devil of devils" (*iblis al-abālisa*) identified with 'Umar.⁶³ Another archenemy of 'Alī condemned to decisive punishment on that day is the notorious al-Ḥārith b. al-Nu'mān al-Fihri. As al-Ṭabarānī correctly observes, al-Fihri's objection to the designation of 'Alī at Ghadīr Khumm is attested also in non-Nuṣayrī sources.

⁶⁰ These obstacles, termed *'iqāb*, are treated at length in the pseudepigraphic *Kutāb al-ṣirāṭ* ascribed to Ja'far al-Šādiq. See also chap. 3, above, pp. 85-86.

⁶¹ *MA*, p. 61, lines 6-7. For the motif of forgetfulness and other causes of the Fall, see above, chap. 3, pp. 75-76.

⁶² *MA*, p. 63, lines 9-16. On these derogatory appellations of the three first caliphs in Shī'ī tradition, see E. Kohlberg, "Some Imāmī Shī'ī Views on the *Ṣaḥāba*," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 5 (1984), pp. 143-175, esp. 164-165 (reprinted in idem, *Belief and Law in Imāmī Shī'ism*, chap. 9); Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, pp. 113-120. In another sermon for the day of Ghadīr Khumm ascribed to 'Alī (*MA*, pp. 73-81), a similar passage (ibid., p. 77), interpreting other Qur'ānic verses containing the word *yawm* in eschatological context, is a further reference to the day of Ghadīr Khumm in the eschatological era.

⁶³ *MA*, p. 65, line 17. *Iblīs al-abālisa* together with another derogatory designation, *fir'aun al-farā'ina* (Pharaoh of Pharaohs), also occurs in *MA*, p. 110, line 5, referring to 'Umar. For a discussion of 'Umar's abusive appellations in Shī'ī tradition, see Kohlberg, "Some Imāmī Shī'ī Views on the *Ṣaḥāba*," pp. 162-167; Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, pp. 84 and 113-120.

In their interpretation of Q. 70:1-2: "a person asked of a chastisement about to fall for the unbelievers..." (*sa'ala sā'il bi-'adhāb wāqī' li-l-kāfirīna*), many Shī'ī commentators interpret the verse as referring to al-Fihri. Upon hearing Muḥammad proclaim 'Alī as his *mawla*, al-Fihri raised a stern objection to the Prophet's decision, denouncing it as arbitrary and uninspired by divine revelation. Al-Fihri left Muḥammad, indignantly beseeching God's intervention and adjuring Him to punish the Prophet if he had lied or himself if the Prophet were proven truthful. This trial by fire reaches a violent conclusion when a stone from heaven kills al-Fihri by piercing his head and emerging from his rear.⁶⁴

In the above-mentioned sermon for the day of Ghadīr Khumm ascribed to 'Alī, some messianic roles traditionally reserved to the Mahdī and the archangel Isrāfīl are assigned to 'Alī. Like Jesus, 'Alī describes himself by a series of titles, some of which are of a typically eschatological connotation. "Do you know what is the path of God and who is the path of God, his *ṣirāṭ*⁶⁵ and his way?" 'Alī asks rhetorically, responding that he himself is the one who stands on the *ṣirāṭ*, the one whose role it is to assign people to paradise or hell (*qasīm al-janna wa-l-nār*) according to their deeds in this world.⁶⁶

The tendency of *MA* to emphasize the importance of Nuṣayrī holidays by listing a series of events that have taken place throughout history, as occurring on the day of the festival is also prevalent here. These events are hinted at through various expressions, mostly Qur'ānic, containing the word *yawm* (day) that the author interprets as referring to the day of Ghadīr Khumm.⁶⁷ He concludes the list

⁶⁴ *MA*, pp. 81–84 (*khbar al-Fihri la'anahu llāh*). On this tradition in Imāmī exegesis, see e.g. Furāt b. Furāt b. Ibrāhīm al-Kuḥfī (d. ca. 310/922), *Tafsīr Furāt*, edited by Moḥammad Kāẓim (Tehran, 1410/1990), pp. 503–507 and the other sources cited on p. 505, note 663; Abū 'Alī al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1153), *Majma' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-qur'ān* (Beirut, 1374–7/1955–7), vol. 29, pp. 53–55; al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 39, pp. 239ff. See also the Zaydī commentator Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Aḥmad al-Shawkānī (d. 1250/1834), *Fath al-qadīr: al-jāmi' bayna fannay al-rivāya wa-l-dirāya min 'ilm al-tafsīr* (al-Mansura, 1814/1997), vol. 5, pp. 382–383. It is noteworthy, however, that these sources also offer alternative identifications for the anonymous person mentioned by the Qur'ānic verse, such as Abū Jahl, one of the chief opponents of Muḥammad in Mecca.

⁶⁵ The word is employed here in its eschatological sense, denoting the bridge separating paradise and hell.

⁶⁶ *MA*, p. 78, lines 16–19. For 'Alī's title *qasīm*, or alternatively *qasīm al-nār*, see *Lisan al-'Arab*, root *qsm*. Ibn Manẓūr, the author of the *Lisān*, ascribes to 'Alī the statement *anā qasīm al-nār*, interpreted as referring to 'Alī's assignment of his supporters and opponents to paradise or hell.

⁶⁷ *MA*, pp. 77–78. Cf. the discussion above of 'īd al-aḍḥā.

by noting that this day is also the “day of Seth, Idrīs, Aaron, Joshua b. Nun, Asaf, Simon (Peter), and ‘the faithful trustee’ (*al-amīn al-ma’mūn*=‘Alī).” In other words, it is the day on which the *ma’nā* revealed itself in these persons in the seven historical cycles.

Having described the various dimensions of the day, al-Ṭabarānī proceeds as is his custom to liturgical aspects, offering a set of instructions for rituals to be performed on that day. Bathed and adorned, the believers should gather, verifying that no adversaries, children, slaves, or female servants are present. They should then sacrifice an animal, burn incense, and offer drink and food to the participants. The meal over, the believers should wash their hands and pour the water remaining from the ritual washing of the hands at the corners of the house where the ceremony took place. At this point the sacramental wine (*‘abd al-nūr*)⁶⁸ should be served, accompanied by a censer of incense; all the participants should partake of the wine—an action called here “the mandatory duty” (*al-fard al-wājib*)⁶⁹—extend their hands to God, kiss each other,⁷⁰ and recite a prayer expounding formulas in praise of ‘Alī the god and a summary of the various merits of the day.⁷¹ This being a day when prayers are believed to be especially efficacious, the believers are encouraged to “pray for the absent to return, for the sick to be cured, and for the poor to be granted God’s mercy” (*wa-d’ū fī hādhā al-yawm li-ghā’ibikum ya’ud wa-li-marīḍikum fa-yushfā wa-li-fuqarā’ikum yurḥamū*).⁷² Finally, fasting on this day is highly recommended as it is considered a meritorious act of piety.⁷³

Another tradition, cited from the treatise entitled *al-Muqṇā’a* by the Imāmī theologian Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. al-Nu’mān, better known as al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022), also offers ritual instructions for the Ghadīr festival. These instructions, however—only

⁶⁸ On the sacramental wine (*‘abd al-nūr*) see below, chap. 8, p. 169, with note 25.

⁶⁹ It seems that this idiom—here denoting the sacramental wine—is employed in reference to religious duties of a distinctly sectarian nature. Cf. below, chap. 7, p. 157.

⁷⁰ *MA*, p. 64, line 15. The kiss, not familiar to us from Muslim liturgy, may reflect the Christian kiss of peace (*pax*), the mutual greeting of the faithful in the Eucharistic liturgy. For kisses in the Nuṣayrī initiation rite, see *Bākūra*, pp. 5–6.

⁷¹ *MA*, pp. 64–68. For the liturgical development of the Nuṣayrī mass and its formulas, see *Catechism*, questions 76–78, 87–88, 91–92, in chap. 8, below. See also *Bākūra*, pp. 38–46 (=Salisbury, pp. 266–282).

⁷² *MA*, p. 67, lines 17–18.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 79, line 16.

partly resembling the foregoing ones—are addressed to Shī'īs in general.⁷⁴ Apart from the obligation to wash, adorn themselves, and wear their best clothes, the believers are instructed to perform the dawn prayer, including the normative Muslim practice of two genuflections (*rak'atān*).⁷⁵ In each of these the believer should recite the following Qur'ānic texts: *sūra* 1 (*al-fātiḥa*); *sūra* 112 (*al-ikhhlāṣ*) eleven times; *sūra* 97 (*al-qadr*) ten times, and the “verse of the throne” (*āyat al-kursī*) ten times. Then follows the habitual prayer for Muḥammad and the holy family, and maledictions upon the enemies of Islam. The believer is reminded, however, that “having completed [this outward prayer] he should address an esoteric prayer to God” (*thumma al-du'ā' ilā llāh ba'da al-farāgh min hādhā l-faṣl bāṭinan*).⁷⁶

3.2. *The Day of 'Āshūrā'* (īd 'āshūr⁷⁷)

The very designation of the day of 'Āshūrā' as a festival (īd) already indicates the conception elaborated by al-Ṭabarānī that, unlike Shī'ī Islam, the Nuṣayrīs do not consider this a day of mourning. The pattern employed by al-Ṭabarānī in discussing the day of Ghadīr Khumm—namely, that normative Shī'ī tradition adheres to outward aspects of historical events, falling short of perceiving their inner and more essential aspects—is even more pronounced in his treatment of the day of 'Āshūrā'. The rebellion against the Umayyads—headed by 'Alī's son Ḥusayn—which ended with the death of Ḥusayn and other descendants of the Prophet at Karbalā' (in the month of Muḥarram 61/October 680) is given a radical interpretation by al-Ṭabarānī. His acquaintance with the traditional accounts concerning this uprising can be gleaned from the cursory description offered at the head of the chapter on 'Āshūrā'. However, as in other cases, he emphasizes that this does not tally with the Nuṣayrī view of the historical sequence of events but is the version narrated by “Sunnīs and outward Shī'īs” (*al-āmma wa-ẓāhiriyyat al-shī'a*).⁷⁸ According to

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 80–81. See especially the beginning of the passage (p. 80, line 17–p. 81, line 5), which replicates almost exactly al-Mufīd's *Muqni'a* in *Silsilat mu'allafāt al-shaykh al-Mufīd* (Beirut, 1414/1993), vol. 14, pp. 203–206.

⁷⁵ For detailed instructions regarding the various prayers and the number of genuflections to be performed during them, see *Catechism*, question 101, in chap. 8, below pp. 197–199.

⁷⁶ *MA*, p. 81, lines 9–10.

⁷⁷ This is the name employed by al-Ṭabarānī for the day of 'Āshūrā'. In our discussion, however, we have opted for the latter, more common, appellation.

⁷⁸ *MA*, p. 107, line 4.

them, Ḥusayn was killed in the uprising at Karbalā', but this position is rejected outright by the author of *MA*, who offers a docetic interpretation of Ḥusayn's death. Being at Karbalā', Ḥusayn bestowed his outward image (*alqā shibhahu*)⁷⁹ on his supporter Ḥanzala b. As'ad al-Shibāmī,⁸⁰ who was in turn ransomed and replaced by "the second" (*al-thānī*), namely 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, the archetypal enemy of the Shī'a, also referred to as "the devil of devils and Pharaoh of Pharaohs" (*iblis al-abālisa wa-fir'awn l-farā'ina*).⁸¹

A more elaborate formulation of this docetic concept appears later in a tradition ascribed to the Imam Ja'far al-Šādiq. Commenting on Ḥanzala's title *al-mufaddā* (the ransomed) in a verse attributed to the 'Abbasid poet Abū Nuwās,⁸² al-Šādiq explains that Ḥanzala was so named "because he ransomed his lord al-Ḥusayn with himself, and his lord [al-Ḥusayn] in turn ransomed him with the opponent⁸³ (i.e. 'Umar). Murder and bloodshed will come upon the opponent, may God curse him, while doubt and error [will come] upon the deniers, those who maintain that death occurred to our lord al-Ḥusayn" (*li-annah faddā mawlānā al-Ḥusayn bi-nafsihi fa-faddāhu mawlāhu bi-l-didd wa-l-qatl wa-l-dam wāqī' [!] bi-l-didd la'anahu llāh wa-l-shakk wa-l-ḡalāl 'alā l-munkirīna al-qā'ilīna inna l-qatla wāqī' bi-mawlānā l-Ḥusayn*).⁸⁵

It is noteworthy that the concept of Ḥusayn being ransomed by 'Umar is elaborated by al-Ṭabarānī in contradistinction to another interpretation that he ascribes to Imāmī Shī'īs and to the Mufawwiḍa.⁸⁶

⁷⁹ Ibid., lines 9–10.

⁸⁰ According to Shī'ī tradition, this Ḥanzala was one of the martyrs at the battle of Karbalā'. See e.g. al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, *al-Irshād fī ma'rifat ḥujaj Allāh 'alā l-'ibād* (Najaf, 1381/1962), p. 238. See also M. Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam: A Study of the Devotional Aspects of 'Ashūrā' in Twelver Shī'ism* (The Hague, 1978), p. 116.

⁸¹ *MA*, p. 110, lines 4–5. Cf. also ibid., p. 127, line 7, where a similar interpretation is related by al-Khaṣībī in the name of his teacher 'Alī b. Aḥmad al-Ṭurbā'ī.

⁸² Chronologically, it is unlikely that al-Šādiq would comment on a verse by Abū Nuwās who was still a youth when al-Šādiq died (148/765).

⁸³ The notion of opponents or opposites (*didd*, pl. *addād*, or alternatively *nidd*, pl. *andād*) of the Shī'a, and hence of God Himself, is widespread in Shī'ī literature. On its occurrences there, see Kohlberg, "Some Imāmī Shī'ī Views on the *Ṣaḥāba*," pp. 165–166.

⁸⁴ This of course can be read as *faddā*, in the first form. The reading in the second form is, however, compatible with the form *mufaddan*, apparently preferred by the poet for prosodic reasons.

⁸⁵ *MA*, p. 109, lines 6–8.

⁸⁶ Those who believe in *tafwīḍ* (literally: the delegation of authority), an opinion held by heterodox Shī'ī circles. The Mufawwiḍa maintain that God, after having created the Imams, delegated to them the authority to continue the work of creation. On this group, see Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shī'ite Islam*, pp. 21–29, 38–49.

According to this interpretation, cited from an untitled treatise by al-Khaṣībī (and evidenced in the proto-Nuṣayrī work *Kitāb al-haft wa l-aẓilla*⁸⁷), Ḥusayn's martyrdom is interpreted as ransom for Ishmael's sacrifice.⁸⁸ Already in the primordial world of shadows (*fi-l-aẓilla*), recounts al-Khaṣībī, Ishmael knew he was the one destined to be sacrificed. Abraham then addressed all his future descendants, especially the chosen among them (*ahl al-ṣafwa minhum*), asking who would be willing to sacrifice himself in ransom for his son Ishmael, but "all descendants except Ḥusayn held back" (*amsakat al-dhurriyya illā l-Ḥusayn*).⁸⁹ The Qur'ānic verse—37:107—"and we ransomed him with a mighty sacrifice" (*wa-fadaynāhu bi-dhabḥin 'aẓīm*) was hence interpreted as an allusion to Ḥusayn, who "is greater in ransom and importance than Ishmael" (*a'zamu fidā'an wa-qadran min Ismā'īl*).⁹⁰ Al-Ṭabarānī—seemingly aware of a traditional exegetical affinity between the figures of Ishmael and Ḥusayn⁹¹—nevertheless stresses that the concept that Ḥusayn stood as ransom for Ishmael is unfounded (*mā lā aṣla lahu*),⁹² opting for the alternative interpretation, mentioned above, that Ishmael was ransomed by 'Umar, who in turn became the substitute for Ḥusayn.

Al-Ṭabarānī likens the error committed by "all Muslims and by the outward Shī'īs" (*kāffat al-āmma min al-muslimīna wa-zāhiriyyat al-Shī'a*)⁹³ to that of the Christians regarding Jesus—erroneously believing in his death and crucifixion. The true interpretation, states the author, is that spelled out in the Qur'ān (4:157)—that Jesus was neither slain nor crucified "but only a likeness of that was shown to them" (*wa-lākin shubbiha lahum*). The tendency to draw an analogy between Ḥusayn and Jesus is quite common in Shī'ī writings.⁹⁴ Our text,

⁸⁷ *Kitāb al-haft wa-l-aẓilla*, pp. 97–101. For a partial English translation of this chapter, see Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam*, pp. 246–247.

⁸⁸ Referring to the traditional interpretation of Abraham's prophetic dream (Q. 37:101).

⁸⁹ *MA*, p. 109, line 15.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, line 17.

⁹¹ On this affinity, see Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. 'Alī Ibn Bābawayhi, *Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā* (Najaf, 1390/1970), vol. 2, pp. 187–188 (chap. 17); al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 12, pp. 121–140.

⁹² *MA*, p. 109, line 17.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 107, line 12.

⁹⁴ See e.g. Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam*, pp. 34–36, 116; G. Kanazi, "The Massacre of al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī: Between History and Folklore," in *Studies in Canonical and Popular Literature*, edited by S. Ballas and R. Snir (Toronto, 1998), pp. 23–36; K. Sindawe, "The 'Maqātil' in Shī'ite Literature" (Ph.D. diss., Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan, 2000), pp. 145–148 (Hebrew).

however, broadens this analogy to include a docetic interpretation of their deaths, a motif more frequently used to characterize the affinity between Jesus and 'Alī.⁹⁵ In *MA*, Ḥusayn is explicitly identified with Jesus: "...for our master Ḥusayn is Christ and Christ is Ḥusayn (*li-anna sayyidanā l-Ḥusayna minhu al-salām huwa al-masīḥ wa-l-masīḥ fa-huwa l-Ḥusayn*).⁹⁶ Another, even more precise formulation of this concept, appears in two verses from an ode by al-Khaṣībī describing the scene at Karbalā':

Peace be upon him whose person God veiled / but revealed to the enemies a likeness in his image.

(*salāmun 'alā man ḥajjaba llāhu shakhṣahu / wa-azhara li-l-a'dā'i shibhan ka-ṣūratihī*)

Like Jesus, and [indeed] he is Jesus, with no difference between them / and no doubt that he [Ḥusayn] is of his kin.

(*ka-'Īsā wa-huwa 'Īsā wa-lā farqa baynahum[!] / wa-lā shakka fīhi annahu min sarīratihī*).⁹⁷

Ḥusayn's death being rejected, any mourning rite performed on the annual day of 'Āshūrā' is deemed meaningless and is strongly condemned. In an ode dedicated to the day of 'Āshūrā', al-Khaṣībī explicitly excludes from among his followers those who mourn Ḥusayn's death on the day of 'Āshūrā': "He who bewails his lord, I am not, thanks God, of his party" (*wa-bākiyan yabkī 'alā rabbihi lastu bi-ḥamdi llāhi min ḥizbihi*).⁹⁸ Unlike Shī'īs (labelled here *aḍḍād*—"opponents"), who mourn on this day, weep and wear black, "the unitarians—that is, the Nuṣayrīs—rejoice and are merry, praise God, beseech Him and confess His unity, in contrast to the deniers" (*wa-sta'malat rijāl al-tawḥīd fīhi al-faraḥa wa-l-ibtihāja wa-l-thanā'a 'alā llāh subḥānahu wa-l-taḍarru'a bi-tawḥīdihi khilāfan 'alā mā qālahu al-munkirūna*).⁹⁹

A poetic and succinct summary of the Nuṣayrī interpretation of the day of 'Āshūrā' is offered in the aforementioned ode of al-Khaṣībī.¹⁰⁰ It stresses especially the dichotomy between Shī'īs in general and Nuṣayrīs, the latter styled here by al-Khaṣībī as "the true Shī'a"

⁹⁵ See above, chap. 1, pp. 21–22. For this tendency in heterodox Shī'ī circles, see Bar-Asher, "The Qur'ān Commentary Ascribed to Imam Ḥasan al-'Askarī," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 24 (2000), pp. 358–379, esp. pp. 369–374.

⁹⁶ *MA*, p. 107, lines 16–17.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 108, lines 11–12. The same verses are cited again on p. 111, lines 13–14.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 110, line 13.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, lines 9–11.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 110–115.

(*shīʿat al-ḥaqq*).¹⁰¹ Al-Khaṣībī praises those who go on pilgrimage to the shrine at Karbalāʾ, knowing the truth of Ḥusayn's mystery.¹⁰² He further urges those lacking this knowledge to beseech God, "lord of the stairways" (*dhū-l-maʿārij*),¹⁰³ to guide them toward "the hidden inner knowledge" (*ʿilm bāṭin mastūr*) of this mystery. Al-Khaṣībī elegantly employs the classical metaphor of climbing a ladder to depict the mystical endeavours of the true believer to attain the divine mystery:

Seek a ladder, ascend to the truth and roam around the essence of hidden knowledge

(*wa-btaghū sullaman wa-fīrū ilā l-ḥaqqi wa-jūlū bi-kunhi ʿilmin sarīrī*)

Rise heavenward to the Veil, the Veil of God, master of the throne and the noble rank (*wa-tasāmaw ilā l-ḥijābi, ḥijābi llāhi, dhi-l-ʿarshi wa-l-maqāmi l-athīrī*).¹⁰⁴

Arriving in his mystical wanderings at the divine realm, various secrets are revealed to the true believer. He gains knowledge of the holy scriptures of all religions¹⁰⁵ and recognizes that there is truth neither in the widespread accounts relating that Ḥusayn "found his death... under the horses of the cursed Ibn Ziyād, nor that he is buried in a tomb" (*bi-annahu māta ... taḥta khayli al-lāʿini ibni Ziyādīn, lā wa-lā kāna mulḥadan fī-l-qubūr*).¹⁰⁶ The believer further perceives the true essence of Ḥusayn, namely that "he is the lord of creation" (*annahu ṣāḥib al-badā [!] wa-l-fuṭūr*).¹⁰⁷

This tension between the historical Ḥusayn, the martyr of Karbalāʾ, and the hidden, divine figure is further elaborated by al-Ṭabarānī in a chapter entitled "The Occultation and the Manifestation" (*al-ghayba wa-l-zuhūr*). This chapter opens with the story of a meeting between a gnostic believer (*baʿḍ al-muʾminīna al-ʿarīfīna*) and an anonymous person. When asked whence he has come, the latter answers that he has come from the martyr's shrine (*mashhad*). The gnostic then asks: "When did he [al-Ḥusayn] at all disappear that he has reappeared?" (*matā ghāba ḥattā shahida*).¹⁰⁸ Thereupon the foreigner corrects himself, saying: "[Indeed, I come] from the place of [Ḥusayn's] ascen-

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 113, line 10.

¹⁰² Ibid., lines 9–10.

¹⁰³ Referring to Q. 70:3.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 114, lines 1–2.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., line 8.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., lines 17–18.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., line 12.

¹⁰⁸ This paradoxical question seems to hint at the basic astonishment concerning the belief in Ḥusayn's martyrdom.

sion (*al-miʿrāj*).” The gnostic pursues the point: “When did Ḥusayn descend [to earth] that he indeed had to ascend?” Being twice corrected, the foreigner then asks the gnostic: “How should I then express myself (*fa-kayfa aqūlu*)?” The gnostic teaches him that he should have said he had come “from the place of occultation and the renewal of manifestation” (*mawḍiʿ al-ghayba wa-tajdid al-zuhūr*).¹⁰⁹

To elucidate the inherent tension between Ḥusayn’s occultation and revelation, the gnostic sage introduces a mythical-magical dimension into the story, employing a concept reminiscent of the dual manifestation of Christ: in weakness in his historical appearance and in glory in the Parousia. He recounts that on the eve of the uprising at Karbalāʾ, Ḥusayn revealed himself to his followers in his “form of weakness” (*fi šūrat al-ʿajz*), saying that since his enemies were not interested in any one except himself, they—namely his followers—should disperse and be released from their duty of allegiance to him. However, when Ḥusayn realized that they refused to abandon him to his fate, he revealed himself to them in his luminous essence (*tarāʾā lahum bi-l-nūrāniyya*).¹¹⁰ They then acknowledged his divinity. Here the author offers a peculiar explanation of Ḥusayn’s docetic death. Out of the good deeds of the weak among the enemy present on the battlefield, the divine Ḥusayn created a person whom the enemies killed, erroneously regarding him as Ḥusayn.

Al-Ṭabarānī then proceeds with accounts illustrating this dialectical tension between occultation and revelation. In one of these a certain believer is asked:

“In what way did you come to know God?” He said: “[God] revealed Himself, and I found Him.” He was then asked: “How did He reveal Himself so that you found Him?” He answered: “When He addressed the world saying:¹¹¹ ‘Am I not your Lord?’ they said: ‘yes we testify.’ [God] then hid Himself and I knew Him.” He was further asked: “How did He hide Himself and yet you knew Him?” He replied: “Through His acts toward me. God then absented Himself but I observed Him.” He was [finally] asked: “How did God absent Himself and yet you saw Him?” He answered: “He did not absent Himself in annihilation but in fact it was I who was absent from Him by my evil deeds” (*bi-mā ʿarafta llāha? qāla: zahara fa-wajadtuhu; qāla: kayfa zahara fa-wajadtahu? qāla: haythu*

¹⁰⁹ *MA*, p. 115, line 14.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 116, line 1.

¹¹¹ Referring to the well-known “verse of the covenant” (Q. 7:172). On this verse in Imāmī exegesis, see R. Gramlich, “Der Urvertrag in der Koranauslegung (zu Sura 7,172–173),” *Der Islam* 60 (1983), pp. 205–230; Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shiʿism*, p. 34.

and all the other prophets, angels, and believers waiting to hear his words.¹¹⁹ It is further stated that he arrives at Karbalā' every year on the day of 'Āshūrā', surrounded by all the creatures of heaven and earth.¹²⁰

A cluster of mythical accounts emphasizing the supernatural features and miraculous powers of Ḥusayn is included in a chapter entitled *ḵabār al-ṭufūf*—namely, the story of the [day of] al-ṭufūf, a place in the vicinity of Karbalā'.¹²¹ Ḥusayn is presented progressively in these accounts, first playing the role of the Mahdī, fighting his enemies and performing miracles,¹²² then being the deity itself, explicitly proclaiming: "I am God the All-high, the All-glorious" (*anā allāh al-'ālī al-'azīm*).¹²³

As for his miraculous powers, it is related that after the enemy on the battlefield of Karbalā' prevented his disciples from drinking from the Euphrates, Ḥusayn summoned them, placed his thumb on the palm of his hand (*waḍa'a ibhāmahu fī rāḥatihi*), and water gushed out of his thumb. All the disciples drank from the water, "the likeness of which no one had drunk in this world" (*sharāban mā sharibahu aḥad fī dār al-dunyā*).¹²⁴ He then ordered a table (*mā'ida*) to be set before them and nourished them with food and drink from paradise.¹²⁵ All this, stresses the author, "was witnessed by numerous people of al-Kūfa." The author then tells of another repast, this time a spiritual one, that took place in the mountains of Raḍwā, the messianic location evoked earlier. Ḥusayn ordered his disciples to repair to there—now as embodied souls (*wa-hum arwāḥ wa-lahum ṣūrat al-abdān*)¹²⁶—to be nourished by the food and drink of the place.

The dialectical tension between Ḥusayn's human nature (*nāsūt*) and

¹¹⁹ *MA*, p. 116, line 20–p. 117, line 1.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 117, lines 1–2.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 117–124. The *ṭufūf* events became a traditional theme in Shī'ī martyrology. See e.g. Ibn Ṭāwūs (d. 664/1266) in his *al-ṭuhf* (or *al-maḥfūf*) 'alā qatlā al-ṭufūf, described in E. Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work: Ibn Ṭāwūs and his Library* (Leiden, 1992), p. 42; Sindawe, "The 'Maqātīl' in Shī'ite Literature," pp. 93–97.

¹²² *MA*, p. 119, lines 1–12.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 118, line 19.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 119, line 5.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, lines 8–9. The motif of Ḥusayn's last meal with his disciples is apparently associated with Q. 5:112, which in turn seems to refer to the scene of the Last Supper, or to Peter's vision of the heavenly table (Acts 10:10). See W. Rudolph, *Die Abhängigkeit des Qorans von Judentum und Christentum* (Stuttgart, 1922), pp. 81ff.

¹²⁶ *MA*, p. 119, lines 11–12.

his divine nature (*lāhūt*)¹²⁷ also found its way into liturgical texts, entitled *ziyārāt*, which are to be recited annually on the day of 'Āshūrā'. The following passage, the first of two *ziyārāt* cited in *MA*, illustrates this dialectical tension:

You are greatly exalted above what evildoers say, and above their fabrication that you are buried in this place, or that you were defeated and vanquished. Indeed you are the creator of death and annihilation; you are the living and everlasting, the eternal and primordial, Lord of lords and God of gods. How can annihilation befall you when you created it, and how can death apply to you when you made it? How then can your enemies make you die when it is you who makes them live or die according to your will? (*subhānaka 'ammā yaftarūna annaka fī hādhihi al-buq'a madfūn aw maghlūb wan kabīran wa-'ammā yaftarūna annaka fī hādhihi al-buq'a madfūn aw maghlūb aw maqhūr, bal anta khāliq al-mawt wa-l-fanā' wa-anta al-hayy al-qayyūm wa-l-azal al-qadīm wa-rabb al-arbāb wa-ilāh al-āliha; kayfa yaqā'u bika al-fanā' wa-anta khāliquhu wa-kayfa yaḥillu bika al-qatl wa-anta munshi'uhu; am kayfa yaqbiḍu 'alayka a'dā'uka wa-anta tuhyihim wa-tumītuḥum 'alā mā tashā'u kayfa tashā'u*).¹²⁸

As in other sections of *MA*, the discussion of the day of 'Āshūrā' ends with a prayer for this day, which, significantly, epitomizes its major features: upholding Ḥusayn's divinity and categorically denying his death as well as any other manifestation of his humanity.¹²⁹

3.3. *The Day of 'Umar's Death* (maqtal dulām)

The attitude of the Shī'a to the first three caliphs as archenemies who conspired to deprive 'Alī of his rightful claim to the leadership of the Muslim community after the Prophet's death is well known.¹³⁰ Prominent among these caliphs is 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. Shī'i tradition commemorates the day of the assassination of 'Umar (*dulām*)¹³¹ on the ninth of the month of Rabī' al-Awwal,¹³² but it seems not to have developed into an important day in the Shī'i calendar.¹³³ Nuṣayrī

¹²⁷ Ibid., pp. 125–126.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 125, lines 7–11.

¹²⁹ Ibid., pp. 131–132.

¹³⁰ See e.g. Kohlberg, "Some Imāmī Shī'i Views on the *Ṣaḥāba*," pp. 143–175; Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, pp. 204–223.

¹³¹ For *dulām* as a pejorative for 'Umar, meaning "black," see Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, pp. 107, 116.

¹³² An alternative date for this day in Shī'i tradition was the 29th of Dhū al-Ḥijja. See Kohlberg, *Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work*, pp. 176, 234.

¹³³ For the celebration of the anniversary of 'Umar's assassination in modern Iran, see the account given by Robert Binning, a representative of the East India Com-

tradition, however, carried that Shī'ī attitude toward the first caliphs to new extremes. It seems to be in this context that the day of 'Umar's death became a special festival. The traditions recounted in *MA* reflect the novelty of this festival among Nuṣayrī circles and supply various etiologic explanations for the circumstances of its recent introduction into the Nuṣayrī calendar. This holy day appears also in the above-mentioned list of holy days appended in Ms. Paris, arabe 6182. In al-Adhanī's list of Nuṣayrī festivals, however, it appears under the name "the Second Ghadīr."¹³⁴

In one such tradition a certain Abū 'Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad b. Abī-l-'Abbās recounts a story, traced through al-Khaṣībī to the tenth Imam 'Alī al-Askarī, describing the visit of al-Qāsim b. Salama with a group of devotees to the sage Abū Muḥammad b. Ayyūb al-Qummī. Al-Qummī asks Ibn Salama to present a letter from him to the Imam. When they visit the Imam they find him acting in a solemn manner suited to a holy day: drying his beard after bathing, lighting incense, and putting on a special robe. The reason for this festive conduct soon becomes clear. The Imam informs his guests that it is the ninth of Rabī' al-Awwal, describing to them the significance of that day and rebuking them for not being aware of its uniqueness. He further informs them that it is a special day when miracles can happen; special requests are therefore appropriate on this day. As with other Nuṣayrī holy days, the importance of this day is demonstrated by its

pany in the mid-19th century: "On the thirteenth of January, just before we left Sheerauz, the festival of Omar's assassination (*īdī omar kooshān*) took place. On this day, it is the practice of Sheeahs to make large images, something like our Guys on the fifth of November, of sticks and paper or fragile materials, the insides of which are filled with bonbons. These effigies, intended to represent the obnoxious Khaleefa, are paraded about the town, and then torn and hacked to pieces, while there is a general scramble for the sweetmeats they contain. The prince made a great public feast for all his dependants, the harmony of which was enlivened by the humane spectacle of sundry bullfights, besides feats of jugglers and ropedancers, with fireworks at night. Some Persians suppose that any sins they may commit on this day—suicide, I believe, excepted—are not counted against them hereafter; and accordingly they have license to take their full swing of iniquity" (R. B. Binning, *A Journal of Two Years' Travel in Persia, Ceylon etc.* [London, 1857]), vol. 1, pp. 428–429. See also H. Masset, *Croyances et coutumes persanes* (Paris, 1938), pp. 166–169. Another report describes the annual celebration of this day in the town of Gulpāygān at about the same time. For this celebration a Jew was dressed as 'Umar and was paraded through the town on a donkey, derided and beaten by the bystanders; in the evening he would be slaughtered and his flesh distributed among the celebrants. See A. Ben Yaakov, *The Jews of Babylon in the Diaspora* (Jerusalem, 1985), pp. 497–498 (Hebrew). We thank our colleagues S. Soroudi and D. Yerushalmi for these references.

¹³⁴ See *Bākura*, p. 35.

being identified with the day on which a series of significant events in biblical and post-biblical history took place. Among these are the rescue of Jonah and the people of Nineveh, the drowning of Pharaoh and his people, David's killing of Goliath, Asaf's bringing the throne of Bilqīs (the Queen of Sheba) to King Solomon, the creation of Eve, and the catastrophe of the "people of the elephant" (*aṣḥāb al-fīl*)¹³⁵—namely the Ethiopians who invaded pre-Islamic Arabia.¹³⁶

The Imam, this tradition continues, instructs Ibn Ayyūb on a series of ritual acts that the gnostic believer must perform on that day: taking a morning bath, putting on clean garments, lighting incense, and giving alms to the poor.¹³⁷ The Imam concludes by calling on Ibn Ayyūb to return to his place, convene his fellow believers, and instruct them to follow the teachings of the Imam by maintaining the customs of the holy day—eating, drinking and rejoicing.¹³⁸ Ibn Ayyūb obeys the Imam's orders and gathers his brothers in faith to his home in 'Askar Sāmarrā', where he performs the special ritual. His friends marvel at it and inquire about its meaning and about the special day. Festive gatherings in private homes on this day may reflect the development of ritual gatherings that later became the common form of worship among the Nuṣayrīs.¹³⁹ The astonishment of Ibn Ayyūb's friends at the unfamiliar ceremony performed on that day may indicate the novelty of this holy day among early Nuṣayrīs.

The story continues to relate the merits of Ibn Ayyūb and the special rewards bestowed upon him by the Imam for following his instructions in performing the duties of the holy day. These merits and the special powers of the Imam are woven into a tale of wondrous and miraculous events in which Ibn Ayyūb and the Imam play the major roles.¹⁴⁰

Although al-Ṭabarānī seems to have recognized the novelty of the holy day of *maqtal dulām* he sought to anchor it in traditions going back to the prophet of Islam. In these traditions *maqtal dulām* is depicted as an all-Shī'ī holy day observed already by Muḥammad. One of these traditions relates that certain disciples turned to the Shī'ī

¹³⁵ Referring to Q: 106:1.

¹³⁶ *MA*, p. 135.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 133. This section is followed by a long discussion of the ethics of charity, ending with the warning that whoever does not act benevolently toward the needy will be punished by transmigration (*Ibid.*, p. 137, line 6).

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 137, lines 14–15.

¹³⁹ See e.g. Dussaud, *Histoire et religion des Nuṣayrīs*, pp. 19–20; *Bākūra*, pp. 34–36.

¹⁴⁰ *MA*, pp. 139–143.

scholar Aḥmad b. Ishāq al-Qummī,¹⁴¹ a devotee of the Imam ‘Alī al-‘Askarī (d. 254/868), to resolve a dispute regarding Abū-l-Khaṭṭāb, the eponymous founder of the Shī‘ī heterodox sub-sect known as al-Khaṭṭābiyya. A maidservant of the sage emerged and told them he was busy because of the holy day. The disciples were astonished; they knew of only four holy days: ‘īd al-ḥijra, ‘īd al-adḥā, the day of Ghadīr Khumm, and Friday. The maidservant pointed out that al-Qummī taught, in the name of the Imam, that this day, the ninth of Rabī‘ al-Awwal, was the most important of all Shī‘ī holy days. Then al-Qummī himself came out to them, arrayed in a festive attire, and spoke to them about the holy day and its significance, telling them what he had learned from the Imam when staying with him in the city of Sāmarrā’. Al-Qummī relates that when the Imam was asked whether he was instituting a new holy day for the Shī‘īs, he replied that this was the most important holy day of all.¹⁴²

The story serves as a framework for another account, traced to the Prophet, concerning the day of *maḡtal dulām*. In this account Ḥudhayfa b. Yamān, the renowned pro-‘Alid companion of the Prophet, is said to have paid a visit to the Prophet on that day and found him dining together with his two grandchildren, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. The Prophet blessed them, saying: “This is the day when God will take hold of His enemy and the enemy of your grandfather, and will answer your mother’s prayer; this is the day when God will kill your enemy. . . . This is the day when the Pharaoh of my family, the evildoer and usurper of its rights, will be lost” (*fa-innahu al-yawm alladhī yaqbiḍu allāh fihī ‘alā ‘aduwwihī wa-‘aduwwi jaddikumā wa-yastajibu fihī du‘ā’a ummikumā kullān fa-innahu al-yawm alladhī yaqtulu fihī ‘aduwwakumā. . . . fa-innahu al-yawm alladhī yufqadu fihī Fir‘awn ahl baytī wa-zālimuhum wa-ghāṣib ḥaqqihim*).¹⁴³ Upon hearing these predictions Ḥudhayfa is perplexed and asks: “Is there in the midst of your community a man who will disgrace this sanctity (*wa-fī ummatika man yahtiku hādhihi al-ḥurma*)?”¹⁴⁴ The Prophet answers affirmatively. Without explicitly referring to ‘Umar, his answer incorporates a series of traditional Shī‘ī defamations commonly levelled at the second caliph. This paragraph stands out among Shī‘ī descriptions of ‘Umar in its

¹⁴¹ On him see Abū ‘Amr Muḥammad b. ‘Umar Al-Kishshī, *Kitāb al-rijāl* (Najaf, n.d.), pp. 466–467; Abū-l-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Najāshī, *Rijāl al-Najāshī* (Qumm, 1407H), p. 91.

¹⁴² *MA*, pp. 147–148.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 149, lines 5–10.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, lines 11–12.

long list of slanders, constituting an unusually virulent denigration of 'Umar. Muḥammad refers to 'Umar as the vicious leader of the hypocrites (*khabīth min al-munāfiqīna, yatarā* 'asu 'alayhim),¹⁴⁵ a fornicator in his community, a leader astray from the Lord's path, a falsifier of the book of God and the *sunna* of the Prophet, a usurper of the inheritance of the descendants of the Prophet, who attributes knowledge to himself, offends against the (institution of the) Imāma after the Prophet, desecrates the sacred fortunes of God, and denies God, 'Alī, and the rights of Muḥammad's daughter (Fāṭima).¹⁴⁶

Hudhayfa urges the Prophet to pray for the imminent destruction of 'Umar. Muḥammad replies that he does not dare to interfere with divine predestination. Nevertheless, he has already petitioned God that the day of 'Umar's death might become the most propitious day for the Shī'īs. God promises Muḥammad that all enemies of the Shī'a will undergo punishment and suffering after the resurrection. 'Umar in his role as the archenemy of the Shī'a is further demonized by being transferred to the celestial sphere. He is now depicted as the epitome of the sinner against God, with the celestial powers participating in the celebration of his death.¹⁴⁷ The tradition concludes by returning to its narrative framework, where the disciples thank Ibn Ishāq for revealing to them the merits of this special day.

All these traditions focusing on the Imam 'Alī al-'Askarī seem to have been introduced into *MA* to enhance the status of the novel holy day of *maqtal dulām* and establish its legitimacy by tracing its roots to the Prophet. At the same time there emerges a clear awareness of this as a new holy day, not earlier than the time of 'Alī al-'Askarī. It is noteworthy that the heterodox Shī'ī component of the Nuṣaryī religion is translated here into the ritual calendar and does not remain in the domain of literature and theology.¹⁴⁸ Of note again is the attempt of the tradition to identify *maqtal dulām* as an all-Shī'ī holy day—a trend deviating from the first traditions cited here, which seem to characterize it already as sectarian.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., lines 12–13.

¹⁴⁶ *MA*, pp. 149–150. For a comprehensive list of defamations against 'Umar, see *ibid.*, p. 151.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 150.

¹⁴⁸ On the first three caliphs as the metaphysical manifestation of evil in the emanation of satanic powers, see *Bākūra*, p. 63 (=Salisbury, p. 287: "In all of the tabernacles [i.e. primordial cycles] thus enumerated, the Adversary or Satan consisted of three persons in one, namely Abū Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthmān").

The chapter on *maqtal dulām* includes two prayers for this day. The first¹⁴⁹ is of a general character, containing praise of God and a request for mercy and having nothing unusual or even particularly Shīʿī about it. This absence of any sectarian traits may suggest that it was intended outwardly for a wider public or was meant to dispel suspicion. In contradistinction, the second¹⁵⁰ is an outright and didactic Nuṣayrī prayer, unfolding the principal hierarchy of the divine realm and the various degrees of the believers.

3.4. *ʿĪd al-mubāhala*

The festival of the *mubāhala*,¹⁵¹ celebrated by the Nuṣayrīs on the twenty-first day of Dhū al-ḥijja, commemorates a well-known event in the hagiography of Muḥammad. It is believed to have taken place during a dispute on Christology and prophetology between Muḥammad and the Christians of Najrān. The Qurʾānic verse unanimously regarded as referring to this event is 3:61, known also as *āyat al-mubāhala*: “He whoso disputes with you, concerning him [i.e. Jesus], say ‘come now, let us call our sons and your sons, our wives and your wives, our slaves and your slaves; then let us humbly pray and so lay God’s curse upon the ones who lie” (*fa-man ḥājjaka fihi min ba’di mā jā’aka min al-‘ilm fa-qul ta’ālāw naḍ’u abnā’anā wa-abnā’akum wa-nisā’anā wa-nisā’akum wa-anfusānā wa-anfusakum thumma nabtahil fa-naḥ al la’nata llāh ‘alā l-kādhibīn*).

The dispute referred to in the Qurʾān concerns the question as to whether Jesus is the Son of God, as Christians claim, or merely a human messenger of God, as stated in the Qurʾān. The people of Najrān are reported to have requested a recess for further thought. The two disputing sides met in a place named *al-kathīb al-aḥmar* (the red dune), where the ordeal was to take place. When Shihāb b. Abī al-Tammām, the leader of the Najrānīs, noticed Muḥammad and his family—who according to both Sunnī and Shīʿī traditions included Fāṭima, ‘Alī, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn—he returned to his people telling them that he had seen people whose prayers could move mountains. The Najrānīs therefore declined Muḥammad’s challenge to an ordeal and instead agreed to a directive he imposed: to sign a treaty of

¹⁴⁹ *MA*, pp. 143–145.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 146–147.

¹⁵¹ The term *mubāhala*, among other meanings, denotes a kind of ordeal invoked by disputants, whether persons or parties.

protection, according to which they would be tolerated as Christians living under Muslim rule.¹⁵²

In its general outline, the Nuṣayrī account of the *mubāhala* scene in *MA* resembles descriptions in Sunnī and Shīʿī sources. However, its interpretation, not surprisingly, is in line with Nuṣayrī trinitarian doctrine. In addition to the Prophet and his family the Nuṣayrī account assigns a prominent role to Salmān. Later, when the Najrānī leader is astonished at seeing the holy family, it becomes clear that his reluctance to participate in a divine ordeal is due to his discovery that 'Alī is not a mere human being but God incarnate.¹⁵³ Moreover, the Najrānīs, challenged to accept the supremacy of Islam over their own religion, are surprised to realize that Muḥammad is in fact identical with Jesus,¹⁵⁴ being his tenth manifestation (*zuhūr 'āshir li-masīhina*). Consequently belief in the Christian trinity becomes identical with belief in the Nuṣayrī trinity. In other words, the significance of the *mubāhala* event is not the revelation of the Muslim creed to the Christians of Najrān but rather their induction into the Nuṣayrī trinitarian doctrine. Like other chapters in *MA*, the section on 'īd al-*mubāhala* concludes with two prayers for the day and ritual instructions.

3.5. The Festival of the Bed ('īd al-Firāsh)

The Festival of the Bed, celebrated by the Nuṣayrīs on the twenty-ninth of Dhū al-Hijja, commemorates the night of Muḥammad's emigration to Medina, when 'Alī slept in Muḥammad's bed to frustrate a plot to kill the Prophet. As al-Ṭabarānī rightly states, the section on this festival in *MA*¹⁵⁵ derives primarily from al-Khaṣībī's *Kitāb al-hidāya l-kubrā*.¹⁵⁶ The section does not however contain explicit Nuṣayrī features except for the concluding prayer, which includes common theological formulas regarding 'Alī's divinity.¹⁵⁷ Noteworthy, however,

¹⁵² For a concise analysis of the *mubāhala* event, see L. Massignon, "La Mubāhala: Étude sur la proposition d'ordalie faite par le prophète Muhammad aux chrétiens Balhārith du Nejrān en l'an 10/631 à Médine," *Annuaire de l'école pratique des hautes études* (Paris, 1943), pp. 5–26. See also W. Schmucker, "Mubāhala," *EF*, vol. 7, pp. 276–277.

¹⁵³ *MA*, p. 86, lines 18–19.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 87, lines 1–6.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 97–106.

¹⁵⁶ The first part of al-Ṭabarānī's account (*ibid.*, p. 97, line 3–p. 100, line 11) is quoted almost verbatim from al-Khaṣībī, *al-hidāya l-kubrā*, pp. 82–85.

¹⁵⁷ *MA*, pp. 105–106.

is the ode dedicated to the day, elegantly epitomizing the story of the dramatic night.¹⁵⁸ This ode is ascribed to a certain al-Ṣā'igh, who can be identified with the 10th-century Nuṣayrī sage Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥusayn b. Hārūn al-Ṣā'igh; the two short theological treatises by him which are known to us are published in the present work.¹⁵⁹

3.6. *The Night of Mid-Sha'bān* (laylat al-niṣf min sha'bān)

The night of mid-Sha'bān is a festival marked in the general Shī'ī calendar. In his book *al-Muqni'a*, al-Shaykh al-Mufīd describes it as one of the most significant nights in the year for divine blessings. According to Shī'ī tradition, 'Alī used to spend this night in vigils of prayer and reading the Qur'ān.¹⁶⁰ Beyond a few liturgical practices recorded by al-Mufīd, no further specific details regarding this day are known to us. It seems to have been imbued with a distinct character in the Nuṣayrī tradition.

The chapter in *MA* dealing with the night of mid-Sha'bān is divided into several sections. In the first, the author states that in the Khaṣībīan calendar it is the last holiday on which pilgrimages (*ziyārāt*) to the tombs of Ḥusayn and al-Khaṣībī are performed. As the text makes clear further on, these pilgrimages are primarily spiritual in nature, although physical pilgrimage is not explicitly excluded. This night also commemorates the occasion when Ḍalāl and Wabāl – namely, 'Umar and Abū Bakr,¹⁶¹ who conspired to assassinate 'Alī – were killed and revived by him. Believers should gather on that night, rejoice with 'abd al-nūr (the sacred wine), and recite praises to God and his isms, the *maqāms*, the *bābs*, and the persons of rank.¹⁶² Al-Ṭabarānī cites the *Rāstbāshiyya* epistle of al-Khaṣībī, in which the night of mid-Sha'bān is associated with "the night of power" (*laylat al-qadr*). The author states that six nights of Ramadan are consecrated to Faṭīma, these being further identified with Faṭīma as the person of "the night of power" and mid-Sha'bān.¹⁶³

The night of mid-Sha'bān is associated especially with the memory

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 104–105.

¹⁵⁹ See above, chaps. 4 and 5.

¹⁶⁰ Al-Mufīd, *al-Muqni'a*, pp. 226–227. See also 'Abbās Qummī, *Maṣāliḥ al-jinān*, translated from the Persian by M.R. Nūrī Najafī (Beirut, 1415/1995), p. 477.

¹⁶¹ The two derogatory names, Ḍalāl meaning "error" and Wabāl denoting "evil," are given to the camels representing the first two caliphs. See *MA*, pp. 164–171. This tradition is discussed later in this chapter.

¹⁶² Ibid., p. 154.

¹⁶³ Ibid., lines 12–13.

of the holy family. Fāṭima—named by her masculine form Fāṭir¹⁶⁴—together with her three sons are here identified with Muḥammad, his substance and his light.¹⁶⁵ The historical appearance of Fāṭima in the form of a female took place in order to confuse the weak-minded (*wa-innamā zaharat bi-l-ta'nīth... talbīsan 'alā hādhā l-khalq al-mankūs*).¹⁶⁶ Without elaborating, the author associates the night of mid-Sha'bān with the most important of the six distinguished nights of Ramadan. Thus the night of mid-Sha'bān seems to be connected to the cycle of Ramadan, evoking the symbolism of the holy family, especially its feminine aspects. The first of the six nights of Ramadan is identified with Khadīja, Muḥammad's first wife. It is in fact the night when God permitted men to have sexual relations with women.¹⁶⁷ The divine power manifested in *laylat al-qadr* is identified with Muḥammad, while *laylat al-qadr* itself is identified with Fāṭima, according to the principle explained above. Fāṭima is actually conceived of as the inner mystery of Muḥammad, and the two are in essence one and the same. The sixth of the distinguished nights of Ramadan—identified with the night of mid-Sha'bān—is the night when God discerns every important matter, namely the divine emanations of the three sons of 'Alī and the divine hierarchies that follow.

The second section of the chapter is entitled “The Story of the *naqīb* Muḥammad b. Sinān al-Zāhirī.” The first part of this section continues the earlier discussion regarding the symbolism of Fāṭima, telling the story of Muḥammad b. Sinān, who veiled himself. Asked by the gnostics to explain the reason for his veiling, he answers that he saw Muḥammad in seventy *maqāms* and in the Muḥammadan cycle, where he appeared as a woman with female organs and hair—namely, in the figure of Fāṭima (*ra'aytu l-sayyida l-akbara Muḥammad... fī sab'ina maqāman. . . . fa-lammā ra'aytuhu fī hādhīhi l-qubba l-Muḥammadiyya. . . . wa-qad zahara bi-l-farj wa-l-sha'r bi-l-ta'nīth*).¹⁶⁸ By introducing the fe-

¹⁶⁴ The need to present Fāṭima substantially as a masculine divine entity historically disguised as feminine is a common Nuṣayrī motif deriving from the tension created by introducing a feminine element into the divine realm. See above, chap. 1, p. 37.

¹⁶⁵ *MA*, p. 155, lines 4–5.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, lines 8–9; p. 156, lines 15–16.

¹⁶⁷ This patently refers to Qur'ān 2:187 “Permitted to you, upon the night of the fast, is to go in to your wives” (*uḥilla lakum laylata al-ṣiyām al-raḥṭh ilā nisā'ikum*), the classical verse permitting marital intercourse on the nights of the fast. The author of *MA* further elaborates the Qur'ānic permission, basing it on the special symbolism of the holy family.

¹⁶⁸ *MA*, p. 155, lines 13–14.

male symbolism of the divinity, this story enhances the hypostatic identity of Muḥammad and Fāṭima and emphasizes the androgynous conception of the deity and its feminine dimension.

Within the framework of commenting on *sūrat al-qadr* (Q. 97), al-Ṭabarānī further adduces a tradition from his teacher al-Jillī explaining the variant masculine names of Fāṭima: Fāṭim and Fāṭir. When questioned as to why Fāṭim was included among the persons of the *mīm*—namely Muḥammad—he replies that the heretics were denied recognition of her (*fuṭimū ‘an ma’rifatihā*). Since Muḥammad is identified with the divine power and Fāṭima is conceived of as his essence (*jawharatuhu*), she is equated with the night of power. The answer to the rhetorical question appearing in the *sūra* (verse 2)—“And what shall teach you what is the night of power?” (*wa-mā adrāka mā laylat al-qadr*)—is that people of feeble mind maintain that Fāṭima is merely a woman of flesh and blood. God, therefore, rejects that opinion through the Qur’ānic question cited above.¹⁶⁹ The author proceeds to interpret the name Fāṭir: Fāṭima is thus named because “she is the one who created the creatures and shaped them” (*hiya allatī faṭarat al-khalqa wa-kawwanathum*).¹⁷⁰ The angels who brought down God’s decrees on that night, as mentioned later in the *sūra* (verse 4), are interpreted as possessing the true knowledge of Fāṭima (*fa-l-malā’ika hiya mālikū ma’rifatihā bi-ḥaqīqatihā*).¹⁷¹ The spirit mentioned in that verse as accompanying the angels, traditionally identified with the archangel Gabriel, seems to be identified here with Salmān,¹⁷² who plays the role of summoning the gnostics to the knowledge of Fāṭima. The concluding verse “Peace it is, till the rising of dawn” (*salāmūn hiya ḥattā maṭla’ al-fajr*) is set here in an eschatological context. Fāṭima, earlier identified with the night of power, is said to be in charge of justice and to be revealed in “the rising of dawn,” interpreted as the day when the redeemer will be revealed.¹⁷³

It appears then that the theological import of the night of mid-Sha‘bān focuses on Fāṭima or the feminine manifestation of the masculine second person of the deity, her father Muḥammad. In fact

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 156, lines 2–7.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., line 8.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., lines 9–10.

¹⁷² Salmān, the *bāb*, is not mentioned here by name but seems to be alluded to through a play on his appellation “Salsal,” and through his role as the Holy Spirit. On the identification of Salmān with the Holy Spirit, see e.g. chap. 2, pp. 69–70, above.

¹⁷³ *MA*, p. 156, lines 12–13.

Fāṭima is identified with Muḥammad, as is often stressed in this text. Moreover, here we meet Fāṭima as an ongoing presence in the religious history of the Nuṣayrīs and in their consciousness, through the medium of the Shīʿī Imams and perhaps even of the leaders of the Nuṣayrī community. She is also perceived as fulfilling an eschatological role in preparing for the coming of the redeemer. It could be argued that according to *MA* the festival of mid-Shaʿbān is primarily a celebration of Fāṭima as the divine mother, the consort of the supreme deity, ʿAlī, and the mother of his divine descendants. It could further be argued that in this symbolism Muḥammad as the second person of the trinity becomes somewhat redundant, which may help to explain the strong emphasis on the absolute identity of Fāṭima and Muḥammad, stressing the feminine aspect of the masculine deity despite its crude apologetics.

The night of mid-Shaʿbān involves three acts of spiritual pilgrimage taking place in the vigils of the night. Al-Ṭabarānī proceeds by comparing a physical pilgrimage with a spiritual one. He criticizes the “outward Shīʿa” (*ẓāhiriyyat al-shīʿa*)—also characterized as “those who are deficient” (*muqaṣṣira*)—who mistakenly advocate physical pilgrimage to the tomb of Ḥusayn and the performance of rituals at the site.¹⁷⁴ These physical rituals, states the author, are the result of a misconception of Ḥusayn’s martyrdom.¹⁷⁵ In contradistinction, the unitarians (*muwvāḥida*), namely the Nuṣayrīs, who reject the notion of Ḥusayn’s physical death at Karbalāʾ, do not ascribe any importance to the geographical site and perform spiritual pilgrimages (*ẓārū bi-l-ziyārāt al-bāṭina*) wherever they may be.¹⁷⁶ Denying the validity of pilgrimage to the tomb of Ḥusayn is in line with the more famous Nuṣayrī denial of the religious value of the pilgrimage to Mecca.

In the first of the spiritual pilgrimages performed during the first vigil of the night of mid-Shaʿbān, the believer is to recite any prayer that occurs to him.¹⁷⁷ There follows a second prayer, one that according to al-Ṭabarānī appears in a biographical work of the 10th-century Nuṣayrī scholar, Abū-l-Faṭḥ Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Qāḍī al-Qaṭīʿī (d. ca. 989H).¹⁷⁸ The words of this short prayer are: “My ephemeral, worn face worships your eternal and everlasting face, O

¹⁷⁴ A notion of spiritual pilgrimage is attested, however, in later Shīʿism. See Sindawe, “The ‘Maqātil’ in Shiʿite Literature,” p. 46.

¹⁷⁵ On the docetic concept of Ḥusayn’s death, see above, pp. 129ff.

¹⁷⁶ *MA*, p. 157, lines 11–12.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 157, lines 16ff.

¹⁷⁸ On him, see Ḥasan, *Aʿlām min al-madhhab al-jāʿfarī al-ʿalawī*, vol. 1, pp. 19–20.

great 'Alī" (*sajada wajhī al-fānī al-bālī li-wajhika al-dā'im al-bāqī, yā 'Alī yā kabīr*).¹⁷⁹ The believer recites this formula three times, then throws earth on himself, places his right cheek on the ground, and says three times: "Power belongs to you, 'Alī" (*laka al-'izza, yā 'Alī*).¹⁸⁰ He then lays his left cheek to the ground repeating three times: "Unity belongs to you, 'Alī" (*laka al-wahda, yā 'Alī*).¹⁸¹ This ritual is repeated in all three acts of spiritual pilgrimage taking place on that night.

The first pilgrimage is entitled al-Namīriyya (or al-Numayriyya), after the eponym of the Nuṣayrī religion, Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr al-Namīrī (or al-Numayrī). The liturgical text for the first pilgrimage includes words praising and glorifying Ḥusayn b. 'Alī, who manifests himself to those who know him through the various degrees of divine hierarchy. It further contains reservations toward those who misapprehended the mysteries of his being, ascribing to him a son, contacts with women, and other human traits, and who entertain the belief that Ḥusayn was actually killed and buried.¹⁸² The prayer elaborates on the misguided opinions regarding Ḥusayn, describing the historical error of the Shī'īs as a failure to grasp the Nuṣayrī mystery of divinity.¹⁸³

The text for the second spiritual pilgrimage includes praises of the holy family and the Imams and a litany, as well as some theological pronouncements—such as that the deity is manifested through all the Imams, a concept familiar from other Nuṣayrī sources,¹⁸⁴ and that the institution of the Imāma is identical with the external manifestation of the deity while the esoteric divine essence (*al-ma'naviyya al-lāhūtiyya*) forms its inward aspect. The text also addresses the issue of the direction of prayer—a recurrent motif in other Nuṣayrī works¹⁸⁵—emphasizing that God answers the prayers addressed to the various degrees of divine hierarchy, according to the degree addressed. These degrees are further identified with the Shī'ī Imams.¹⁸⁶

The text for the third pilgrimage is similar in content to that for the second, containing the regular characteristics and attributes of God, warnings regarding misconceptions of the deity, and the prin-

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 157, line 19–p. 158, line 1.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 158, line 2.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., lines 2–3.

¹⁸² See the discussion of 'Āshūrā' above, p. 128–136.

¹⁸³ *MA*, pp. 159–160.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 161–162. See also chap. 1, pp. 30–33.

¹⁸⁵ *MA*, p. 161. Cf. chap. 5, above; see also *Catechism*, question 11, in chap. 8, below.

¹⁸⁶ *MA*, p. 161.

ciple of addressing God through all of his divine emanations.¹⁸⁷ Though neither original nor innovative, it is an attractive liturgical text. It is followed by a prayer for the night, replete with flowery phrases, by one Abū Khālid ‘Abd Allāh b. Ghālib al-Kābulī that includes mostly praise of and a litany to ‘Alī.¹⁸⁸

The next section of the chapter, entitled “The Story of Ḍalāl and Wabāl”—the denigratory appellations of the two camels that represent the first two caliphs¹⁸⁹—is essentially an etiological tradition explaining the origin and significance of the night of mid-Sha‘bān. This tradition is traced to al-Khaṣībī through two different chains of transmitters, the second of which offers the date of Sha‘bān 418H (September 1027) for the narration of the story by Abū-l-Qāsim al-Qaṭṭān b. ‘Alī, a disciple of al-Khaṣībī.¹⁹⁰ This etiological tradition, related by Salmān the Persian, describes a plot to assassinate the Prophet and ‘Alī on the night of mid-Sha‘bān, telling of a meeting of Salmān and Qanbar (one of the *yafīms*) with ‘Alī in which the conspiracy is revealed. The meeting takes place in the mosque of Qubā’, outside Medina, preceded by a miraculous journey to Mount Abū Qubays in the vicinity of Mecca. The two camels on which Salmān and Qanbar had arrived turn into Abū Bakr and ‘Umar. ‘Alī gradually reveals to Salmān the essence of the plot, to be carried out with two poisoned daggers. Salmān punishes the conspirators by using the same two daggers in accordance with their own murderous scheme. The story is intertwined with common defamatory statements against the first caliphs. ‘Alī and his two companions return to Medina, ‘Alī riding the Prophet’s mule, which had borne him to the meeting, the two companions riding the camels, Ḍalāl and Wabāl, identified with the first two caliphs. Salmān explains to the bewildered Qanbar the meaning of the events that have taken place. Upon arriving in Medina, Salmān is sent by ‘Alī to visit Abū Bakr and ‘Umar, rumoured to be sick. They show Salmān the signs of their wounds and killing. Consistent with his common portrayal in Shī‘ī tradition, ‘Alī is revealed in this story also as a miracle worker and a sage possessing secret knowledge and powers of divination.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 163–164.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 166–167.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 164, lines 15–16.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 164–171. On these features of ‘Alī in Shī‘ī tradition, see e.g. Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, p. 144; idem, “The Qur’ān Commentary Ascribed to Imam Ḥasan al-‘Askari,” pp. 366–369; M.A. Amir-Moezzi, “Savoir c’est pouvoir:

This story seems to set the night of mid-Sha'bān in a different context, one having almost no clear Nuṣayrī connotations. Here it is associated with the motif of conspiracy against Muḥammad and 'Alī being preempted by 'Alī, a motif familiar in Imāmī Shī'ism.¹⁹² It presents 'Alī as a powerful figure who only outwardly succumbs to the historical plot, since the plot was actually known to him and punishment had been meted out to the conspirators. 'Alī revived the two archenemies in order to carry on the outward historical sequence of events. This tendency of presenting 'Alī not as a victim of the conspiracy but as an all-powerful figure preordaining and controlling the course of history is in line with the docetic conception of the martyr's death of Husayn in Karbalā' discussed earlier. Although this tradition contains no explicit Nuṣayrī motifs, it may reflect certain proto-Nuṣayrī attitudes.

An apocalyptic tradition belonging to the third vigil of the night associates the night of mid-Sha'bān with eschatological expectations. The same three figures—Salmān, Qanbar and 'Alī—appear in this tradition as well. Visiting 'Alī in the cemetery of Medina (*baqī' al-madīna*), Salmān and Qanbar find him "sitting on a throne radiating light, his outward appearance seen through his inner self and his inner self seen through his outward appearance" (*jālis 'alā sarīr yataw aqqadu nūran, fa-idhā huwa yurā zāhiruhu min bāṭinihi wa-bāṭinuhu min zāhirihi*).¹⁹³ All the while strange sounds of crowds are heard: hubbub, turmoil, sobbing, and wailing. Salmān inquires about the meaning of these sounds; 'Alī tells him to open his inner eye and look. On opening his inner eye Salmān sees a multitude of men and beasts and realizes that this is the night of resurrection. 'Alī then tells Salmān to look at his hands, and Salmān sees in 'Alī's hands a vast quantity of empty scrolls. "Have another look at them," says 'Alī, and Salmān notices that they are in fact inscribed with the reward and punishment of all creatures. It turns out, then, that the night of mid-Sha'bān is also the night of the Last Judgement. When Salmān sees the earth widening and a great river flowing in its midst, 'Alī explains that the river is the Euphrates and the land is the region between Karbalā' and Kūfa, where each year the vision seen by Salmān takes place.¹⁹⁴ Obeying

Exégèses et implications du miracle dans l'imamisme ancien: Aspects de l'imamologie duodécimaine V," in *Miracles et Karāma: Hagiographies médiévales comparées*, edited by D. Aigle (Turnhout, 2000), pp. 251–286.

¹⁹² See e.g. Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis*, pp. 44–45.

¹⁹³ *MA*, p. 171, line 12.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 172, lines 15–17.

‘Alī’s orders, Salmān tosses the scrolls into the air and is amazed to realize that each person and each beast receives the scroll on which his own fate is written. ‘Alī then points with his hand and everything vanishes. He gets up, his throne disappears, and the call of the muazzin in the mosque of the Prophet in Medina is heard.¹⁹⁵

This account manifestly demonstrates the eschatological content of the night of mid-Sha‘bān, shedding light on its earlier description as the most significant night of Ramadan. It is here identified with the night of resurrection and the Last Judgement, an eschatological drama that will be enacted in the Shī‘ī holy land extending between Karbalā’ and Kūfa, with ‘Alī as its great hero.

4. Conclusion

All the festivals included in the Nuṣayrī calendar under the category “Arabic holy days,” stem from Muslim tradition; some are common to the Sunna and Shī‘a, but most derive from the Shī‘ī liturgical calendar. Apart from the special days commemorating historical persons, the calendar has no new holy day introduced by the Nuṣayrī religion. This religion, then, is distinguished not by the invention of new holy days but rather by the casting of existing Muslim holy days into a new mould of liturgical hermeneutics and practice. This trait is further evidenced in Nuṣayrī holy days originating in Christianity and Persian religious tradition.

Allegorization of the various festivals in the Nuṣayrī calendar became the major device for transforming the original content of Muslim holy days. By suppressing their religious nomistic dimension new, explicitly antinomian, concepts were introduced. The emphasis on the antinomian and spiritual dimension of festivals of Muslim provenance, and the injection of specific Nuṣayrī tenets into their new perceptions, pervade al-Ṭabarānī’s discussions in *MA*, the major source for our knowledge of the Nuṣayrī liturgical year.

The order of the months in the Nuṣayrī year has indeed been changed, distinguishing it from the Muslim year; but the external liturgical veneer has remained predominantly Muslim. Heterodox antinomian dogma carried Nuṣayrī religion far from both Sunnī and Shī‘ī Islam, yet we should not underestimate the importance of this external Muslim appearance. The preservation of Muslim festivals,

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 173, line 3–10.

with their traditional names, dates, and even some of their rituals, enabled the heterodox religion of an oppressed minority to demonstrate its common ground with Islam (or Christianity) while inwardly maintaining the particular beliefs and rituals which it had developed over the centuries.

A DRUZE-NUṢAYRĪ DEBATE IN THE "EPISTLES OF WISDOM"

1. Introduction

The Druze canon—commonly known as *Rasā'il al-ḥikma* (The epistles of wisdom)¹—contains an anonymous anti-Nuṣayrī polemical epistle entitled *al-Risāla al-dāmigha li-l-fāsiq: al-radd 'alā al-nuṣayrī la'anahu al-mawlā fi kull kawr wa-dawr* (The epistle crushing the heretic: A refutation of the Nuṣayrī—may the Lord curse him in every generation). This epistle is attributed to Ḥamza b. 'Alī (d. after 1021), the founder and great missionary of the Druze religion and the author of numerous epistles in the Druze canon.² The Druze author polemicizes against an anti-Druze Nuṣayrī treatise entitled *Kitāb al-ḥaqā'iq wa-kashf al-mahjūb* (Book of truths and exposure of the veiled). The author of this work is unknown and the work itself did not come down to us. A partial French paraphrastic translation of the Druze text accompanied by a number of cursory observations, is offered by de Sacy in his *Exposé de la religion des Druzes*.³ An eclectic edition of the Arabic text, without commentary, was later published by Strothmann.⁴ This epistle is also included in Bryer's unpublished edition of the first two parts of the Druze canon.⁵

¹ An edition of the *Rasā'il*, with a useful introduction, was published anonymously in Beirut in 1986. A critical edition of the first two parts was prepared by Bryer as part of his unpublished D. Phil. dissertation, "The Origins of the Druze Religion: An Edition of Ḥamza's Writings and an Analysis of his Doctrine." A complete critical edition of these epistles remains a desideratum.

² On Ḥamza and the formative period of the Druze religion, see Bryer, "The Origins of the Druze Religion." See also N.M. Abu-Izzedin, *The Druzes: A New Study of Their History, Faith and Society* (Leiden, New York and Cologne 1993), pp. 103–126.

³ For the epistle in question, see vol. 2, pp. 559–586. A short discussion of this epistle is also included in al-Ḥarīrī, *al-Nuṣayriyyūn al-'alawiyyūn*, pp. 180–183.

⁴ R. Strothmann, "Drusen-Antwort auf Nuṣayrī-Angriff," *Der Islam* 25 (1939), pp. 269–281. Our references will be to Strothmann's edition of this epistle (henceforth: *al-Risāla al-dāmigha*).

⁵ "The Origins of the Druze Religion: An Edition of Ḥamza's Writings and an Analysis of his Doctrine," vol. 2, pp. 172–184. A summary of this epistle is given by Bryer, *ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 241–242.

This epistle comprises a series of arguments that are offered by the Nuṣayrī opponent and refuted by the Druze author. However the latter is not always clear in the way he presents his arguments, and it is often difficult to tell whether the Nuṣayrī opponent is presenting his own views or depicting a Druze belief as he perceives it.

The polemic between the two rivals focuses on certain cardinal concepts of both religions. The main questions discussed within this polemic are the antinomian stance toward Muslim religious commandments, their concepts of divinity and transmigration, a principal focus being the religious significance of the physical union between man and woman.

Our aim in this study is to offer an analysis of this epistle, focusing on Nuṣayrī doctrines and praxis as reflected in the polemic rather than on the attitude of the Druze opponent.

2. Antinomian Stance toward Muslim Religious Law

The Druze author opens his discourse with a belligerent denunciation of the Nuṣayrī rival: "Whoever agrees with his book worships the Devil, believes in transmigration, permits sexual promiscuity and allows deceit and slander" (*fa-man qabila kitābahu 'abada Iblīs wa-'taqada al-tanāsukha wa-ḥallala al-furīja wa-staḥalla al-kadhibā wa-l-buhtāna*).⁶ This denunciation seems to be aimed at the Nuṣayrī belief in transmigration and the basic antinomianism of the Nuṣayrī religion. The Druze author has a somewhat erratic way of presenting his argument. He quotes the Nuṣayrī as attributing to the Druzes an extreme antinomianism toward such fundamental moral prohibitions as killing, theft, deceit, slander, prostitution and sodomy—all of which, the Nuṣayrī claims, are permissible to the Druze gnostics, men and women (*muṭlaq li-l-'ārif wa-l-'āriḥa*).⁷ The Druze rejects this accusation and redirects it at the Nuṣayrīs. It is difficult to assess the credibility of these arguments; but they seem to reflect an extreme polemical adaptation of the basic antinomian positions advocated by both religions.⁸

After setting the general framework, the author moves to more specific claims of the Nuṣayrī regarding the Druzes, pinpointing the

⁶ *Al-Risāla al-dāmigha*, p. 270, lines 8–9.

⁷ *Al-Risāla al-dāmigha*, p. 272, line 8.

⁸ On early Druze antinomianism, see e.g. Bryer, "The Origins of the Druze Religion," *Der Islam* 52 (1952), pp. 248–256.

principle of brotherhood and solidarity among the believers, namely the Druzes, as a condition for achieving religious perfection. This brotherhood and solidarity—according to the Nuṣayrī—include an obligation on the part of the believer to share his possessions and honour with his co-religionists and make his wife available to them (*yajibu ‘alā l-mu’mīn [an] lā yamna’a akhāhu min mālihi wa-lā min jāhihi wa-an yuḡhira li-akhīhi al-mu’mīni ‘iyālahu. . . wa-illā fa-mā yatimmu ‘īmānuhu*).⁹ The believer’s obligation to offer his wife to his fellow believers, presented here somewhat vaguely, is described more explicitly further on:

As to his statement that it is mandatory for the believing woman not to withhold herself from her brother in faith and to offer herself to him whenever he so desires; and that esoteric intercourse is not complete without manifest intercourse. . . [by stating this] he has slandered our Lord. . . (*ammā qawluhu bi-an yajiba ‘alā l-mu’mīna [an] lā tamna’a akhāha farjahā wa-an tabdhula farjahā lahu mubāḥan ḥaythu yashā’u wa-annahu lā yatimmu nikāḥ al-bāṭin illā bi-nikāḥ al-ẓāhir. . . fa-qad kadhdhaba ‘alā mawlānā*).¹⁰

The accusation of sexual licentiousness is a common motif in the history of religious polemics. It is a widespread pagan anti-Christian claim¹¹ recurring in Muslim heresiography. Certain groups—primarily among extremist Shī’īs (*ghulāt*)—are depicted as practising various forms of sexual licentiousness. In his account of the Nuṣayrīs, the Imāmī heresiographer al-Nawbakhtī accuses Muḥammad ibn Nuṣayr, the eponymous founder of the Nuṣayrī sect, of various immoral practices, including sodomy. Al-Nawbakhtī further attributes to Ibn Nuṣayr a religious motivation for this practice, claiming that the latter considered sodomy to be an act attesting to modesty and humility, and one not in fact prohibited by God (*wa-yaẓ’umu anna dhālika min al-tawāḍu’ wa-l-tadhallul. . . wa-anna llāha ‘azza wa-jalla lam yuḥarrim shay’an min dhālika*).¹² Other *ghulāt* groups are accused not only of sodomy but also of prostitution, incest and the exchange of women.¹³ It seems, however, that this type of accusation was not always pure fabrication. In early Christianity, for example, certain heterodox gnostic sects pro-

⁹ *Al-Risāla al-dāmigha*, p. 272, lines 13–14.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 273, lines 4–5.

¹¹ See e.g. the 2nd-century Christian apologists Theophilus of Antioch (*Ad Autolyicum*, edited by R.M. Grant [Oxford 1970], 3:4) and Tatian (*Oratio ad Graecos*, edited by M. Whittaker [Oxford 1982], 32).

¹² Al-Nawbakhtī, *Fīraq al-shī’a*, p. 78, lines 4–6.

¹³ See e.g. ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-fīraq*, p. 16, in his account of the Janāhiyya sect, and pp. 26, 29, where the general features common to various Bāṭinī sects are presented.

claimed sexual communism as part of their ritual.¹⁴ Communal access to women was also widespread in Mazdaki circles in late antiquity and was given a religious ideological basis.¹⁵ The Druze author associates sexual communism with the Khurramiyya—a general title applied in Muslim sources to various Iranian anti-Arab heterodox sects of Mazdaki origin.¹⁶ Indeed, allusions to the Khurramīs advocating communal access to women (*ibāḥat al-nisāʾ*) appear in other sources and seem to be more than a mere stereotype created by Muslim heresiographers.¹⁷ Communal access to women actually formed a part of the ritual of the Lamb Festival of the Dönmeḥ—the Jewish-Muslim Sabbatian sect that emerged in the late seventeenth century.¹⁸ It is not clear whether these charges regarding other sects are always the result of malicious propaganda. While we know of no literary source that offers a definitive answer to this question, the scant evidence available seems to indicate that reports of sexual communism among certain Ismāʿīlī and Nuṣayrī circles are not entirely reliable. Lyde discusses the anti-Nuṣayrī sexual claims and concludes that they are groundless.¹⁹

¹⁴ See e.g. the 4th-century Church Father Epiphanius (*Panarion* 26: 4–5) describing the communion service of the gnostic Christian Fibionite sect as a ritual orgy. Epiphanius claims to have been himself introduced to the literature and rituals of this sect (*Panarion*, 26:17). For further discussion of pagan anti-Christian charges of immorality, see S. Benko, *Pagan Rome and the Early Christians* (Bloomington, 1986), pp. 54–78.

¹⁵ See P. Crone, "Kavād's Heresy and Mazdak's Revolt," *Iran* 29 (1991), pp. 21–42, esp. pp. 24–25.

¹⁶ *Al-Risāla al-dāmigha*, p. 273, line 1.

¹⁷ For sexual communism among the Khurramīs, see e.g. W. Madelung, *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran*, Columbia Lectures on Iranian Studies 4 (New York, 1988), p. 10; idem, "Khurramiyya," *EI²*, vol. 5, pp. 63–65; Crone, "Kavād's Heresy and Mazdak's Revolt," p. 25 with note 114.

¹⁸ On this festival see H. Graetz, "Überbleibsel der Sabbatianischen in Salonichi," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 33 (1884), p. 54; A. Galanté, *Nouveaux documents sur Sabbetaï Sevi* (Istanbul, 1935), pp. 50–53; and G. Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (New York, 1971), p. 114.

¹⁹ Lyde, *The Asian Mystery*, p. 107. M.C.F. Volney, *Voyage en Égypte et en Syrie* (Paris, 1787), vol. 2, p. 6 (= *Travels through Syria and Egypt* [London, 1787], vol. 2, p. 5), ascribes to a certain Nuṣayrī group, which he calls Kadmusia, both a cult of the female genitalia and nightly ritual orgies. Cf. also J.L. Burckhardt, *Travels in Syria and the Holy Land* (London, 1822), p. 152; F. Walpole, *The Ansairi and Assassins with Travels to the Further East* (London, 1851), vol. 3, p. 334. According to Lyde (*ibid.*, p. 104), however, Volney mistook the Ismāʿīlīs of Qadmus for Nuṣayrīs. Lyde further refers (*ibid.*, p. 97) to a Latin translation of an Ismāʿīlī prayer cited by Walpole—which the latter erroneously ascribed to the Nuṣayrīs—that indicates worship of the female genitalia and the communal practice of sexual promiscuity. However, this text does not appear in the 1851 edition of Walpole's book.

Concerning the Nuṣayrīs we have no evidence of communal access to women except for the 19th-century account by Sulaymān al-Adhanī in his *Bākūra*. Al-Adhanī recounts that on a journey with his spiritual guide to the village of Wādī al-Jarb in the region of Anṭākiyya, he was the guest of a Nuṣayrī sage. When night fell the sage prepared a bed for him in an empty room. In the middle of the night, the daughter of the sage knocked on his door, entered and lay down beside him. Al-Adhanī was embarrassed, not knowing her intentions. After a short while she started conversing with him and asked: "Do you not accept the religious obligation" (*al-farḍ al-lāzim wa-l-ḥaqq al-wājib*)? Only then, says al-Adhanī, did he realize that his guide, when referring earlier to the religious obligations, had actually meant the duty of mutual offering of the believers' women (*taqḍīm nisā'ihim li-ba'dihim*).²⁰ It is noteworthy that al-Adhanī's account strikingly echoes the aforementioned words of the Nuṣayrī polemicist who attributed this practice to the Druzes.

The Nuṣayrī rival further elaborates his claim regarding sexual communism by supplying an ideological affirmation of sexual union, claiming that "spiritual union is not achieved without physical union" (*lā yatimmu nikāḥ al-bāṭin illā bi-nikāḥ al-zāhir*);²¹ moreover, in his opinion "physical union fortifies religion" (*bi-anna al-mujāma'a al-zāhira tazīdu fī-l-dīn*).²² To reinforce this general stance the Nuṣayrī offers a bold interpretation of the act of sexual intercourse:

Woe unto a believing woman who holds back her vagina from her brother in faith, for the vagina stands for the Imams of heresy while the male organ entering the woman's vagina points to the esoteric meaning. The meaning of this [act] is the subjugation of the people clinging to the external [aspects of religion] and to the Imams of heresy (*al-wayl kulla al-wayl 'alā mu'mina tamna'u akhāha farjahā li-anna l-farja mathal a'immat al-kufr wa-l-iḥtīl idh dakhala farja l-mar'a datīl 'alā l-bāṭin wa-mamthūluhu 'alā mukāsarāt ahl al-zāhir wa-a'immat al-kufr*).²³

The concept of "esoteric intercourse" (*nikāḥ al-bāṭin*), which is a key term in the argument of the Nuṣayrī rival, is not familiar to us from other sources. Furthermore, its meaning in the above passage is not clear. One could perhaps take it to refer to a mystical union, either

²⁰ See *Bākūra*, p. 93; Salisbury, p. 285. Allegations of Nuṣayrī worship of the female genitalia—referring to the Nuṣayrīs as *'ubbād al-farj* (worshippers of the female genitalia)—are still common among the people of Syria and Lebanon.

²¹ *Al-Risāla al-dāmigha*, p. 273, line 5.

²² *Ibid.*, line 18.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 274, lines 7–9.

between certain spiritual entities or between the gnostic believer and the divine realm—both common forms in various mystical systems. However, it seems that in the above-cited passage a more restricted meaning of this is suggested. Physical union symbolically represents the militant ideology regarding the external heretical world, which implicitly refers to the Muslim world as a whole.

It is not clear whether the Nuṣayrī is merely attributing this position to the Druze²⁴ or whether he is also indirectly expressing his own positive view in the matter. If the latter, then we have here a clear statement of the positive religious value ascribed to sexual union which may apply to a wider social context—such as the affirmation of marriage and procreation as a religious prerequisite for spiritual perfection.

The Druze polemicist's response to the Nuṣayrī advocates an obverse position with regard to the religious value of marriage and sexual union. In his opinion, there is no intrinsic value to sexual union and marriage, and their absence does not preclude the possibility of achieving spiritual perfection. "Had a unitarian gnostic believer lived a hundred years without lawfully marrying. . . , this would not have diminished his rank in religion at all. Likewise, had a unitarian gnostic believing woman. . . lived a hundred years without marrying, dying a virgin, this would not have diminished her rank in religion at all . . ." (*law anna rajulan mu'minan muwahhidan 'arifan 'ashā mi'ata sana wa-lam yatazawwaj ḥalālatan. . . lam yanquṣ dhālika min manzilatihī fī-l-dīn wa-kadhālika law anna mra'atan mu'minatan muwahhidatan 'arifatan. . . 'ashat mi'ata sana wa-lam tatazawwaj wa-mātat bikran lam yanquṣ dhālika min manzilatihā fī-l-dīn shay'an. . .*).²⁵

In conclusion, the centrality of the motifs of sexual communism and the religious value of sexual intercourse in our epistle is manifest. We have seen also that these motifs are rooted in certain sectarian milieux. This might have attested to an early authentic tradition. However, there is no allusion to such ideology and practice in the Nuṣayrī writings known to us. Moreover, the sole internal Nuṣayrī evidence known to us for the practice of sexual communism is al-Adhanī—evidence that is to be regarded with caution. Other, exter-

²⁴ For a possibly positive religious attitude toward physical union between the sexes expressed in Druze sources, see de Sacy, *Exposé de la religion des Druzes*, vol. 2, pp. 574–575.

²⁵ *Al-Risāla al-dāmigha*, p. 274, lines 1–4.

nal popular pronouncements on the subject should also be treated with suspicion.

3. *Theological Issues*

After having dealt with the main polemical topic of the epistle—namely, the charge of sexual communism—the author goes on to respond briefly to a few fragmentary theological arguments presented by the Nuṣayrī rival. These arguments concern mainly the concept of the unity of God.

The Druze polemicist links his refutation of these theological arguments to the preceding refutation of the Nuṣayrī charge of sexual communism. His refutation revolves around the question of whether the deity is present and active at the moment of sexual intercourse and the formation of the fetus. This view is attributed to the Druze by the Nuṣayrī but is rejected by the Druze as detracting from the unity of God. “For our Lord, may He be exalted,” says the Druze, “is not defined by number nor can he be counted” (*wa-mawlānā jalla wa-‘azza lā yadkhulu fī-l-‘dād wa-lā yu‘addu fī-l-āḥād*).²⁶ This argument is not familiar to us from Nuṣayrī writings, but it may be conceived of as an expansion of the principle of divine incarnation in historical figures, a central doctrine of Nuṣayrī theology.²⁷

The Nuṣayrī polemicist preaches to the Druzes the divinity of ‘Alī while rejecting the Druze belief in the divinity of al-Ḥākim. ‘Alī’s supremacy over al-Ḥākim is reflected in the Nuṣayrī’s reference to him by the formula *‘alaynā salāmuḥu wa-rahmatuḥu* (may his peace and mercy be upon us), as distinct from the Druze reference to al-Ḥākim by the expression *‘alaynā salāmuḥu* (may his peace be upon us).²⁸ The Nuṣayrī further claims that the Druzes have confused the divinity of ‘Alī with their belief in al-Ḥākim. The Druze author distorts the Nuṣayrī position by claiming that it erroneously identifies ‘Alī with al-Ḥākim. This, emphasizes the Druze, is an unpardonable manifestation of polytheism (*fa-ṣaḥḥa ‘inda l-muwahḥid al-‘arīf bi-anna l-shirka alladhī lā yughfaru abadan bi-an yushrika bayna ‘Alī ibn ‘Abī Ṭālib wa-bayna mawlānā jalla dhikruḥu*).²⁹

²⁶ Ibid., p. 277, lines 8–9.

²⁷ For various concepts of incarnation in early Nuṣayrī doctrine, see above, chap. 1, pp. 14–30.

²⁸ *Al-Risāla al-dāmigha*, p. 279, lines 1–2.

²⁹ Ibid., lines 3–4.

Apparently the Nuṣayrī author further expounded his theory of emanation of the second aspect of the deity—namely, the Veil (*ḥijāb*) or rather the “Greatest Veil” (*al-ḥijāb al-aʿẓam*), identified with Muḥammad, through which the supreme aspect of the deity (the *maʿnā*) is revealed. The Druze author seems to understand the manifestation of ʿAlī through Muḥammad as referring to the Druze belief in al-Ḥākim as the supreme deity, and he rejects this concept, which in his opinion diminishes his transcendental concept of al-Ḥākim’s divinity. The Druze therefore modifies the meaning of the term *ḥijāb*, emphasizing its concealing role in contrast to its Nuṣayrī revelatory notion. In other words, while for the Nuṣayrī the term *ḥijāb* denotes the concept both of veiling and of revealing, according to the Druze it should be understood as referring exclusively to the aspect of veiling—or, as he puts it, “The Veil conceals rather than reveals” (*al-ḥijāb huwa sutrat al-shayʿ laysa izhārahu*).³⁰

4. Transmigration

Another polemical subject presented in the epistle—albeit with little elaboration—is the belief in transmigration. From the Druze’s reaction it becomes clear that the Nuṣayrī ascribes to the Druzes a belief in a radical form of the transmigration of souls. “The souls of the opponents [of the sect],” says the Nuṣayrī, “turn into dogs, monkeys, pigs and further into iron. . . and into fowl and owls. Some of them turn into a woman who is bereaved of her child” (. . . *bi-ʿanna arwāḥa al-nawāṣib wa-l-aḍḍād tarjīʿu*³¹ *fī-l-kilāb wa-l-qirāda wa-l-khanāẓir ilā an tarjīʿa fī-l-ḥadīd. . . wa-baʿḍuhum fī-l-ṭayr wa-l-būm wa-baʿḍuhum tarjīʿu ilā l-marʾa llatī tathkalu waladaha*).³²

The belief in transmigration into animals and organic matter is however the common form of this belief among the Nuṣayrīs, as attested in many sources.³³ The Druze rejects this view as contra-

³⁰ Ibid., lines 13–14.

³¹ The verb *rajāʿa* denoting transmigration is uncommon in Nuṣayrī sources, which are otherwise marked by a wide range of terms denoting various forms of transmigration. *Kitāb al-majmūʿ*, for example, includes a series of seven different terms (*KM*, p. 183 [=pp. 163–164 in the French translation]; Salisbury, p. 238). According to al-Adhanī these seven terms are interpreted by the Nuṣayriyya as referring to the seven floors of hell mentioned in the Qurʾān (15:44) (*Bākūra*, p. 11). For a brief discussion of transmigratory terminology in a broad Islamic context, see Ben-Shammai, “Transmigration of Souls in Tenth Century Jewish Thought in the Orient,” p. 124.

³² *Al-Risāla al-dāmigha*, p. 277, lines 11–13.

³³ On the Nuṣayrī doctrine of transmigration, see above, chap. 2, pp. 62–66.

dicting his doctrine of theodicy. It is unjust, he says, that our Lord punishes reasonable persons by turning them into animals—who in this state are unable to perceive the rationale for their punishment. The Druze opts for a moderate form of a compensatory scale of transmigration into human beings that seems to have become the common Druze view of transmigration.

5. *Conclusion*

The Druze-Nuṣayrī polemic contained in this epistle may indicate a reality of social and religious contacts between Nuṣayrīs and Druzes at the formative stage of the Druze religion. As we have seen, it is rather difficult to distinguish between Nuṣayrī positions and opinions ascribed to the Druzes. On the other hand, the refutations by the Druze polemicist should not be accepted unconditionally. We have also noted that certain terms are shared by both religious groups, which may indicate some exchange of ideas. It may also point to certain social and religious milieux that served as a target for the missionary sectarian zeal of both groups, creating a rivalry between them.

CHAPTER EIGHT

A CATECHISM OF THE NUṢAYRĪ RELIGION

1. Introduction

The Nuṣayrī catechism (*Kūlāb ta'lim diyānat al-nuṣayriyya*) published here with an annotated English translation forms part of the collective Nuṣayrī manuscript Paris, arabe 6182. This manuscript was acquired by Joseph Catafago, who served as chancellor and dragoman of the Prussian consulate general in Syria during the 1840s. Catafago apparently intended to publish the full text of this manuscript. To this end he prepared an Arabic copy of the catechism and the first draft of a French translation of the entire manuscript. The catechism with its French translation was sent by Catafago to the King of Prussia.¹ Catafago's handwritten translation is contained in Ms. Berlin 2086. An abridged German translation of this catechism was published by Philipp Wolff;² from this Lyde produced an English translation that is included in his *Asian Mystery*.³ This undertaking of Catafago's was only one aspect of his enduring interest in the Nuṣayrī religion. In addition to the Nuṣayrī catechism he also acquired a manuscript of the Nuṣayrī work *Majmū' al-ā'yād* (Book of Festivals) of al-Ṭabarānī and published short sections of it in French translation.⁴ These efforts seem to have been part of Catafago's plan to assemble materials for a monograph on the Nuṣayrī religion. In a letter from Beirut dated 6 July 1847, Catafago further spelled out his vision that "with the help of this manuscript—namely, *Majmū' al-ā'yād*—and the cate-

¹ Lyde, *The Asian Mystery*, p. 270.

² P. Wolff, "Auszüge aus dem Katechismus der Nosairier," *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 3 (1849), pp. 302–309.

³ Lyde, *The Asian Mystery*, pp. 271–281.

⁴ See J. Catafago, "Notice sur les Ansériens," *Journal asiatique*, 4th series, vol. 11 (1848), pp. 149–168. See also his publication of three Nuṣayrī masses accompanied by a German translation, "Die drei Messen der Nossairier," *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 2 (1848), pp. 388–394.

chism... one can do for the religion of the Nuṣayrīs what Silvestre de Sacy did for the religion of the Druzes."⁵

The various units constituting Ms. Paris, Arabe 6182, focus on the process of initiation to the Nuṣayrī sect, thus forming a thematic collection. The manuscript contains the following five units of which nos. 2–4 are found also in Ms. Manchester (John Rylands Library), no. 124:

- 1 *Ta'lim diyānat al-nuṣayriyya* (a catechism of the Nuṣayrī religion), fols. 1a–20b.
- 2 *Al-Tawjīh* ([The Treatise of] Instruction) or *al-mashyakha* ([the book of] the sheikhs), fols. 20a–30b (=Ms. Manchester, no. 124, fols. 36a–48b).⁶
- 3 *Khiṭāb al-tilmīdh ba'da al-su'āl* (The teaching to the disciple following [his] question) or *al-dukhūl* (The entrance), fols. 31a–36a (=Ms. Manchester, no. 124, fols. 50a–56a).⁷
- 4 *Al-'Iqād* (The attachment [of the initiate to his spiritual guide]), fols. 36a–37a (=Ms. Manchester, no. 124, fols. 49a–50a).
- 5 Untitled section listing the various Nuṣayrī holy days, resembling the short list given by al-Adhanī,⁸ fols. 37b–39a.

As in other esoteric religious groups, initiation into the mysteries of the religion seems to have played an important role in the process of shaping and maintaining the special Nuṣayrī identity, while preserving its esoteric character. This is evident from various works dealing with different aspects of initiation as well as from contemporary Nuṣayrī practices. Nuṣayrī catechisms are reported to have been transcribed by sheikhs in preparation for initiation. Having learnt the text by heart, the initiate would then set it ablaze.⁹

In addition to the works mentioned above, three other treatises dealing with aspects of initiation are known to us. The oldest known Nuṣayrī account of the long process of spiritual guidance is found in

⁵ Catafago, "Notice sur les Ansériens," p. 155.

⁶ The first title appears at the beginning of the treatise in both manuscripts while the other—*al-mashyakha*—is given at the end. This treatise is different from the book bearing a similar title translated by Lyde. See below.

⁷ In both manuscripts the first title appears at the beginning of the text while the other, *al-dukhūl*, is given at the end.

⁸ See *Bākūra*, pp. 34–35.

⁹ See T. Olsson, "The Gnosis of Mountaineers and Townspeople. The Religion of the Syrian Alawites, or the Nuṣayrīs," in *Alevi Identity: Cultural Religious and Social Perspectives*, edited by T. Olsson, E. Özdalga, and C. Raudvere (Istanbul, 1998), pp. 167–183, at pp. 179–180, 182.

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a treatise entitled *Sharḥ al-imām wa-mā yūjabu 'alayhi* (An explanatory tract on the Imam and his duties), Ms. Paris, arabe 1449, fols. 155a-167a). This work comprises two parts: the first is a chapter on the attachment (*bāb fī ma'rifat al-ta'liq*, fols. 155a-162b) of the novice to his spiritual guide, conceived of as a spiritual birth where the master becomes the true father of the initiate; the second deals with the duty of obedience (*bāb fī-l-samā'*, fols. 162b-167a) of the disciple to his master.

Another work, in the nature of an introductory compendium to the Nuṣayrī religion, is *Kūtāb al-mashyakha* (The manual for sheikhs) extracts of which were translated into English and published by Samuel Lyde.¹⁰ Unfortunately, the whereabouts of this manuscript—which was copied in 1239/1824 and used by Lyde—are unknown.¹¹ Lyde noticed an affinity between "The Manual for Sheikhs" and our catechism, both in arrangement and in content, to the point where certain expressions are sometimes nearly identical.¹² Lacking the Arabic text of the manual, one cannot accurately assess the literary interdependence of the two works. Finally, a detailed account of the initiation and its rites from the mid-19th century is offered by al-Adhanī in his *Bākūra*.¹³

Among the various works pertaining to initiation into the Nuṣayrī religion the catechism stands out as belonging to the literary genre of questions and answers. Works written in this genre are in fact known from an early stage of Nuṣayrī literature. They include *Masā'il Abī 'Abd Allāh b. Hārūn al-Ṣā'igh* (The questions of 'Abd Allāh b. Hārūn al-Ṣā'igh),¹⁴ *Kūtāb al-dalā'il fī ma'rifat al-masā'il* (indications to the knowledge of topics) by al-Ṭabarānī,¹⁵ *Kūtāb al-usūs* (The book of foundations),¹⁶ and the text of ms. Kiel 19, published by Strothmann.¹⁷ However, all these deal with specific doctrinal and exegetical issues and—unlike catechisms—were not conceived of as systematic introductions to religion. The catechism form seems to have been influenced by Western Christian catechisms, which circulated in nineteenth-

¹⁰ *The Asian Mystery*, pp. 230-269.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 270.

¹³ *Bākūra*, pp. 1-7.

¹⁴ See above, chap. 5.

¹⁵ This treatise constitutes part of the Nuṣayrī collective manuscript Or. 304 of the Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg Carl von Ossietzky, fols. 141a-207b.

¹⁶ See above, chap. 2.

¹⁷ See Strothmann, "Morgenländische Geheimsekten."

century Syria, as attested by Dussaud.¹⁸ Christian catechisms also influenced Druze catechisms, which began to appear around this time.¹⁹ In fact the very title of the catechism—*Kitāb ta'lim diyānat al-nuṣayrīyya* (literally: Book of instruction in the Nuṣayrī religion) seems suspect, as noted by Lyde.²⁰ However, despite the manifestly Christian literary form, the catechism, as Lyde puts it, “has the air of being genuine, and, in any case, most certainly contains the Ansairee doctrines and formularies found in their various books.”²¹ We subscribe to Lyde’s general impression of the work, with one reservation. The catechism reflects some pronounced Christian elements not otherwise known to us from the rich Christian component already contained in earlier Nuṣayrī texts. This tendency, however, is also reflected in al-Adhanī’s *Bākūra*, which, we speculate, was written roughly at the same time as our catechism. Such elements include the consecration of bread in addition to wine in the Mass, and their connection to the eucharistic words of Jesus. In fact, the very term *quddās*, denoting the Mass, as well as the specific titles of the various masses and their liturgical texts are attested only in later sources, namely—our catechism and al-Adhanī’s *Bākūra*. Moreover, the Christian-Arabic term *thālūth*, referring to the Nuṣayrī trinity and rarely used in early writings,²² becomes more common in the *Bākūra* and the catechism. All these features seem to belong to a late phase of a growing influence of Christianity upon Nuṣayrī religion and the further adaptation of Christian terminology and liturgical components.

2. Form and Content of the Catechism

The catechism consists of 101 questions and answers written in Middle Arabic and characterized by features similar to those of other Nuṣayrī texts such as the ones published in this volume. The catechism covers a wide range of topics presenting the major aspects of Nuṣayrī creed and ritual. In general, the questions are arranged by topic, with occasional exceptions. The catechism may thus be divided as follows:

¹⁸ Dussaud, *Histoire et Religion des Noçairîs*, introduction, p. xxii.

¹⁹ For examples of such Druze catechisms, see J.G. Eichhorn, “Von der Religion der Drusen,” in *Repertorium für Biblische und Morgenländische Litteratur* (Leipzig, 1783), pp. 155–201. See also Hitti, *The Origins of the Druze People and Religion*, p. 20.

²⁰ Lyde, *The Asian Mystery*, p. 270.

²¹ Ibid.

²² See *Munāẓara*, p. 89b, line 8; p. 92a, line 1.

- Q. 1-9 The nature and essence of the divinity of 'Alī, and its appearance and concealment
- Q. 10-12 Preliminary discussion of the persons of the trinity
- Q. 13-42 The names of the *ma'nā*, *ism*, and *bāb* in their various manifestations:
- Q. 13-21 The names by which the *ism* was revealed to prophets and messengers and its names in the various historical cycles
- Q. 22-42 The names of the *bāb* in the books of the unitarians, in the six spiritual stations: in the Persian era (Q. 24-29), the names of the *bāb* and its *yafīms* in the eleven appearances (Q. 30-42)
- Q. 43-44 The names by which Arabs and others called the *ma'nā*
- Q. 45-47 The names of 'Alī's mother, brothers, and sisters
- Q. 48 The place of 'Alī's tomb
- Q. 49 The exclusive names of 'Alī
- Q. 50 On 'Alī's appellation *amīr al-naḥl* (the prince of the bees)
- Q. 51 The names by which 'Alī was called by primordial nations
- Q. 52-55 The primordial luminous worlds
- Q. 56-64 The seven degrees of emanations below the trinity, their names and nature before their manifestation
- Q. 65-68 The earthly world of humanity and the luminous world
- Q. 69 The names of the prophets
- Q. 70 The names of the twenty-five *yafīms*
- Q. 71 The books of the unitarians
- Q. 72-73 The Qur'ān and its revelation
- Q. 74 The secret sign of 'ayn, mīm, sīn
- Q. 76-79 The Nuṣayrī Mass
- Q. 80-81 The fate of the soul after death
- Q. 82 The mystery of mysteries of the Nuṣayrī creed
- Q. 83-86 Religious duties
- Q. 87-88 The first and second Masses
- Q. 89-90 The Nawrūz and its rituals
- Q. 91-92 The sacred wine
- Q. 93-94 The creative letters *kaf* and *nūn*
- Q. 95-97 The manifestation of the *ma'nā* and further names of 'Alī
- Q. 98 Esoteric and exoteric meanings
- Q. 99-100 Al-Khaṣībī as the great apostle of Nuṣayrī religion

Q. 101

The names of the persons of the prayers

A cursory reading of the catechism suffices to show that a considerable part of the work comprises lists of names representing various degrees of the divine emanations and their appearances in the historical cycles. As in Ismā'īlī and Druze doctrine, these Nuṣayrī lists are drafted from the reservoir of figures from the Old and New Testaments, as well as from Persian, Greek, pre-Islamic, and Islamic History. The concatenation of names apparently arises from the need to fill in the series of title bearers in the world of emanations, and from the tendency to classify these names according to geographical genealogies. Hence the stereotypical nature of these lists, characterized by erroneous references to many figures, as well as the inclusion of various unspecified appellations by which certain manifestations of the deity are called. It seems, moreover, that a good many of the names are pure invention. In light of the above, we did not deem it fruitful to address all the individual names and appellations and restricted our comments to the general categories of the various sub-divisions of names appearing in the catechism. Finally, it may be that we occasionally misread certain names due to the absence of corroborating manuscripts of the catechism.

3. Translation of the Catechism

Preface²³

In the name of the eternal *ma'nā* and the great *ism* and the everlasting *bāb*; and he (the *ma'nā*) is God the merciful the compassionate. O God, element of elements, essence of essences, O mystery of mysteries and knower of the hearts; he who appears from the eye of the sun and rules over every soul. We praise you for the mystery of the divine mysteries that you have revealed to us and for the light of your radiant lights. We also praise you forever for the truths of your sound religion that you have taught us, consisting in the knowledge of your eternal *ma'nā* and your great *ism* and your everlasting *bāb*. He (the *ma'nā*) is united with you and exists in you, without division or separation.

²³ This renders the Arabic title *fātiḥat al-kitāb*, a highly unusual title for a preface and one resembling the title of the opening *sūra* of the Qur'ān. By using it, the author may have intended to emphasize the importance of the catechism as a sacred book—an intention reinforced by the division of *Kitāb al-majmū'* into chapters entitled *sūras*.

ration.²⁴ Through your wondrous manifestation in your servant ‘*abd al-nūr*’²⁵—which you have honoured and graced, and absolutely vouchsafed to your holy ones who know you, and explicitly prohibited to your enemies who reject and deny you.²⁶ O God, we laud you through an endless praise for your great benefaction and your abounding grace, for ever and ever. Now then we shall begin writing the catechism followed by the [treatises] *al-Mashyakha* ([the book of] the sheikhs) and *al-‘Iqād* (The Attachment [of the initiate to his spiritual guide]).²⁷

Q. 1 Who is our lord who created us?

A. He is our master, commander of the faithful, prince of the bees,²⁸ ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib; he is God—there is no god but him, the merciful, the compassionate.

Q. 2 How do we know that our master, commander of the faithful, ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, is God?

A. By his own testimony and his description of himself in a famous sermon which he preached from the pulpit in the presence of the whole audience, but which was understood only by men of reason and clear vision. He then said: “I have the knowledge of the Hour (of resurrection)²⁹ and to me did the messengers point, preach

²⁴ The concept that there is no ontological buffer separating the various hypostatic entities of the divine realm of emanation is recurrent in Nuṣayrī theology. See above, chap. 1, (p. 34), chap. 4 (p. 90) and chap. 5. (p. 103).

²⁵ ‘*Abd al-nūr*’ (literally: the servant of light) is the term for the sacred wine used in Nuṣayrī liturgical ceremonies, such as the various Masses (*quddās*, p. *qadādīs*). as in the Christian Mass, the wine becomes a medium for the presence of the deity. Referring to the sacramental wine as ‘*abd al-nūr*’ reflects the rich Nuṣayrī symbolism of light. For the liturgical use of wine and its symbolism, see below questions 82, 91, and 92; *MA*, pp. 64–66, *Bākūra*, pp. 39–48; Dussaud, *Histoire et Religion des Noṣairis*, pp. 94, 147; Moosa, *Extremist Shī‘ites*, pp. 398–408; Ḥarīrī, *al-Nuṣayriyyūn al-‘alawīyyūn*, pp. 152–160.

²⁶ For the religious permission for the ritual drinking of wine in similar terms, see Strothmann, “Esoterische Sonderthemen,” p. 24; *Bākūra*, pp. 39, 82 (in a verse by Muḥammad b. Kalāzū, the eponym of the Kalāziyya/Qamariyya Nuṣayrī subsect).

²⁷ On these treatises, see above, the introduction to the catechism. ‘*Iqād*’ here may be a variant of the term ‘*aqd*’ alluding in Nuṣayrī texts to the mystery of the trinity. See e.g. ‘*aqd ‘ayn, mīm, sīn*’ in *KM*, p. 193, line 9 (p. 174 in the French translation; Salisbury, p. 254); *Bākūra*, p. 85.

²⁸ On the basis of Q. 16:68, ‘Alī is designated in Shī‘ī writings *amīr al-naḥl* (prince of a swarm [of bees]). According to Shī‘ī interpretation, the bees are the Imams. See I. Goldziher, “Schī‘itisches,” in idem, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Hildesheim, 1970), vol. 5, pp. 213–214, and the sources cited there.

²⁹ According to Q. 31:34, there are five things known to God alone. These include knowledge of the hour (i.e. the Hour of the Last Judgement); knowledge of

my unity and summon toward knowing me. I gave names to [all parts of the universe], unfolded its lands, established its mountains, made its rivers flow and the earth give its produce. I am he who darkened it, raised the sun and lit the moon. I created the creatures and bestowed livelihood. I am lord of lords and master of men; I am the supreme, the knower; I am a knight of iron. I am the creator and the reviver. I inserted Jesus into the womb of his mother Mary, and I am he who sent messengers and made prophets prophesy.”

Q. 3 Who summoned us to the knowledge of our master, the commander of the faithful?

A. His messenger Muḥammad—may God bless him and grant him salvation—as he states in his “sermon of the pledge of allegiance to the house [of the Prophet]”.³⁰ “Listen now to what I am about to tell you, and beware not to doubt. Know that I summon you to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib as I summon you to God, may he be exalted and glorified, for ‘Alī is my master and your master, because you are the chosen among my supporters. I say to you ‘as Jesus, Mary’s son, said to the apostles: Who will be my helpers unto God? The Apostles said: We will be helpers of God. And a party of the Children of Israel believed, and a party disbelieved. So we confirmed those who believed against their enemy, and they became masters’ (Q. 61:14). They are witnesses of God and his officers. I [Muḥammad] and those who follow me summon you to [know] ‘Alī with clear insight. ‘To God be glory! and I am not among the idolaters’ (Q. 12:108). I summon you to ‘Alī by his command. Beware of casting doubt, for my prophethood is under the authority of ‘Alī, because ‘Alī is he who sent me to you as a prophet and he is the one who created me from the light of his essence.³¹ He is my lord and your lord, my creator and your creator. So fear him, and obey him, believe in his unity,

future rainfall (*wa-yunazzilu al-ghayth*); knowledge of the sex of the infant in the mother’s womb (*wa-ya’lamu mā fī-l-arḥām*), and knowledge of people’s fate and place of death (*wa-mā tadrī nafs mādhā taksibu ghadan wa-mā tadrī nafs bi-ayyi arḍ tamūtu*).

³⁰ This pseudepigraphic Nuṣayrī liturgical sermon with a slight variation of the title—*Bay‘at khuṭbat al-dār li-mawlānā amīr al-mu‘minīn*—is included in ms. Manchester (John Rylands Library), no. 124, pp. 28b–33b.

³¹ For the concept of the “light of essence” (*nūr al-dhāt*) as a creative medium between the *ma’nā* and the *ism*, see above, chap. 1 (p. 15) and the references there. For the creation of Muḥammad, the *ism*, by the *ma’nā*, see *KM*, p. 187 (= pp. 167–168 in the French translation; Salisbury, pp. 245–246). See also above, chap. 1, p. 34.

praise him, sanctify him and worship him, for he is God, and there is no god but him, etc.”³²

Q. 4 If our master, the commander of the faithful, ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, is God, how was it that he took a human nature?

A. Know that our master, the commander of the faithful, does not take a human nature, but he veiled himself in [the person of] Muḥammad in his cycle³³ and was named ‘Alī.

Q. 5 How many times did our master veil himself and appear in human form?

A. He veiled himself seven times. In the first he veiled himself in Adam, in his cycle, and was named Abel; in the second [time]—in Noah, and was named Seth; in the third—in Jacob, and was named Joseph; in the fourth—in Moses, and was named Joshua; in the fifth—in Solomon, and was named Asaf; in the sixth—in Jesus, and was named Simon (Peter); in the seventh and last—in Muḥammad, and was named ‘Alī.³⁴ He [our master] is detached from the names he was named by, but they are not detached from him.

Q. 6 How did our master conceal himself in the veils, in their cycles, and appear in human form?

A. Know that the mystery of veiling [in human form] is a great mystery that God alone knows, as [God] may He be exalted says: “They will not know of me except what their hearts can bear, their insights can contemplate, and their minds can conceive.”³⁵

Q. 7 Will our master, the commander of the faithful, veil himself and appear in the world another time?

³² For this passage, with slight variants, cf. ms. Manchester (John Rylands Library) no. 124, pp. 29a–b.

³³ The cyclical concept in Nuṣayrī doctrine is dealt with in chap. 1, above, pp. 28–30.

³⁴ The principle of the cyclical manifestation of the *ma’nā* in human figures presented here is a fundamental Nuṣayrī creed. According to this concept the *ma’nā* revealed himself in each cycle in the lesser person of a pair. This concept evolved to explain the supremacy of ‘Alī in Nuṣayrī theology despite his inferior position in Muslim tradition. In this passage the author describes the principle of the manifestation of the *ma’nā* through the *ism* in each cycle by the *ma’nā*’s historical companion; e.g. the *ma’nā* in the seventh cycle is manifested in ‘Alī and perceived through the mediation of Muḥammad. A similar list of figures in which the *ma’nā* was revealed is given in *Bākūra*, p. 47.

³⁵ Despite use of the formula *qawluhu ta’ālā*—which normally precedes a citation from the Qur’ān or from a “divine tradition” (*ḥadīth ilāhī* or *qudsī*)—these words are not Qur’ānic, nor did we find them in collections of *aḥādīth qudsiyya*.

A. He will appear without veiling [himself] at the end of time, in glory and great splendour, and will redeem the souls of the believers from their graves, which are their garments of flesh and blood, and make them reside in the eternal lights.³⁶

Q. 8 What is the divine manifestation?

A. It is a manifestation of the Creator through the veils, in human form and in grace, envelope within an envelope.

Q. 9 Explain to me your words—how indeed did our master appear in human form?

A. Know that the *ma'nā* entered the *bāb*, veiled himself in the *ism*, and assumed its [the *ism*'s] name as our master Ja'far al-Šādiq—may his memory grant us peace—said: “Invoke God as He deserves, and invoke his *ism* and his *bāb*.”

Q. 10 What are the *ism*, the *ma'nā*, and the *bāb*?

A. They are a trinity³⁷ without separation whose unity indicates the divinity of our master. We therefore say: “In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate.” The word “God” refers to the *ma'nā*, and the words “the merciful, the compassionate” refer to the *ism* and the *bāb*.³⁸

Q. 11 How did the *ma'nā* create the *ism*, and how did the *ism* create the *bāb*?³⁹

A. Know that the element of elements and essence of essences created the *ism* from the light of His unity, and made it a light formed from the essence of His *ma'nā*. He set it in motion from its [state of] rest; He chose it, named it by His [God's] name, and elected it, and it has no lord but Him [the *ma'nā*] and made it His creating power⁴⁰ and His speaking tongue.⁴¹ He [the *ma'nā*] then made it the eternal

³⁶ Here the reference is to the concept of the eschatological restoration of Nuṣayrī souls in the luminary world of their origin before the Fall. The myth of the Fall and restoration appears in early Nuṣayrī writings and is further elaborated in *Bākūra*, pp. 59–62. See the discussion in chap. 3, above, pp. 75–77.

³⁷ For the term *thālūth*, denoting the Nuṣayrī trinity, see above, introduction to the catechism, p. 166.

³⁸ Interpretation of the *basmala* formula as referring to the three persons of the trinity is common in Nuṣayrī writings. See e.g. chap. 1, above, p. 27; and Strothmann, “Die Nuṣayrī nach Ms. arab. Berlin 4291,” p. 177.

³⁹ For the creation of the *ism* by the *ma'nā*, see above, question 3.

⁴⁰ The term *hadd*, denoting emanated power is common in Ismā'īlī and Druze sources but seldom occurs in Nuṣayrī texts.

⁴¹ The term *nāṭiq* to designate the *ism* is rare in Nuṣayrī texts. For a similar usage,

cause through His great command. He further made it the axis of existence and the direction of worship⁴² through the command of the supreme God. He [the *ma'nā*] said to it: Be the causer of causes and the founder of *bābs*. And then the Veil (i.e. the *ism*) created the *bāb* according to its master's command. He [the *ma'nā*] ordered it [the Veil/*ism*] to create the upper worlds and the lower worlds.

Q. 12 Are the *bāb* and the *ma'nā* separated from the *ism*?

A. Not at all! They are rather connected to it and not separated from it, and [God] may He be exalted, said in "the Sermon of Doubts":⁴³ "May his pure salutations be upon his veil which is connected to him, not separated from him."⁴⁴

Q. 13 What are the names associated with the *ma'nā*, the *ism*, and the *bāb*; and how are they divided?

A. The names associated with the *ma'nā*, the *ism*, and the *bāb* are divided into symbolic, personal, and qualificative. The symbolic [names pertain to] the *ma'nā*; the personal to the *ism*; and the qualificative are those by which the *ism* was named and [pertain] particularly to the *ma'nā*, as we say: the merciful, the compassionate, the Creator.

Q. 14 Tell me about the sixty-three names of the *ism*, the symbolic [names] of the *ma'nā*, and the personal [names] of the *ism* by which He manifested himself in the prophets and the apostles?

A. Know that these symbolic names of the *ma'nā*, and personal names of the *ism* are Adam, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalaleel, Jered, Idrīs [=Enoch], Methuselah, Lamech, Noah, Shem, Arphaxad, Ya'rūb,⁴⁵ Hūd, Šāliḥ, Luqmān, Lot, Abraham, Ishmael, Ilyās [=Elijah], Isaac, Jacob, Shu'ayb, Moses, Aaron, Caleb, Ezekiel, Samuel, Ṭālūt (=Saul), David, Solomon, Job, Jonah, Isaiah, Elisha, al-Khiḍr, Zecharia, Yaḥyā (=John the Baptist), Jesus, Daniel, Alexander, Ardashīr, Shāpūr, Lu'ay, Murra, Kilāb, Quṣayy, 'Abd Manāf, Hāshim, 'Abd al-Muṭṭālib, 'Abd

of this term see above, chap. 4, p. 93 with note 27.

⁴² The question of addressing prayer to a certain entity within the divine hierarchy is dealt with in early Nuṣayrī theology. See above, chap. 5, p. 101 with note 6.

⁴³ This Sermon (*khuṭbat al-awḥām*) appears in ms. Manchester (John Rylands Library) no. 124., pp. 33a–36a.

⁴⁴ For the quotation here, see *ibid.*, p. 35a, lines 5–6.

⁴⁵ Ya'rūb [or Ya'rub] son of Qaḥṭān was according to Muslim historiography the ancestor of the Ḥimyar dynasty, and the first speaker of the Arabic language, hence his name.

Allāh, Moḥammad al-Muṣṭafā, al-Ḥasan al-Mujtabā, al-Ḥusayn, the martyr of Karbalā', 'Alī Zayn al-'Ābidīn, Muḥammad al-Bāqir, Ja'far al-Šādiq, Mūsā al-Kāẓim, 'Alī al-Riḍā, Muḥammad al-Jawād, 'Alī al-Hādī, Ḥasan al-'Askarī, and the Imām Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan, the proof, the redeemer, the Mahdī, the herald, the harbinger, the hoped for, the expected, the master of epoch and time. May their memory bestow peace upon us.⁴⁶

Q. 15 What are the qualificative names by which the *ism* was called and that [pertain] particularly to the *ma'nā*?

A. Know that the qualificative names by which the *ism* was called and that [pertain] particularly to the *ma'nā* are Allāh, the merciful, the compassionate, the creator, the shaper, the originator, the first, the last, the hidden, the revealed, the king, the powerful, the almighty, the magnificent, the peace, the faithful, the guardian, the omnipotent, the hearer, the seer, the knower, the wise, the strong, the forceful, the self-sufficient, the praised, the inventor, the restorer, the unique, the maker, the generous, the judge, the omniscient, the able, the illuminator, the lamp, the supreme, the master, the great, the eternal, glory to him, may he be blessed, the grace.⁴⁷

Q. 16 What are the names of the *ism* in the common use of the language?

A. The names of the *ism* in the common use of the language are Aḥmad, Muḥammad, the chosen, the illiterate, the faithful, the leader, the follower, the saver, the gatherer,⁴⁸ the reviver, the "yā", *sīn*,⁴⁹ the seven *ḥawāmīm*,⁵⁰ the three *ṭawāsīn*,⁵¹ the "kāf, yā, hā", 'ayn,

⁴⁶ This list is clearly divided into biblical figures including Qur'ānic figures located in biblical time; Persian figures, including Daniel and Alexander who were apparently associated with the Persian cycle; pre-Islamic Arab ancestors of the Hāshimī clan and finally the twelve Imams of the Imāmī-Twelve branch of Shī'ism. On the role of the twelve Imams in Nuṣayrī doctrine, see above, chap. 1, pp. 30-33.

⁴⁷ Most of these names derive from the traditional list of the "most beautiful names" of God (*al-asmā' al-ḥusnā*), originating in the Qur'ān (see e.g. *sūras* 7:107, 17:110, 20:8). On the concept of the divine names, see D. Gimaret, *Les noms divins en Islam: exégèse lexicographique et théologique* (Paris, 1988). It seems that the concluding words of this answer also denote divine attributes—a point corroborated by a similar use of the formula *subḥāna llāh* in question 23.

⁴⁸ Namely, He who gathers the bodies of the dead before resurrection—a recurrent eschatological motif in the Qur'ān.

⁴⁹ The following names of the *ism* derive from the "mysterious letters" (*fawātiḥ al-suwar* or *al-ḥurūf al-muqatta'a*) appearing at the beginning of 29 *sūras* in the Qur'ān. The mysterious letters "yā", *sīn*—the opening letters of *sūra* 36—denote also the name

ṣād⁵²; the “alif, lām, mīm”;⁵³ the “alif, lām, mīm, ṣād”;⁵⁴ the “alif, lām, rā”;⁵⁵ the “lā, hā”;⁵⁶ the fig, the olive,⁵⁷ *al-muzzammil*, *al-muddaththir*,⁵⁸ the ṣād,⁵⁹ the qāf,⁶⁰ the nūn,⁶¹ the responder. In the Torah [the *ism* is referred to as] *ma’d al-ma’d*,⁶² the trustworthy, the faithful; in the Gospel as the Paraclete;⁶³ in the Psalms as the guardian; and in the Qur’ān as Muḥammad.

Q. 17 Tell me about the nine personal names of the *ism*?

A. Know that they are Adam, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Solomon, Jesus, ‘Abd Allāh, Muḥammad the messenger of God, and Muḥammad son of Ḥasan [al-‘Askarī], the proof.⁶⁴

of this *sūra*. For other lists of *fawātiḥ* referring to the divinity, see Kiel, p. 16 (the Arabic text), p. 37 (the German translation); *MA*, p. 186.

⁵⁰ Plural of “ḥā, mīm”—the mysterious letters appearing at the head of seven consecutive *sūras*: 40 (*ghāfir*), 41 (*fuṣṣilat*), 42 (*al-shūrā*), 43 (*al-zukhruf*), 44 (*al-dukhān*), 45 (*al-jāthiya*), and 46 (*al-aḥqāf*).

⁵¹ Plural of “lā, sīn” (the *fawātiḥ* at the head of *sūra* 27 [*al-naml*]) and “lā, sīn, mīm” (the *fawātiḥ* appearing at the head of *sūras* 26 [*al-shu‘arā*] and 28 [*al-qāṣaṣ*]).

⁵² The *fawātiḥ* at the head of *sūra* 19 (Maryam).

⁵³ These letters appear at the head of six *sūras*: 2 (*al-baqara*), 3 (*āl ‘Imrān*), 29 (*al-‘ankabūt*), 30 (*al-rūm*), 31 (*Luqmān*), and 32 (*al-sajda*).

⁵⁴ See beginning of *sūra* 7 (*al-a‘rāf*).

⁵⁵ See beginning of *sūra* 13 (*al-ra‘d*).

⁵⁶ These letters (“lā, hā”) open *sūra* 20 and also denote the name of the *sūra*.

⁵⁷ The fig and the olive refer to two holy trees mentioned in the Qur’ān in *sūra* 95 named *al-tīn* (the fig).

⁵⁸ *Al-muzzammil* (enwrapped) is the title of *sūra* 73, and *al-muddaththir* (shrouded) is the title of *sūra* 74; both are traditionally interpreted as referring to Muḥammad.

⁵⁹ Denoting also the name of *sūra* 38.

⁶⁰ Denoting also the name of *sūra* 50.

⁶¹ Denoting also the name of *sūra* 68 (named also *al-qalam* [the pen]).

⁶² This refers to the Hebrew biblical words **רַבְרַב** (exceedingly) in Gen. 17:20 about God’s blessing to Ishmael: “And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly....” Based upon the numerical value of the Hebrew letters (and their Arabic transliteration) of that expression adding to 92—equivalent to the numerical value of the name Muḥammad—Muslim tradition regarded this verse as one of the biblical *testimonia* to the prophet of Islam. For this and other biblical verses interpreted in Muslim tradition as references to Muḥammad, see H. Lazarus-Yafe, *Intertwined World: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism* (Princeton, 1992), pp. 106–110.

⁶³ This refers to the New Testament term “Paraclete” (see e.g. John 14:16; 16:7), which, according to Muslim exegesis, is reflected in Q. 61:6, where Jesus foretells the coming of a messenger named Aḥmad. See R. Paret, *Der Koran: Kommentar und Konkordanz* (Stuttgart, Berlin, Cologne, 1980), pp. 476–478, and the references there. See also Blachère, *Le Coran*, p. 593, note 6.

⁶⁴ This term, in the sense of God’s presence on earth, is common in Shī‘ism. In Imāmī Shī‘ī writings it designates the category of prophets and Imams. *Hujja* also denotes a particular high rank in the Faṭimid *da‘wā* hierarchy.

Q. 18 Tell me about the names of the *ism* in the [world of] shadows?⁶⁵

A. Know that the names of the *ism* in the [world of] shadows are will, generation, knowledge, ability, and the concealed grace.

Q. 19 Tell me about the names of the *ism* in the Abrahamic cycle?

A. The names of the *ism* in the Abrahamic cycle are Abraham, Ishmael, Ilyās, Quṣayy, and Isaac.⁶⁶

Q. 20 Tell me about the names of the *ism* in the Mosaic cycle?

A. Know that they are Moses, Aaron, Shabbar and Shubbayr, and Mushbir.⁶⁷

Q. 21 What are the names of the *ism* in the Muḥammadan cycle?

A. They are Muḥammad, Fāṭir (=Fāṭima),⁶⁸ Ḥasan, Ḥusayn, and Muḥsin.

Q. 22 What are the names of the *bāb* of God, the great, the exalted, the immense, the illuminating, the one surrounded by light?

A. They are Gabriel, Yāʿl, Ḥam, Dan, ʿAbd Allāh, Rūzbih, and our master Salmān the Persian—may their memory bestow peace upon us, his “ship,”⁶⁹ namely Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, who is Qays b. Waraqa al-Riyāḥī, Rushayd al-Hajarī, Kankar Abū Khālīd, who is

⁶⁵ This term refers to one of the primordial forms of existence of the souls of the believers in the spiritual world of lights and shadows widespread in early Shīʿism. See Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shīʿism*, pp. 16, 32, and 224 (note); Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shīʿism*, pp. 136–137. This concept became a cornerstone of the Nuṣayrī myth of origin and the Fall attested already in *Kitāb al-ḥaft wa-l-aẓilla*. See also chap. 3, above, pp. 75–77.

⁶⁶ According to the concept of the cyclical manifestation of the deity, the *ism* appears in more than one person in each cycle.

⁶⁷ The first two names are thought to be derived from the Hebrew-Aramaic root *shpr*, which—like its Arabic counterpart (*hsn*)—means “to be beautiful, lovely, nice,” etc. For Ḥasan and Ḥusayn being so named see, for instance, al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022), *Kitāb al-ikhtisāṣ*, p. 37; M.J. Kister, “Haddithū ʿan banī isrāʾīla wa-lā ḥaraja,” *Israel Oriental Studies* 2 (1972), pp. 215–239; Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam*, p. 73. Cf. also S.M. Wasserstrom, “The Shīʿis are the Jews of our Community,” *Israel Oriental Studies* 14 (1994), pp. 297–324 at p. 299, which, as does our text, mentions Muḥsin, a third son of ʿAlī, whose name is said to be a literal translation of the name of a third son of Aaron, Mushbir. For the affinity in Shīʿī tradition between the figures of ʿAlī and Aaron, see Y. Friedmann, *Prophecy Continuous: Aspects of Aḥmadī Religious Thought and Its Medieval Background* (Berkeley, 1989), pp. 58–59.

⁶⁸ For the name of Fāṭima in masculine form see above, chap. 1, p. 37, note 144; chap. 6, p. 144.

⁶⁹ This is a common appellation of Qays b. Waraqa. See also question 33, below.

‘Abd Allāh b. Ghālib al-Kābulī and Yaḥyā b. Ma‘mar b. Umm al-Ṭawīl al-Thumālī, Abū al-Ṭayyibāt Muḥammad b. Abī Zaynab al-Kāhilī al-Bazzāz al-Mawṣilī, al-Mufaḍḍal b. ‘Umar al-Ju‘fī, Muḥammad b. al-Mufaḍḍal, ‘Umar b. al-Furāt the secretary, and Abū Shu‘ayb Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, Salsal, Salsabīl, Diḥya b. Khalīfa al-Kalbī and our lady Umm Salama, entrusted with benefactions alluding through her sanctity to the manifestations of the *ma’nā*, the *ism*, and the *bāb*.⁷⁰

Q. 23 Tell me about the names of the persons⁷¹ of the *bāb* in the books of the unitarians.

A. The names of the persons of the *bāb* in the books of the unitarians⁷² are the throne, the water, the sky, the gate, the faithful spirit,⁷³ the holy spirit, lord of men,⁷⁴ mount Sinai, the raven,⁷⁵ (Noah’s) ark, the she-camel,⁷⁶ the staff,⁷⁷ the ring, the ant, the hoopoe,⁷⁸ the protector⁷⁹ the Mahdī, the throne, Salsal, Salsabīl,

⁷⁰ The central part of this list comprises historical figures identified in Nuṣayrī tradition as the *bābs* of the first eleven Imāms, beginning with Salmān and ending with Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr. Jābir b. Yazīd al-Ju‘fī, the *bāb* of the seventh Imām, is however missing from this list. The beginning and end of the list includes mythological names and figures from among pre-Islamic and early Islamic generations. For similar lists, see Kiel, p. 13 (the Arabic text), pp. 34–35 (the German translation); Ghālib, *Ta’rīkh al-‘Alawīyyīn*, pp. 254–255; Moosa, *Extremist Shi’ites*, pp. 352–353. The term *bāb*, denoting here—as in Shī‘ī tradition generally—the senior authorized disciple of the Imam, is to be distinguished from the common designation of the *bāb* as the third person of the trinity. However, according to certain Nuṣayrī traditions, the deity may also be revealed in the Imams and their *bābs*. See chap. 1, pp. 30–33.

⁷¹ The term *ashkhāṣ* denotes the historical figures represented in the various degrees of emanation. See above, p. 116.

⁷² The following list of names refers to various stories from the Bible, the Qur’ān, and Islamic traditions as well as to abstract attributes. The connotations of some of these names are not always clear.

⁷³ See Q. 26:193. This title is commonly applied in Muslim tradition to the angel Gabriel.

⁷⁴ For this expression, see Q. 114:1.

⁷⁵ This refers to the raven mentioned in Q. 5:31 as teaching Adam’s elder son how to bury his brother. See *Bākūra*, p. 113. See also chap. 2, p. 49 with note 34.

⁷⁶ This refers to the Qur’ānic story about the sending of a she-camel to the people of Thamūd as a divine sign. See e.g. 7:73ff.

⁷⁷ This refers to the staff of Moses. See e.g. Ex. 7:10, 15; Q. 7:107.

⁷⁸ The last three names are associated with tales about King Solomon. The ring refers to the legendary magical ring of King Solomon (see *Bākūra*, p. 115); the ant and the hoopoe allude to the account in Q. 27 known also from Jewish sources.

⁷⁹ For this rare term (in Arabic: *al-kālī*), see also *MA*, p. 10, line 1.

Dan,⁸⁰ *al-qadūm*,⁸¹ the trumpet,⁸² the wall,⁸³ the creation, the drink (wine),⁸⁴ Aries, Aquarius, the cause, the *kawthar*,⁸⁵ the scale, justice, equity, the proof, the evidence, the summoner, the herald, the path, the forerunner, the warner, the light, the moon, the intention, the supporter, the mosque, the serpent, the messenger, the prophet, the guardian, the brother of Joseph, the ship,⁸⁶ praise to God, the knower, the tablet and the pen,⁸⁷ the stealer of the grail,⁸⁸ messengers (?),⁸⁹ the cow⁹⁰ and Gabriel—may they bestow peace upon us. These are the symbolic names of the *bāb* in the books of the unitarians.

Q. 24 Tell me about the names of the persons of the *bāb* in the six spiritual stations.⁹¹

A. Know that the names of the persons of the *bāb* in the first station [are] Gabriel, peace be upon him, and his *yaṭīms*, Michael, Isrāfil, 'Izrā'īl, and Riḍwān.⁹²

⁸⁰ This apparently refers to the biblical son of Jacob, as may be inferred from *Bākūra* (p. 113).

⁸¹ This may refer to the divine attribute *qadīm* (primordial, eternal). See e.g. *KM*, pp. 195, line 12 (=p. 176 in the French translation; Salisbury, p. 257).

⁸² This refers to the eschatological trumpet that will be blown on the Day of Judgement. See e.g. Q. 23:101.

⁸³ See Q. 18:96, referring to the wall (*radm*) built by Dhū al-Qarnayn—identified in Muslim exegesis with Alexander the Great—to keep out the peoples of Gog and Magog. This legendary wall plays an important role in Christian medieval eschatology and would, it was said, be broken by the nations of the north when they invaded the civilized world. See A.R. Anderson, *Alexander's Gate: Gog and Magog and the Enclosed Nations* (Cambridge, Mass., 1932).

⁸⁴ This refers to the liturgical wine or to the wine of paradise. See *khavar al-sharāb* (the tradition of wine) in Strothmann, "Esoterische Sonderthemen," pp. 4–5.

⁸⁵ This refers to the Qur'ānic word *al-kawthar*—the title of *sūra* 108—which in Muslim tradition is often interpreted as one of the rivers of paradise.

⁸⁶ This probably also refers to Noah's ark, mentioned earlier under the name *fulk*. Cf. Strothmann, "Esoterische Sonderthemen," p. 25.

⁸⁷ This is also a Qur'ānic pair. The *lawḥ* refers to *al-lawḥ al-mahfūz* (the heavenly guarded tablet), while the *qalam* refers to the pen of *sūra* 68, which is associated in Qur'ānic exegesis with the heavenly tablet. In Ismā'īlī theosophy this pair connotes the two divine emanations of *kūnī* and *qadar*. See F. Daftary, *A Short History of the Ismailis: Traditions of a Muslim Community* (Edinburgh, 1998), p. 56.

⁸⁸ See Q. 12:72.

⁸⁹ This is a literal translation of the Arabic *sufarā'*, which seems to be a scribal error.

⁹⁰ See Q. 2:68–71.

⁹¹ The term *maqāmāt* (sing. *maqām*; literally meaning place or station) belongs to the concept of dynamic movement of various emanations within the divine *pleroma*. According to this concept, a lower emanation may serve as a station (*maqām*) for a higher degree. This concept is elaborated in the Nuṣayrī treatise, published above, chap. 5, pp. 102–103.

⁹² Note that a sixth name is missing.

Q. 25 Tell me about the names of the persons of the *bāb* in the second station.

A. Know that they are Yā'il b. Fātin and his *yatīms* Afqīl, Ifrāqūn, Kenan, Ifrīq and Ifrīqa.⁹³

Q. 26 Tell me about the names of the persons of the *bāb* in the third station.

A. Know that their names in the third station are Ham son of Kush⁹⁴ and his *yatīms* Juda, Hayrūsh, Mālik, Hamlak, and Anqīl.⁹⁵

Q. 27 Tell me about the names of the persons of the *bāb* in the fourth station.

A. Their names [are] Dan son of Aṣbā'ūt⁹⁶ and his *yatīms* Yahūdān, Hayrūq, 'Abd Allāh, Israel, 'Imrān.⁹⁷

Q. 28 Tell me about the names of the persons of the *bāb* in the fifth station.

A. Know that they are 'Abd Allāh b. Sam'ān and his *yatīms* Sha'īra, Shutelah, Harsha, Maskūl and Ashīra.⁹⁸

Q. 29 Tell me about the names of the persons of the *bāb* in the sixth station.

A. Know that their names [are] Rūzbih son of Marzbān and his *yatīms* John Chrysostom,⁹⁹ John of Daylam,¹⁰⁰ Paul, Peter, and Matthew. May the best prayer and peace be upon them.

⁹³ Except for the biblical Kenan, the other names seem to be pure invention associated with the name Africa. The obscure Yā'il b. Fātin is connected (see questions 25-26 here [and see also question 22])—as in *MA* (p. 211)—with Ham, who according to biblical genealogy is the ancestor of the African peoples. This and the following six questions aim at illustrating the universal dimension of the *bāb* in its relation to humanity.

⁹⁴ In contradistinction to Gen. 10:6, where Ham is the father of Kush.

⁹⁵ It is unclear to us to which ancient people this quasi-mythical list refers.

⁹⁶ This name probably reflects the Hebrew *Šebā'ōt*, a biblical title for God also popular in various Gnostic systems. Prof. Shaul Shaked suggested to us that the name Dan b. Asbā'ōt may be a corruption of the common biblical appellation אֲדֹנָי צְבָאוֹת. Cf. *MA*, p. 212 where the two occur in close proximity to one another.

⁹⁷ The dominant component of this list seems to represent the people of ancient Israel.

⁹⁸ Except for the biblical Shuthelah (Num. 26:35), the derivation of the names in this list of *yatīms* eludes us.

⁹⁹ The fourth-century Church Father, to whom a Nuṣayrī festival is dedicated. See chap. 6, p. 113.

¹⁰⁰ This may refer to the East Syrian 7th–8th centuries missionary to the Daylamites. See S.P. Brock, "A Syriac Life of John of Dailam," *Parole de l'Orient* 10 (1981–1982), pp. 123–175.

Q. 30 Tell me about the names of the persons of the *bāb* in the Bahmanī (Persian) cycles.¹⁰¹

A. Know that their names in the Bahmanī cycles are Sīraūs, Ardavān, Kinyān, Jam, Qobād, Fīrūz, Anūshervān, Kay Kāvūs, Yazdānshāh, Pūr Bahrām Gūr, Afrīdūn, Dodshah (Anūsha?), Shāh Mardān, Buzurjmihr, Shariyarjīl, Jīl, Khordād, Rūzbih, and Turkān.¹⁰²

Q. 31 How is the *bāb* called?

A. He is further called the universal soul, the holy spirit, Gabriel. He is also called the powerful, the supreme, Salmān.

Q. 32 Tell me about the names of the *bāb* and its *yafīms* in the eleven appearances,¹⁰³ whose knowledge God bestowed upon us and led us toward it.

A. Know that the names of the *bāb* and its *yafīms* in the first appearance are our master Salmān, who is Rūzbih son of Marzbān the Persian, and among his appellations are Abū al-Ṭāhir, Abū al-Yaqīn, and Abū ‘Abd Allāh, and his *yafīms* are al-Miqdād b. ‘Amr b. ‘Uthmān b. al-Aswad al-Kindī; Abū Dharr Jundab b. Junāda b. Sakan al-Ghifārī, ‘Abd Allāh b. Rawāḥa al-Anṣārī—who is in his external [appearance] the milk brother of our master the messenger of God, may God pray for him and his family; ‘Uthmān b. Maẓ‘ūn al-Najāshī al-Hilālī, a milk brother of our patron the commander of the faithful, may his blessings grow strong; Qanbar b. Kādān al-Dawsī—who is the servant of our patron, the commander of the faithful, may he bestow mercy. His father and ancestry in the external [appearance] are unknown.¹⁰⁴

Q. 33 Tell me about the names of the *bāb* and its *yafīms* in the second appearance.

A. Know that the names of the *bāb* and its *yafīms* in the second appearance are Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Qays b. Waraqa al-Riyāḥī, who

¹⁰¹ A classification of these cycles is offered in *MA*, pp. 209–212. See also question 97, below.

¹⁰² Most of the Persian names in the Arabic manuscript are distorted. We are indebted to our friend and colleague M.A. Amir-Moezzi for his assistance in reconstructing this list of Persian rulers.

¹⁰³ Questions 32–42 deal with the appearances of the *bāb* during the period of the eleven Imams. This reflects the concept of the incarnation of the deity in all its emanations in the Imams and their intimate companions listed in this series of questions. See also chap. 1, p. 30, note 114.

¹⁰⁴ All five are among the preeminent companions of the Prophet, who were also regarded as devotees of ‘Alī. Hence their honoured place in Shī‘ī tradition.

is called Abū-l-Maṣābīḥ¹⁰⁵ and whose appellation is ship, God's prayers be upon him. His *yafims* are Ṣa'ṣa'a b. Ṣūḥān al-'Abdī and his brother Zayd b. Ṣūḥān, 'Ammār b. Yāsir, a contemporary of the messenger of God— may God pray for him and his family. He is the one of whom [the messenger of God] said: "Ammār is a piece of skin between my eyes. He will be killed by this oppressing band. May God not grant my intercession upon them";¹⁰⁶ Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr b. 'Abd Allāh b. 'Uthmān; and Muḥammad b. Abī Ḥudhayfa.

Q. 34 What are the names of the *bāb* and its *yafims* in the third appearance?

A. Their names [are] Abū-l-'Alā' al-Rushayd al-Hajarī, who is called Abū-l-Nāmiyāt, may the prayers of God be upon him; and his *yafims* are 'Amr b. al-Ḥamiq b. Muḥammad b. Ṣafwān al-Khuzā'i, al-Ḥārith al-A'war al-Hamdānī, Mītham al-Tammār al-Nahrawānī, Ḥujr b. 'Adī al-Kindī, and al-Aṣbagh b. Nubāta al-Ṭā'i.

Q. 35 What are the names of the *bāb* and its *yafims* in the fourth appearance?

A. Their names [are] Abū Khālīd 'Abd Allāh b. Ghālīb al-Kābulī, whose appellation is Kankar and who is also called Abū-l-Taḥyāyā, may the prayers of God be upon him; and his *yafims* are Sa'īd b. al-Musayyab, Ḥakīm b. Jubayr; Jābir b. 'Abd Allāh al-Sulamī al-Anṣārī, al-Qāsim, and Ḥabīb b. Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr.

Q. 36 What are the names of the *bāb* and its *yafims* in the fifth appearance?

A. Their names [are] Yaḥyā b. Ma'mar b. Umm al-Ṭawīl al-Thumālī, may the prayers of God be upon him, who was in his external appearance the son of the midwife of our patron 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn, and he is called Abū-l-Ḥusayn. His *yafims* are Yaḥyā b. Abī-

¹⁰⁵ Literally: "master of lamps." Similar appellations consisting of the plural form of a laudatory noun—such as Abū-l-nāmiyāt (question 34 and 40), Abū-l-Tuḥaf (question 37), Abū-l-Tayyibāt (question 38), and Abū-l-Zakiyyāt (question 39)—seem to be peculiar to Nuṣayrī tradition.

¹⁰⁶ These words refer to a well-known prophecy attributed to Muḥammad regarding the death of his companion 'Ammār b. Yāsir at the hand of a rebel band. See al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 33, p. 7; vol. 52, p. 201; H. Reckendorf, "'Ammār b. Yāsir," *EF*, vol. 1, p. 448. See also *Bākūra*, p. 37, where 'Ammār is referred to by the appellation *ṣāhib al-faḍl wa-l-ma'āthir* (the most excellent and meritorious). The *yafims* mentioned here are also referred to in *ibid.* as "the persons of myrtle" (*ashkhās al-rayḥān*), and their order in the divine hierarchy is called "the myrtle line" (*saṭr al-rayḥān*), like the recurrent term "the imāma line" (*saṭr al-imāma*).

l-'Aqb al-Thumālī, Abū Ḥamza Thābit b. Abī Ṣafiyya al-Thumālī, Kumayl b. Ziyād, Furāt b. Aḥnaf, and Ḥamrān b. A'yan.

Q. 37 What are the names of the *bāb* and its *yafīms* in the sixth appearance?

A. The names of the *bāb* in the sixth appearance are Abū Muḥammad Jābir b. Yazīd al-Ju'fī, who is called Abū-l-Tuḥaf; and his *yafīms* are Furāt b. Aḥnaf, Ḥamrān b. A'yan, Jābir b. Yaḥyā al-Mu'abbarānī, and Banān b. al-Mughīra, Maymūn b. Ibrāhīm al-Tabbān.

Q. 38 What are the names of the *bāb* [and its *yafīms*] in the seventh appearance?

A. Their names are Abū Ismā'īl Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl b. Abī Zaynab al-Kāhilī and al-Bazzāz al-Mawṣilī, who is called Abū-l-Ṭayyibāt,¹⁰⁷ may the prayers of God be upon him. His *yafīms* are Ismā'īl and his disciples (?),¹⁰⁸ Abū Muḥammad Sufyān b. Muṣ'ab al-'Abdī, Bashshār al-Sha'īrī, al-Mu'allā b. Khunays, and Abū Ayyūb al-Qummī.

Q. 39 What are the names of the *bāb* and its *yafīms* in the eighth appearance?

A. Their names are Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Mufaḍḍal b. 'Umar al-Ju'fī, who is called Abū-l-Zakiyyāt, may the prayers of God be upon him. His *yafīms* are Abū Ayyūb al-Qummī, Yūnus b. Ḍabyān al-Ṣakhrī, Abū-l-Ghuṣn Ḥujā who is Thābit b. al-Dukayn, Yaḥyā b. Yazīd, and Abū-l-Ghamr al-Thumālī.

Q. 40 Tell me about the names of the *bāb* and its *yafīms* in the ninth appearance.

A. The names of the *bāb* in the ninth appearance are Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. al-Mufaḍḍal b. 'Umar al-Ju'fī who is called Abū-l-Ṭayyibāt, may the prayers of God be upon him. His *yafīms* are Asad b. Ismā'īl, al-Ḥurr al-Nakhkhās al-Dawābb, Ṣāliḥ b. 'Abd al-Quddūs, and Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Hartamī; others say 'Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad al-Hartamī, and 'Alī b. 'Abd Allāh al-Malik al-Qummī.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Strothmann, "Esoterische Sonderthemen," p. 5, where his appellation is given as Abū-l-Ṭayyibīn wa-l-Ṭayyibāt.

¹⁰⁸ A scribal error seems to have occurred in the transmission of the last name (Ismā'īl). The word *wald* (literally: descendants) may have been inserted here in order to connect the name Ismā'īl to the other names in the list.

Q. 41 Tell me about the names of the *bāb* and its *yafīms* in the tenth appearance.

A. Know that the names of the *bāb* in the tenth appearance are Abū-l-Qāsim 'Umar b. al-Furāt al-Kātib, who is called Abū al-Sahl, may the prayers of God be upon him. His *yafīms* are al-Ḥasan and Wahb, sons of Qārān, Khālīd b. Abī-l-Ash'ath, Naṣr b. Salām, and Muḥammad b. 'Umar al-Kunāsī.

Q. 42 Tell me about the names of the *bāb* and its *yafīms* in the eleventh appearance.

A. Know that the names of the *bāb* in the eleventh appearance are Abū Shu'ayb Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr al-Bakrī al-Namīrī (or al-Numayrī) al-'Abdī,¹⁰⁹ who is called Abū al-Qāsim, and among his Arabic titles are Abū Ṭālib, and Abū-l-Ḥasan. His *yafīms* are Muḥammad b. Jundab, 'Alī b. Umm al-Ruqād, Fādawayhī al-Kurdī, Ishāq b. 'Ammār al-Kūfī, and Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. al-Furāt al-Kātib, may the best of prayers and peace be upon all of them.

Q. 43 Tell me about the names of our master, the commander of the faithful, in the various languages with their details and explanation.¹¹⁰

A. Know that the Arabs named our master the commander of the faithful—'Alī, and he was further called the bald one, the corpulent, the egg of the valley (?), the hairless of [the tribe of] Quraysh, and his mother named him lion. His father named him Zayd, al-Ṣumaydī, Ḥāhīr, and the Prophet, may God's prayers and his peace be upon him, named him man; his uncle named him al-Muqawwam b. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib al-Ṣalṣāl; his midwife named him Ḥāhīr, and Maymūn and Majma' Maymūn, and his grandmother named him Khabīr. His brother Ja'far named him Raḍī; The ascetic called him

¹⁰⁹ Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr, the eponym of the Nuṣayrī religion, is traditionally regarded as the *bāb* of the eleventh Imam al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī and is historically associated with him. Noteworthy is that the messianic title *abū-l-qāsim*—exclusive for the Mahdī—is here ascribed to Ibn Nuṣayr. On the ambiguous attitude of Nuṣayrī tradition to the twelfth Imam, see above, chap. 1, p. 30, note 114. Moreover, an attempt seems to be made here to emphasize the significant role of Ibn Nuṣayr by associating him with two other persons of the Hāshimī clan—'Alī's father, Abū Ṭālib, and 'Alī himself, who is here referred to by his appellation Abū-l-Ḥasan.

¹¹⁰ Not all the names and appellations in the list that follows are identifiable. As with other lists in this catechism, some seem to be pure invention of the Nuṣayrī tradition. The purpose of this list, however, is clearly to indicate that all nations acknowledge 'Alī as the supreme deity.

the great law and Simon the pure (Peter). He named himself on the pulpit Aristotle. His name in the Torah is innocent. His name in the Gospel, Elijah, means 'Alī. His name among the priests¹¹¹ is Būbā. His name among the Indians is Kankar. His name in the Psalms is Arya. His name among the Romans is Peter. His name among the Persians is Bāriya. His name among the Zangs is Ḥabīb. His name among the Ethiopians is Tabrīk. The Armenians named him Ifrīqa. The masses and the elect named him *diryāq* (theriaca) and *fārūq*. He said in some of his sermons: "I am the great righteous and the great redeemer".¹¹² The Daylamites name him "He." Solomon used to say in his prayer: "O He O He, that no one knows who he is but he."¹¹³ And among his names, may he be exalted, by which he was called by the peoples who existed in the world before humanity—the Ḥinn, the Binn, the Ṭimm, the Rimm, the Jānn, the Jinn¹¹⁴—the innocent, the compassionate. And he [Solomon] said reporting their words: "We used to call him before [we called him] 'he'—the innocent, the compassionate." These two names are among the names by which he was called by the people of the five worlds.¹¹⁵ God has many names that cannot be counted, from eternity to our world, and no one except him is called by them. In the Qur'ān he has ninety-nine names, among which are: the Messiah, the holy, the second, the thanksgiver, the utterer, the praiser, the praying, and other names, and these are some of them.¹¹⁶ These names are famous as God says (Q. 7:18): "To God belong the names most beautiful, so call him by them." When you are in trouble say: "O ruler, the grumbler, O peace, rescue me, O guardian protect me." You should then distinguish him, may he be

¹¹¹ It is unclear whether the text refers here to certain priests of an unspecified religion or to the pre-Islamic Arab diviners, who were also known as *kahana*.

¹¹² The honorary appellations *al-ṣiddīq* (a title of Abū Bakr) and *al-fārūq* (one of the many designations of 'Umar) are employed in Shī'ī writings with reference to 'Alī; see e.g. the 3rd/9th century Imāmī Qur'ān commentator, Furāt b. Furāt b. Ibrāhīm al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr Furāt*, p. 26: "... 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib al-ṣiddīq al-akbar wa-l-fārūq al-a'zam." And see also Muḥammad b. 'Alī Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib āl Abī Ṭālib* (Najaf, 1375/1956), vol. 2, p. 285.

¹¹³ An identical formula appears in *KM*, p. 182 (=p. 62 in the French translation; Salisbury, p. 235). See also question 51, below.

¹¹⁴ For these enigmatic names, see below, question 52. These names are also mentioned by al-Adhanī (*Bākūra*, pp. 61–62) as denoting the seven primordial cycles (*al-qibāb al-sab'*) according to three early Nuṣayrī works, among which is the proto-Nuṣayrī *Kitāb al-ḥaṣṭ* [*wa-l-azilla*].

¹¹⁵ These five worlds—belonging to the primordial stage—should not be confused with the seven cycles mentioned above.

¹¹⁶ Some of these names deviate from the traditional list of divine names.

exalted, from all names by these three names: living, knowing, and able.¹¹⁷ He was called death, and at the battle of Badr he was called *Sanāḥnah*. Muḥammad named him faith, the leader, the deputy, the judge, the jurist, peace, believer, the guardian, the rich, the praised, and "there is no God but him," the clear truth, the saint, the Hour, and the most compassionate.

Q. 44 Tell me about the rest of the names of our master, the commander of the faithful, with their explanation and details.

A. Know that the names of our master the commander of the faithful in the scrolls of Seth, Idrīs [=Enoch], Noah, and Abraham¹¹⁸ in Syriac are primordial matter, the faithful, clearness, certainty, conviction, the victorious; in the books of the Persians [he is called] *Namīr*, which is the name of fire; in the books of the Turks *Tabīra*; in the language of the Zangs *Kiyyinā*; in the language of the Ethiopians *Tabrīk*. He was also named the day of the well. On that day the son of his *Hilālī* midwife fell down [into the well], and he [=‘Alī] tied his foot and led him out fortunate.¹¹⁹

Q. 45 How is the mother of our master, the commander of the faithful, called outwardly?

A. She is called *Fāṭima* daughter of *Asad b. Hāshim b. ‘Abd Manāf*. At his time there was no *Hāshimī* son of a *Hāshimī* woman but him.

Q. 46 Who are the brothers of our master, the commander of the faithful?

A. They are *Ḥamza*, *Ja‘far*, *Ṭālib*, and *‘Aqīl*.

Q. 47 Who are the sons of our master, the commander of the faithful outwardly?

A. They are *Ḥasan*, *Ḥusayn*,¹²⁰ and his two daughters, *Zaynab* and *Umm Kulthūm*.

¹¹⁷ All three attributes are the traditional self-attributes of God advocated by the *Kalām*.

¹¹⁸ Pseudepigraphic writings attributed to biblical figures such as Seth exist in Nuṣayrī literature. See e.g. *Kitāb al-usūs*, pp. 55–56 (=ed. Dandashī, pp. 133–134). It seems, however, that here the text gives a fictitious legendary motif with the purpose of creating the impression of an ancient mysterious lore.

¹¹⁹ According to a parallel tradition cited by al-Khāṣībī (*al-Hidāya l-kubrā*, p. 93), the person who fell down into the well is ‘Uthmān.

¹²⁰ Note that the third son of ‘Alī, namely Muḥṣin, is missing here.

A. 48 Where is the tomb of our master, the commander of the faithful?

A. His tomb is in al-Dakwat al-Bayḍ,¹²¹ west of al-Kufa.

Q. 49 What are the exclusive names of our master, the commander of the faithful, the use of which is not permitted to anyone but him, and [through which] the interior meaning of the prayer is to be directed to him alone?¹²²

A. They are the *ma'nā*, the eternal, the unique, the primordial, the one, the everlasting, the supreme, *ma'nā* of *ma'nās*, the lord of the *mathānī*,¹²³ the goal of goals, the end of ends, the lord of eternity, the master of everlastingness, the living, the knower, the living and everlasting, the prince of the bees, the supreme and the great, my lord and master, Abel, Seth, Joseph, Joshua, Asaf, Simon (Peter), the commander of the faithful,¹²⁴ the bald, the corpulent.

Q. 50 Why do we call our master, the commander of the faithful, the prince of the bees and what is its symbolic meaning?

A. Know that the believers were likened to bees because they gather from the flowers their best, and since our master, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, is the commander of the faithful, he was called the prince of the bees.¹²⁵

Q. 51 How did the nations that existed in the world before humanity call our master, the commander of faithful?

A. They used to call him "he"—namely, he who is. It is therefore that Solomon used to say in his prayer: "O He O He, that no one knows who he is but he."¹²⁶

Q. 52 Which are the nations that were in the world before humanity?

¹²¹ Cf. *al-Hidāya l-kubrā*, pp. 94, 98.

¹²² See also questions 43-44 above.

¹²³ On the various meanings of this Qur'ānic word, see A. Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān* (Baroda, 1938), pp. 257-258; U. Rubin, "Exegesis and *Hādīth*: The Case of the Seven *Mathānī*," in *Approaches to the Qur'ān*, edited by J.R. Hawting and A.A. Shareef (London and New York, 1993), pp. 141-156.

¹²⁴ The last seven persons are the incarnations of the *ma'nā* in the seven historical cycles.

¹²⁵ This appellation of 'Alī in Shī'ī tradition derives from Q. 16:68. The common interpretation of the "bees" mentioned in this verse is the Imams. See Goldziher, "Schī'itisches," in idem, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5, pp. 213-214.

¹²⁶ For this formula, see above, question 43 with note 113.

A. They are the Jinn, the Binn, the Ṭimm, the Rimm, and the Jānn.¹²⁷

Q. 53 How many worlds are there?

A. Know that the worlds are many, and no one knows their number but their creator. Among these are the great luminous world and the small human earthly world.¹²⁸

Q. 54 What is the great luminous world?

A. It is the heaven that is the light of lights.

Q. 55 What is the small human earthly world?

A. It is the earth.

Q. 56 What does the great luminous world include?

A. It includes the seven ranks before their appearance in the world of humanity; they are the *bābs*, the *yafīms*, the *naqībs*, the *naḥībs*, the *mukhtaṣṣes*, the *mukhallāṣes*, and the *mumtaḥans*.¹²⁹

Q. 57 Explain to me the names of the degrees of the seven ranks.

A. Know that the names of the degrees of the first rank, which are the four hundred *bābs*, are the names, the veils, the signs, the lights, the suns, the stars, the clouds.

Q. 58 What is the second rank?

A. It is the five hundred *yafīms*, which have seven degrees, and they are the easts, the wests, the moons, the crescents, the stars, the thunders, and the lightnings.

Q. 59 What is the third rank.

A. It is the rank of the six hundred *naqībs*, which has seven degrees and they are prayer, alms-giving, pilgrimage, fast, emigration, holy war, and invocation.

¹²⁷ Cf. above, question 43.

¹²⁸ The Arabic *jīns* appearing here and in the following question seems to be employed in the sense of the Greek *genos* referring to the human race. Its syntactic position in the sentence, however, remains unclear.

¹²⁹ These ranks—frequently mentioned in Nuṣayrī texts—represent the continuation of the realm of emanations. The last five can also designate degrees that the Gnostic believer may attain in his spiritual ascent. See *KM*, pp. 190–191 (=pp. 171–172 in the French translation; Salisbury, p. 250). See also chap. 3, above, p. 78. The names for the degrees of each rank normally belong to a certain category (e.g. celestial bodies and phenomena, religious commandments and practices, the parts of the day, etc.). However, certain names do not fit within any category.

Q. 60 What is the fourth rank?

A. It is the rank of the seven hundred *najībs*, which has seven degrees, and they are mountains, scuds, seas, rivers, winds, clouds, and thunderbolts.

Q. 61 What is the fifth rank?

A. It is the rank of the eight hundred *mukhtaṣṣes*, which has seven degrees, and they are night, day, morning, evening, dawn, twilight, torrent.

Q. 62 What is the sixth rank?

A. It is the rank of the nine hundred *mukhallāṣes*, which has seven degrees, and they are cattle, riding-animals, camels, bees, fowl, monastic-cells, and houses of prayer.

Q. 63 What is the seventh rank?

A. It is the rank of the one thousand and one hundred *mumtaḥans*, which has seven degrees, and they are houses, mosques, palms, grapes, pomegranates, olives, and figs.

These are the seven ranks and each one has seven degrees, totalling to forty nine degrees.

Q. 64 Explain to me how the seven ranks were in the luminous world before their manifestation in the small world of humanity?

A. Know that the seven ranks of the great luminous world had other names in heaven before their manifestation on earth, and before these objects were given names among us in the world, such as figs, olives, palms, grapes and other names mentioned in the Qur'ān. The names for these objects in this world are parallel to the names of the degrees of the ranks in the luminous world. The Qur'ānic use of these allegorical names indicates in its external [meaning] the things of this world, and in its inner [meaning] the names of the degrees of the ranks in the luminous world.

Q. 65 What does the small earthly world of humanity include?

A. It includes fourteen thousand intimate [companions], fifteen thousand cherubs; sixteen thousand spiritual beings; seventeen thousand sanctified ones; eighteen thousand wanderers; nineteen thousand listeners; twenty thousand followers, totalling one hundred and nineteen thousand.¹³⁰

¹³⁰ These ranks, following those listed in the preceding questions, denote lower emanations of the divine realm into the material world. For these lower worlds of emanation adding up to 119,000, see *Bākūra*, p. 33.

Q. 66 Explain to me the names of the *najībs* and their number in the great luminous world and in the small world of humanity.

A. Know that the names of the *najībs* in the world of humanity are Abū Ayyūb Khālīd b. Zayd al-Anṣārī, Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī, Qays b. ʿUbāda b. Daylam al-Khazrajī, Saʿd b. Mālīk al-Anṣārī, Abū al-Ṭufayl ʿUmar b. Wāthila, Zayd b. Nufayʿ, ʿUthmān b. Ḥunayf, Ḥudhayfa b. al-Yamānī, ʿUmar b. Zīyy Khodān, Sahm b. ʿAmmār, Ḥabīb b. Jundab b. Junāda al-Anṣārī, Ḥuwayritha b. Mashhūr, Abū Sufyān al-Anṣārī, Abū ʿAmra b. Kumayl Bashīr, Abū Layla, Hishām b. Hishām, Jubayr b. Muṭʿim, Musayyib b. ʿAqla, and some say b. Najba Abū Baraka, Dhū al-Yamīn, Sahl b. Ḥunayf, Sahmān b. Ḥunayf who is the *mawla* of Fīḍlā and Rayḥāna, al-Mikhwāl al-Kalbī, and ʿAbd Allāh b. Sabā, who is the master of the *najībs*.

Q. 67 I understood the names of the *najībs* in the world of humanity. Inform me now of these names in the luminous world.

A. Know that the names of the *najībs* in the luminous world are Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius, Pisces, the Great Bear, the Small Bear, Cassiopeia, Dragon, Lyre, Perseus, *naʿāʾim*,¹³¹ Bouvier, the Corona, Dolphin, Eagle, Orion, the Pleiades, the Little Dog, and the Great Dog which is firm rope.

Q. 68 What is the meaning of your words in “the world of humanity” and in “the luminous world”?

A. Know that each of the *najībs* has two names, one that is spiritual in the luminous world, and the other that is material in the world of humanity—e.g. Abū Ayyūb Khālīd b. Zayd al-Anṣārī is called by this name in the world of humanity, whereas in the luminous world he is called Aries, and likewise the rest of the *najībs*.

Q. 69 What are the names of those who have been endowed with prophecy, and how many are they?

A. Know that they are seventeen persons and their names are these: the first is Zayd b. Ḥāritha the foster-son of the Messenger of God, who is the head of the class of those who have been endowed with prophecy, and the most respected among them. The second is Saʿd b. Muʿadh, followed by Thābit b. Abī-l-Aflaḥ, Ubayy b. Kaʿb,

¹³¹ Literally: The Ostriches. These are the twentieth lunar house, composed of eight stars of the zodiacal constellation of Sagittarius.

Tamīm al-Dārī, Sa'd b. Mālik, Mu'ādh b. 'Umar, Thābit b. Qays, 'Umar b. Taghliba, Khuzayma b. Thābit, Ḥāritha b. al-Nu'mān, Abū Dujāna Simāk b. Kharasha al-Anṣārī, 'Ammār b. Yāsir, 'Abd Allāh b. 'Amr b. Ḥarām, Ḥarām b. Ḥayyān, Abū al-Haytham Mālik b. al-Tayyihān, 'Amr b. al-Ḥamiq, and some say (his name is) b. al-Jamūḥ.

Q. 70 What are the twenty-five names of the *yatīms*, and who are they?

A. Know that the first among them are the *yatīms* of our master Salmān, and they are al-Miqdād b. 'Amr b. 'Uthmān b. al-Aswad al-Kindī, Abū Dharr Jundab b. Junāda b. Sakan al-Ghifārī, 'Abd Allāh b. Rawāḥa al-Anṣārī, 'Uthmān b. Maẓ'ūn al-Najāshī al-Hilālī, Qanbar b. Kādān al-Dawsī, the servant of our patron, the commander of the faithful. Following them are the *yatīms* of our master Muḥammad, and they are Ja'far b. al-Ḥārith, Abū-l-Hayyāj b. al-Ḥārith, Abū Sufyān b. al-Ḥārith, Yaḥyā b. Umāma, and Ṣāliḥ b. Umāma, peace be upon them. Then follow the *yatīms* of our master (!) Fāṭir, and they are the lady Fiḍḍa and Rayḥāna, Asmā' daughter of 'Umays al-Khath'amiyya, Zaynab al-Ḥawlā' al-'Aṭṭāra, and Fākhita Umm Hānī, peace be upon them. [Then follow] the *yatīms* of Umm Salama, and they are Maymūna daughter of al-Ḥārith, and Amat Allāh, daughter of Mālik, Umm Ishāq, Āmina, daughter of al-Sharīd, and Umm Mālik peace be upon them. The *yatīms* of our master "the ship"¹³² are Ṣa'ṣa'a b. Ṣūḥān, Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr, Muḥammad b. Abī Hudhayfa, and 'Ammār b. Yāsir, may God grant his best prayer and peace to all of them.

Q. 71 How many are the books of the unitarians?

A. Know that the books of the unitarians are one hundred and fourteen.

Q. 72 What is the Qur'ān?

A. It is an anterior indication of the manifestation of our master in human form.¹³³

¹³² This appellation refers to the companion of the Prophet Qays b. Waraqa al-Riyāhī, on whom see above, questions 22 and 33.

¹³³ This answer seems to reflect the author's awareness of the general Muslim concept regarding the uncreatedness of the Qur'ān. Its preexistent status serves as a testimony for the incarnation of the supreme aspect of the deity in the historical figure of 'Alī.

Q. 73 Who taught Muḥammad the Qur'ān?

A. Our master, the prince of the faithful, who is the *ma'nā* [taught the Qur'ān] through the tongue of Gabriel, who is the holy spirit, which is the *bāb*.¹³⁴

Q. 74 What is the equipment of our brethren, the believers?

A. Know that their equipment at all times is '*ayn*, *mīm*, *sīn*, which are the '*ayn* of 'Alī, the *mīm* of Muḥammad, and the *sīn* of Salsal (=Salmān).¹³⁵

Q. 75 Was Christ crucified and killed as the Christians say in their account of him?

A. Know that there is no truth in that, for the Jews (Q. 4:157–158) "did not slay him, neither crucified him, only a likeness of that was shown to them... But God raised him up to Him" as God says (Q. 3:169) "Count not those who were slain in God's way as dead, but rather living with their Lord, by Him provided."¹³⁶

Q. 76 What is the Mass?

A. It is the sanctification of the wine that is drunk in the mystery of the *naqībs* and the *naḡībs*.¹³⁷

Q. 77 What is the sacrifice?

A. It is the bread that the believers offer for the souls of their brethren, and on which the Mass is pronounced.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ While the term *rūḥ al-quds* (holy spirit) itself frequently appears in the Qur'ān, where it is commonly associated with Gabriel, it is clear from various Nuṣayrī sources that the equation of the holy spirit with the *bāb* bears Christian connotations. Namely, that the third person of the Christian trinity is likened to the third person of Nuṣayrī trinitarianism; see above, chap. 2, pp. 69–70.

¹³⁵ For a similar descriptions of the initials '*ayn*, *mīm*, *sīn*, as an equipment (*'udda*) of the believers, see Kiel, p. 10 (the Arabic text), p. 33 (the German translation). These initials of the three persons of the Nuṣayrī trinity came to epitomize the mystery of divinity. Moreover, according to al-Adhanī, they were employed as a secret code of recognition among the Nuṣayrīs. See *Bākūra*, pp. 82–83.

¹³⁶ The Nuṣayrī docetic concept of the crucifixion briefly alluded to here is elaborated in the *Munāẓara* of al-Nashshābī. See above, chap. 1, pp. 21ff., and chap. 6, pp. 129ff.

¹³⁷ Various texts of the Nuṣayrī Mass for different occasions are given by al-Adhanī in his *Bākūra*, pp. 38–51. For an English translation of these masses, see Salisbury, pp. 266–285. See J. Catafago, "Notice sur les Ansériens," *Journal asiatique*, 4th series, vol. 11 (1848), pp. 149–168. On the Nuṣayrī Mass, see also questions 87–89, below. The *naqībs* and the *naḡībs* are officeholders in the Nuṣayrī liturgy. For their role in Nuṣayrī liturgy, see al-Adhanī's description of the initiation rites, *Bākūra*, pp. 1–7.

¹³⁸ The element of the bread in the Mass is not familiar to us from other Nuṣayrī

Q. 78 Who performs the Mass and offers the sacrifice to the believers?

A. It is their Imam and great preacher.

Q. 79 What is the great mystery of God?

A. It is the mystery of flesh and blood of which Christ told his disciples: "This is my flesh and blood; eat and drink from it for it is the eternal life."¹³⁹

Q. 80 Where do the souls of our brethren, the believers go upon their departure from their tombs which are their garments of flesh and blood.

A. They go to the great luminous world where they attain happiness and eternal life for ever and ever, and put on the garments of light, which are the stars.¹⁴⁰

Q. 81 What will happen to the polytheists, the heretics who deny the divinity of our master?

A. They will suffer torments in all periods and cycles.

Q. 82 What is the mystery of the faith of the unitarians that is the mystery of mysteries and the creed of the righteous?

A. It is the mystery of the Two (+ Know that this mystery is also called the mystery of good and evil, the mystery of light and darkness, the mystery of water and fire, the mystery of flesh and blood, the mystery of food and drink, the mystery of death and life, the

texts and may be due to an increasing Christian influence in more recent times.

¹³⁹ This quotation—unattested in other Nuṣayrī texts known to us—is a paraphrase of Matt. 26:26–29 and parallel texts. It may further indicate the latterly increasing Christian influence.

¹⁴⁰ The concept of the preexistence of the Nuṣayrīs as lights and stars in the divine realm is widespread in Nuṣayrī cosmogony. See e.g. the section on the Fall in al-Adhanī's *Bākūra* where this motif is elaborated. This chapter opens with this statement: "All Nuṣayrī groups believe that in the beginning, before the creation of the world, they were luminous lights and stars." See further chap. 3, above, p. 75. The goal of the Nuṣayrī gnostic is to restore his lost state in the luminous paradise before the Fall. The association of the myth of the Fall with the biblical story of paradise is attested already in early Nuṣayrī sources (chap. 3, p. 76). The use of the term "garments of light" seems to reflect the author's awareness of the old Jewish-Christian motif interpreting Gen. 3:21. This verse mentions the "garments of skins" (*kutnōt 'ōr*) which were interpreted as garments of light (*kutnōt ōr*). For the motif of Adam's and Eve's garments of light and its Jewish background, see S. Brock, "Clothing Metaphors as a Means of Theological Expression in Syriac Tradition," in *Typus, Symbol, Allegorie bei den östlichen Vätern und ihren Parallelen im Mittelalter*, edited by M. Schmidt (Eichstatt, 1981), pp. 11–40.

mystery of heat and cold, and the mystery of Nawrūz and Mihrajān).¹⁴¹ This [mystery] is the true knowledge of God. It is a noble mystery, a great speech, an exalted lore, and a grave danger that even mountains cannot bear due to its great stature and nobility. It is the healing antidote to the one who guards it, follows it, and cherishes it; and it is lethal poison to the one who reveals and spreads it to the unworthy. It is the mystery of the veiling of our master in the light, namely the eye of sun,¹⁴² and his manifestation in his servant 'abd al-nūr.¹⁴³

Q. 83 What happens to one who knows [the mystery] and doubt enters his mind?

A. He will be among "the squanderers" who are the heretics, the "brothers of the devils" (Q. 17:27) and will deserve transmigration¹⁴⁴ and existence in base and lowly garments, and God will make him taste the burning [pain] of the iron and its [excruciating] frost.

Q. 84 What are the preconditions that the believer must keep upon receiving the mystery of mysteries?

A. His first obligation is to devote his efforts to protect his brothers, look after them, treat them with courtesy, take pains to visit them and treat them amicably and graciously. He should desire for them everything that he desires for himself. He should also make a fifth of his earnings¹⁴⁵ an unconditional gift to them every year, and he should perform the prayer in its times, and give alms to the worthy.¹⁴⁶ He

¹⁴¹ The text in parenthesis is a gloss to this place in the manuscript.

¹⁴² This seems to reflect a belief in the manifestation of 'Alī in the light of the sun. So far we have not come across any explicit statement of this belief in early Nuṣayrī texts. It is elaborated in detail, however, by al-Adhānī (*Bākūrā*, pp. 10, 33, 85). The Nuṣayrī *shamsiyya* sub-sect, known also as *shamāliyya*, derives its appellation from the adoration of the sun as the manifestation of 'Alī.

¹⁴³ See, above, p. 169 with note 25.

¹⁴⁴ For the belief in transmigration, elaborated in various Nuṣayrī writings, see e.g. chap. 2, pp. 62–66; chap. 3, p. 81.

¹⁴⁵ The obligation to give a fifth of one's earnings to the Imam or to the religious authorities following the cessation of the Imamate is a standard Shī'ī ordinance.

¹⁴⁶ According to al-Adhānī (*Bākūrā*, p. 53), the mandatory almsgiving (*zakāt*) is given to the Imām. The attitude toward Muslim religious commandments here seems to be more positive than the antinomian stance reflected in early Nuṣayrī writings. However, the fact that the author does not specify the nature of these obligations may indicate that his statement reflects a precautionary dissimulation—namely, that Muslim commandments, such as those mentioned here, are not actually performed in a normative Muslim manner. Regular daily prayers are not generally known from Nuṣayrī sources. They are specified, however, in question 101 of the catechism as

should take pains to fulfil his religious duties and be nimble in upholding the obligations. He should be obedient to his master, in invoking him, thanking him, remembering him, and being loyal to him to his utmost ability. He should willingly accept him, abstaining from all vanities that are repugnant [to his master].¹⁴⁷

Q. 85 What is the second thing from which the believer must refrain upon receiving the mystery of mysteries?

A. Know that it is his duty to take care not to treat his brethren unjustly or offend any of them, and to abstain from causing them to sin. He should not offend against what is pleasing to them and should avoid grieving them.

Q. 86 Is it permitted for a believer to divulge to anyone the mystery of mysteries?

A. He is not permitted to divulge it to anyone except to his brother in faith; and if he acts otherwise he is excluded from God, His books, and His messengers.¹⁴⁸

Q. 87 What is the first Mass?¹⁴⁹

A. It is the one pronounced before the Nawrūz.¹⁵⁰

well as in al-Adhanī's *Bākūrā*, pp. 12–13. Modern Nuṣayrī apologetic literature also affirms the Muslim practice of regular daily prayers by the Nuṣayrīs.

¹⁴⁷ The relation between the Nuṣayrī catechumen and his spiritual master, or guide, who initiates him into the mystery of religion is an essential stage in the religious development of the believer. The spiritual guide is actually considered the real father of his disciple and the period of instruction is conceived of as a spiritual pregnancy concluding with the rebirth of the initiate. For the initiation into the sect and the relations between the disciple and his guide, see above, our introduction to the catechism.

¹⁴⁸ For the severe sanctions against and the divine punishments to a Nuṣayrī who divulges the secrets of religion to the non-initiate, see al-Adhanī's introduction to his *Bākūrā*. In fact, al-Adhanī himself was ostracized and later paid with his life for the publication of the secrets of the Nuṣayrī religion.

¹⁴⁹ The catechism mentions only two types of Mass without specification, whereas the *Bākūrā* (pp. 38–51) refers to four different masses distinguished by different names and offers their liturgical texts. The First Mass in the *Bākūrā* is entitled "Mass of Perfume" (*quddās al-fīb*); the second, "Mass of Incense" (*quddās al-bukhūr*); the third, "Mass of the Call to Prayer" (*quddās al-ādhān*); the fourth, "Mass of Betokening" (*quddās al-ishāra*).

¹⁵⁰ The Nuṣayrī festivals of Nawrūz, the Persian New Year at the spring equinox, and the Mihrajān, the Persian festival of the fall equinox, were adopted into the Nuṣayrī syncretistic liturgical calendar. For a description of these Nuṣayrī festivals and their rituals, see *MA*, pp. 188–229.

Q. 88 What is the second Mass?

A. It is the one pronounced after the Nawrūz.

Q. 89 What is the Nawrūz?

A. It is the sanctification of the wine in the chalice.

Q. 90 Recite me [the prayer of] the Nawrūz.

A. Know that [the prayer of] the Nawrūz is as follows:¹⁵¹

Nawrūz is a beneficial and successful truth, realized in the closeness to God of the most noble of [the sons of] Hāshim. [It is] a day in which God revealed Himself in the Persian cycles, before the cycle of the Arabs. In this [cycle] He ascended toward heaven and there, through sound minds, they [the believers?], observed swings. Salsal [=Salmān] was manifested in it [i.e. in this era] as a guardian, following our ancient one.¹⁵² Drink pure wine, for this is the day on which his light was manifested in the clouds.¹⁵³ The day of Ghadīr [Khum] ¹⁵⁴ is one to which Muḥammad referred, addressing himself toward God, the Lord of the world. (+ The day of Ghadīr Khumm is the eighteenth day of [the month of] Dhū al-Ḥijja; it is the day on which our master Muḥammad revealed the *ma'nā* essence of our patron Prince of the Bees, may his peace be upon the elect and the multitude. Some accepted this while others denied. This [day] is of great merit and grand nobility, for the patron [God] reveals Himself in it and unveils the hidden. The good will be bountiful [on that day]. Our master Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Khaṣībī has a marvellous ode entitled al-Ghadīriyya¹⁵⁵).¹⁵⁶

Q. 91 What is the name of the holy wine drunk by the believers?

A. It is called '*abd al-nūr*'.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵¹ The following is a liturgical hymn attributed to al-Khaṣībī included in *MA* pp. 208–209, in the chapter dedicated to the Nawrūz.

¹⁵² The swings (*marājīḥ*) may allude to the swinging scales of justice forming an essential part of the Nawrūz ritual (see e.g. *MA*, p. 197). For the depiction of God ('Alī) as an old man and its background, see above, chap. 2, p. 53.

¹⁵³ The belief among certain *ghulāt* groups that the deity, manifested in 'Alī, reveals itself in various celestial elements is also recorded by Sunnī doxographies, see above, chap. 1, p. 16, note 54.

¹⁵⁴ This holy day, commemorating in Shī'ī tradition the appointment of 'Alī as Muḥammad's heir, was adopted and transformed in the Nuṣayrī calendar. See the discussion in chap. 6, above, pp. 120–128.

¹⁵⁵ This ode is given in *MA*, pp 56–60.

¹⁵⁶ The text in parenthesis is a gloss of this place in the manuscript.

¹⁵⁷ See above, p. 169, note 25.

Q. 92 Why is it called '*abd al-nūr*'?

A. Because God was manifested in it. It is therefore told of our master Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥusayn al-Khaṣībī, the sage of keen mind, that when '*abd al-nūr*' was brought to him, he used to hold the chalice in his right hand and drink from it three swallows, and recite: "O God, this is your servant '*abd al-nūr*', a substance you have graced; extolled, and absolutely permitted to your devotees who know you; and explicitly proscribed to your enemies who deny you. O God, our master, as you have permitted it to us, bless us by it with security and protection and [sound] health against sickness, and remove from us worry and sorrow." (+ '*Abd al-nūr* is the substance of the fire which God made as His greatest sacrifice and the most noble substance, and deemed suitable for atonement through it).¹⁵⁸

Q. 93 What is the concealed mystery of God extending between the *kāf* and the *nūn*?¹⁵⁹

A. It is the light, as God, may He be exalted, said: "Let there be light, and there was light" (Gen. 1:3).

Q. 94 What is light?

A. It is the ancient *ma'nā*, for it veiled itself in light.

Q. 95 If our master veiled himself in light, in what, then, will he manifest himself?

A. Know that our master will manifest himself in Truth as he says in [the prayer of] the Nawrūz.¹⁶⁰

Q. 96 Why does the believer turn his face in prayer toward the sun?

A. Know that the sun is the light of lights, and the direction of prayer of the people of devotion and glory.¹⁶¹ For it [the sun] is the

¹⁵⁸ The text in parenthesis is a gloss of this place in the manuscript. It is partially parallel to *MA*, p. 215, lines 16–17.

¹⁵⁹ The letters *kāf* and *nūn* constitute the imperative form *kun* (Be!) through which God created the world. Relying upon this form, recurrent in the Qur'ān, it was elaborated in early Ismā'īlī cosmogony to denote the beginning of the realm of emanation with the feminine hypostasis *kūnī* through the medium of the divine light and God's command *kun*. On this concept in early Ismā'īlism, see e.g. S.M. Stern, *Studies in Early Ismā'īlism* (Jerusalem and Leiden, 1983), pp. 18ff.; Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 141–142.

¹⁶⁰ The author refers here to the hymn cited in question 90.

¹⁶¹ The rite of turning toward the sun in prayer is also mentioned in the *Bākūra* 10). See in addition p. 168, above, regarding the manifestation of 'Alī in the eye of the sun and the note concerning Nuṣayrī daily prayers (p. 193, note 146).

veil of the beauty and the place of preference. In it resides the eternal, the perpetual, the everlasting, the existent, the mystery of mysteries and the light of lights.

Q. 97 Why is our master, the commander of the faithful, called the patron of recurrence and return?¹⁶²

A. Because he returns and comes back and manifests himself in the [historical] eras which are the Bahmanī cycles¹⁶³ from Abel to Abū Turāb¹⁶⁴ ('Alī).

Q. 98 What is the esoteric meaning and what is the exoteric meaning?

A. Know that the term "esoteric meaning" indicates the divinity of our patron, while "exoteric meaning" indicates his humanity. In exoteric parlance we say "our patron 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib," and its esoteric meaning is the *ma'nā*, the *ism*, and the *bāb*, and he is God, the compassionate the merciful.

Q. 99 Who is our sage who has founded for us the religions in all countries?¹⁶⁵

A. He is our master Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥusayn b. Ḥamdān [al-Khaṣībī], peace and prayer be upon him and his disciples.

Q. 100 Why are we called the Khaṣībīyya?

A. Because we follow the instruction of our sage Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥusayn b. Ḥamdān al-Khaṣībī, may God sanctify his mystery.

Q. 101 I understood what you explained to me, inform me now about the names of the persons of the obligatory and supererogatory prayers.¹⁶⁶

A. Know that [the person of the] prayer in general is Muḥam-

¹⁶² For a similar appellation of 'Alī—*ḥaydarat al-karrār*—see *Bākūra*, p. 47.

¹⁶³ The term Bahmanī cycles (*al-qibāb al-bahmaniyya*)—equivalent to *al-qibāb al-fārisiyya* (MA, pp. 209ff.)—refers to the early historical cycles, prior to Islam.

¹⁶⁴ On this appellation of 'Alī, see E. Kohlberg, "Abū Turāb," in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 41 (1978), pp. 347–352, reprinted in idem, *Belief and Law in Imāmī Shī'ism*, chap. 6.

¹⁶⁵ The reference to world religions seems to mean religious groups or cells of the Nuṣayriyya. The same definition regarding al-Khaṣībī and his role as founder of Nuṣayrī cells among world religions appears in *KM*, p. 194 (in the Arabic text) and p. 175 (in the French translation). The concept of Nuṣayrī coreligionists in every faith appears in *Kitāb al-usūs*, p. 58b, lines 3–4 (=ed. Dandashī, p. 136).

¹⁶⁶ For the term "persons of prayer" (*ashkhāṣ al-ṣalāt*), denoting the persons representing a certain divine degree to which the prayer is addressed, see above, chap. 6, p. 113.

mad; and specifically it has fifty-one genuflections for fifty-one persons.¹⁶⁷ The first period [of the day includes] the prayer at noon consisting of eight genuflections which are al-Qāsim, al-Ṭāhir, 'Abd Allāh, Zaynab, Ruqayya, Umm Kulthūm who is [also] called Āmina, Fāṭima al-Zahrā', all seven are the children of the Messenger of God from Khadīja, daughter of Khuwaylid, and Ibrāhīm from Mary the Copt. Then follows the obligatory [prayer] consisting of four [genuflections] which are Muḥammad, Fāṭir, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn. Next is the supererogatory afternoon prayer consisting of eight [genuflections], which are 'Abd Allāh, Muḥammad, and 'Awn, sons of Ja'far b. Abī Ṭālib, Abū Sufyān, Ja'far, Muḥammad, and Abū al-Hayyāj, sons of al-Ḥārith b. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, and Muḥammad b. Abī Ḥudhayfa. The second period [of the day includes] the afternoon obligatory prayer consisting of four [genuflections], which are Muḥammad, Fāṭir, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn.

The third period [of the day includes] the sunset obligatory prayer consisting of three [genuflections] which are Muḥammad, Fāṭir, and Ḥasan, and the supererogatory [prayer] consisting of four, which are Thawbān, the *mawlā* of the messenger of God, Khuzayma b. Thābit, Abū al-Haytham Mālik al-Tayyihān al-Ashhalī, and Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī.

The fourth period [of the day includes] the evening obligatory prayer consisting of four [genuflections] which are Muḥammad, Fāṭir, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn. The supererogatory evening prayer consists of two genuflections [starting] from a sitting position that are considered as one, which are Zaynab al-Ḥawlā' al-'Aṭṭāra' and Amat Allāh, daughter of Khālīd b. Sinān al-'Absī.

[Next follows] the night prayer consisting of eight [genuflections], which are 'Abd Allāh, 'Abd Manāf, Ḥamza, al-Ḥārith, al-Zubayr, Ḥijl al-Muqawwam, al-Ghaydāq, the children of 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, followed by three [genuflections], which are the *shaf'* and the *witr*.¹⁶⁸ The *shaf'* is Asad and 'Imrān son of Ḥusayn, and the *witr* is 'Ubāda b. Bashīr b. al-Ṣāmit al-Khazrajī al-Anṣārī.

The fifth period [of the day includes] the [prayer of the] dawn

¹⁶⁷ The number fifty-one, denoting members of the holy family and companions of the prophet, may also be associated with the fifty-one mythical disciples of al-Khaṣībī mentioned in *KM*, p. 196 (= p. 177 in the French translation; Salisbury, p. 258).

¹⁶⁸ *Shaf'* here signifies an even number of genuflections, whereas *witr* signifies an uneven number added to the pair of the *shaf'*.

consisting of two [genuflections], which are Sa'd b. Mālik al-Anṣārī, and Nu'aymān al-Anṣārī, may the prayer of the supreme, the Creator be upon them. Then follows the obligatory [prayer of the dawn] consisting of two [genuflections] which are Muḥammad and Fāṭir, peace upon them. These are then the fifty-one persons as stated by our master Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥusayn b. Ḥamdan al-Khaṣībī—may the supreme God sanctify his soul, Amen—in his account:

The same way that prayer is people, thus are their persons allegory;

fifty-one sanctified and noble persons;

Muḥammad, Fāṭir, and the Shabbarān,¹⁶⁹ who are the roots;

everything is from them and with them; they are the right guidance and the [true] path;

the alms-giving is the *bāb* whose name is Gabriel;

no one but Salmān is the guide to the Messenger.

End of the Catechism.

¹⁶⁹ Namely Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. On these appellations, see above, p. 176, note 67.

4. The Arabic Text of the Catechism

كتاب تعليم ديانة النصيرية

فاتحة الكتاب

(1b) بسم المعنى القديم والاسم العظيم والباب المقيم وهو الله الرحمن الرحيم. اللهم يا عنصر العناصر وجوهر الجواهر يا سرّ السرائر وعالم ما في الضمائر الظاهر من عين الشمس القابض على كل نفس. إنّنا نحمدك على ما أوحيته لنا من سرّ أسرار الإلهية وأظهرته لنا من نور أنوارك الشعشعانية، كما نحمدك حمداً سرمدياً على ما علّمتنا إياه من حقائق دينك القويم الكائن بمعرفة معنك القديم واسمك العظيم وبابك المقيم المتحد بك الموجود فيك الذي لا يتجزأ¹ ولا يتبعّض ولا ينفصل عنك؛ وبظهورك العجيب في عبدك عبد النور الذي حلّته وكرّمته وفضّلته لأوليائك² العارفين بك حلالاً طلقاً وحرّمته على أعدائك الجاحدين المنكرين لك حرام (!) نصّاً. اللهم إنّنا نحمدك حمداً لا بداية لأوله ولا نهاية لآخره (2a) على إنعامك هذا العظيم وفضلك العميم إلى دهر الداهرين.

أمّا بعدُ نبتدئ بكتابة التعليم وهو هذا ويتلوه المشيخة والعقاد.

س ١ من هو ربنا الذي خلقنا؟
ج هو مولانا أمير المؤمنين أمير النحل علي ابن أبي طالب وهو الله الذي لا إله إلا هو الرحمن الرحيم.

س ٢ من أين نعلم أن مولانا أمير المؤمنين علي ابن أبي طالب هو الله؟

ج من شهادته ووصفه لنفسه في خطبة له مشهورة نطق بها على المنبر أمام كافة من حضر وعلمها أهل العقل والنظر فقال أنا عندي علم الساعة وعليّ دلّلت الرسل وبتوحيدي نطقت وإلى معرفتي دعت. أنا سمّيت أسمائها (!)³ وأسطحت أرضها وأرسيّت

¹ يتجزأ Ms.

² لأوليائك Ms.

³ Cf. a similar description in Ibrāhīm b. al-Ḥusayn al-Ḥāmidī (d. 557/1162), *Kitāb kanz al-walad*, edited by M. Ghālib (Beirut 1416/1996), p. 220, where the seemingly smoother variant—سمكت سماءها (I thickened its heavens)—is given.

جبالها وأجريت أنهارها وأخرجت أثمارها؛ أنا غسقت الغسق، أنا أطلعت (2b) شمسها وأنرت قمرها، أنا خلقت الخلق وبسطت الرزق؛ أنا رب الأرباب ومالك الأرقاب، أنا العليّ العلام، أنا قرم من حديد؛ أنا المبدئ المعيد، أنا أولجت عيسى في بطن مريم أمه إيلجاً، أنا أرسلت الرسل ونبأت النبيين.

س ٣ من دعانا إلى معرفة مولانا أمير المؤمنين؟
ج رسوله محمد صلعم كما قوله (!) في خطبة بيعة الدار: "اسمعوا الآن ما أقول لكم وإياكم تشكّون، اعلّموا أنّي أدعوكم إلى علي ابن أبي طالب كما أدعوكم إلى الله عز وجل؛ إلا أن علياً مولاي ومولاكم لأنكم خواص⁴ أصاري. أقول لكم "كما قال عيسى ابن مريم للحواريّون (!) "من أنصاراً (!) إلى الله قالوا (!) الحواريّون نحن أنصاراً (!) إلى (!) الله فأمنت طائفة من بني اسرائيل وكفرت طائفة فأيدنا الذين آمنوا على عدوّهم فأصبحوا ظاهرين" فهم شهود الله ونقباؤه وأدعوكم إلى علي على بصيرة أنا ومن اتبعني (3a) وسبحان الله وما أنا من المشركين أدعوكم إلى علي بأمرأ (!) منه وإياكم الريب إلا أن نبوّتي تحت ولاية علي، لأن علي (!) الذي نبأني إليكم وهو الذي خلّقني من نور ذاته وهو ربي وربكم وخالقي وخالقكم فاتّقوه وطيعوه (!) ووحدوه وسبّحوه وقُدّسوه واعبدوه لأنّ هو الله الذي لا إله إلا هو إلى آخره.

س ٤ إن كان مولانا أمير المؤمنين علي ابن أبي طالب هو الله فكيف تجانس مع المتجانسين؟
ج إعلم أنّ مولانا أمير المؤمنين لا يتجانس مع المتجانسين بل أنه احتجب بمحمد في كوره ودوره وتسمّى علياً.

س ٥ كم مرة احتجب مولانا وظهر بالإنسانية؟
ج احتجب سبعة (!) مرات ففي الأولى احتجب في آدم في كوره ودوره، وتسمّى هابيل (!) وفي الثانية في نوح وتسمّى شيثاً وفي الثالثة في يعقوب وتسمّى يوسف (!) وفي الرابعة بموسى وتسمّى يوشع (!) وفي الخامسة بسليمان وتسمّى (3b) أصفاً وفي السادسة بعيسى وتسمّى شمعوناً (!) وفي السابعة أخيراً بمحمد وتسمّى علياً وهو خالي (!) من الأسماء الذي تسمّى بهم (!) سوهم (!) لا يخلون منه.

⁴ أخواص Ms.

س٦ كيف احتجب مولانا في الحُجُب^٥ في كورهم (!) ودورهم (!) وظهر بالإنسانية؟

ج إعلم أن سرَّ الاحتجاب هو سرٌّ عظيم لا يعلمه سوى الله وحده كقوله تعالى: "فلا يعرفون منِّي إلا ما حملته قلوبهم وعاينته أبصارهم واحتملته عقولهم".

س٧ هل أن مولانا أمير المؤمنين يحتجب ويظهر بالعالم مرة أخرى؟

ج يظهر من دون احتجاب في آخر الزمان بمجد وبهاء عظيم ويخلص أرواح المؤمنين من قبورها التي هي قمصانها اللحمية الدموية ويجعلها أن تسكن بالأنوار الأبدية.

س٨ ما هو الظهور الإلهي؟

ج هو ظهور الباري بواسطة الحُجُب (!) بالإنسانية وألطف^٥ غلاف في جوف غلاف.

س٩ فسّر لي قولك هذا وكيف مولانا ظهر بالإنسانية؟

ج إعلم أن المعنى دخل بالباب (4a) واحتجب بالاسم وتسمّى به كما قال مولانا جعفر الصادق علينا من ذكره السلام: "اذكروا الله حق ذكره، واذكروا اسمه وبابه".

س١٠ ما هو الاسم والمعنى والباب؟

ج هو ثالث غير منفصل، تدلّ وحدانيته على إلهية مولانا ولهذا نقول "بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم"، فلفظة "الله" تدلّ على المعنى ولفظة "الرحمن الرحيم" تدلّ على الاسم والباب.

س١١ كيف المعنى اخترع الاسم وكيف الاسم اخترع الباب؟

ج إعلم أن عنصر العناصر وجوهر الجواهر قد اخترع الاسم من نور وحدانيته وجعله نوراً منجيباً من جوهر معنويته وحركته من سكونه واصطفاه^٧ وسمّاه باسمه واجتباها ولم يكن له رباً سواه وجعله حدّه الخالق ولسانه الناطق وأقامه بالأمر العظيم السبب القديم وجعله دائرة الوجود ومحراب السجود بأمر العلي المعبود وقال له: كُنْ مُسَبَّبَ الأسباب ومُبَوَّبَ الأبواب (4b) فعندها الحجاب^٨

^٥ Ms. الحجب

^٦ Ms. اللطف. Cf. the expression اللطف الخفي in question 18, below.

^٧ Ms. واسطفاه

^٨ The word اسم is added above the word حجاب in the text.

خلق الباب بأمر مولاه وأمره أن يخلق العوالم العلوية والعوالم السفلية.

س ١٢ هل أن الباب والمعنى ينفصلوا (!) من الاسم؟
ج كلاً! بل إنهم متصّلين إليه ولا عنه مُنفصلين كما قال تعالى في خطبة الأوهام: "وتحيّاته الزكيّة على حجابِه المتّصلِ ولا عنه مُنفصلِ".

س ١٣ ما هي الأسماء المتعلقة بالمعنى والاسم والباب وكيف تقسم؟

ج إن الأسماء المتعلقة بالمعنى والاسم والباب تقسم إلى مثلية وذاتية وصفاتية؛ فالمثلية المعنى والذاتية الاسم والأسماء الصفاتية هي التي تسمّى بها الاسم وهي للمعنى خاصة كقولنا الرحمن الرحيم الباري.

س ١٤ أخبرني عن أسماء الاسم الثلاثة وستون (!) المثلية المعنى والذاتية الاسم وهي الذي قام فيها في النبوة والرسالة.

ج أعلم أن هذه الأسماء المثلية المعنى والذاتية الاسم هم (!) سيدنا آدم وأنوش وقينان ومهلايل ويارد، وإدريس والمتوشلح وملك ونوح وسام وأرفخشاد ويعروب وهود وصالح (5a) ولقمان ولوط وإبراهيم وإسماعيل (!) وإلياس وإسحاق ويعقوب وشعيب وموسى وهارون وكالب⁹ وحزقييل وشمويل وطالوت¹⁰ وداود وسليمان وأيوب ويونس وإشعيا واليشع (!) والخضر وزكريا ويحيى وعيسى ودانيال، والإسكندر والأردشير¹¹ وسابور ولؤي ومرة وكلاب وقصي وعبد مناف وهاشم وعبد المطلب وعبد الله ومحمد المصطفى والحسن المجتبي والحسين الشهيد بكرباء وعلي زين العابدين ومحمد الباقر وجعفر الصادق وموسى الكاظم وعلي الرضا ومحمد الجواد وعلي الهادي والحسن العسكري والإمام محمد ابن الحسن الحجة القائم المهدي البشير النذير المؤمل المنتظر¹² صاحب العصر والزمان علينا من فضل ذكرهم السلام.

س ١٥ ما هي الأسماء الصفاتية التي تسمّى بها الاسم (5b) وهي للمعنى خاصة؟

⁹ Ms. كولب

¹⁰ Ms. طالوت

¹¹ Ms. والأردشير

¹² Ms. المنتظر

ج إعلم أن الأسماء الصفاتية التي تسمى بها الاسم وهي للمعنى خاصة هي الله الرحمن الرحيم البارئ المصور الفاطر الأول الآخر الباطن الظاهر الملك العزيز الجبار المتكبر السلام المؤمن المهيمن القادر السميع البصير العليم الحكيم القوي الشديد الغني الحميد المبدئ المعيد الواحد الخالق المنان الديان الخبير القدير المنير السراج العلي المولى الكبير القديم سبحانه وتبارك الحمد.

س ١٦ ما هي أسماء الاسم في اصطلاح اللغة؟
ج أسماء الاسم في اصطلاح اللغة هم (!) أحمد محمد المصطفى الأمي الأمين الدليل العاقب الناجي الحاشر الباعث، يس، الحواميم السبعة، الطواسين الثلاثة، كهيعص؛ ألم ألمص آلر، طه، التين، الزيتون، المزمّل المدثر، ص، قاف، نون، المجيب؛ وفي التوراة مأد، الماد، الوفي، الأمين؛ وفي الإنجيل الفارقليط؛ وفي الزبور مهيمناً؛ (6a) وفي القرآن محمد.

س ١٧ أخبرني عن أسماء الاسم في التسعة الذاتية.
ج إعلم أنهم آدم ويعقوب وموسى وهارون وسليمان وعيسى وعبد الله ومحمد رسول الله ومحمد ابن حسن الحجة.

س ١٨ أخبرني عن أسماء الاسم في الأظلة.
ج إعلم أن أسماء الاسم في الأظلة هم المشيئة والفطرة والعلم والقدرة واللفظ الخفي.¹³

س ١٩ أخبرني عن أسماء الاسم في القبة الإبراهيمية.
ج أسماء الاسم في القبة الإبراهيمية هم إبراهيم وإسماعيل وإلياس وقُصي وإسحاق.

س ٢٠ أخبرني عن أسماء الاسم في القبة الموساوية (!)
ج إعلم أنهم موسى وهارون وشبّر وشبّير ومُشبر.

س ٢١ ما هي أسماء الاسم في القبة المحمدية؟
ج هم محمد وفاطر والحسن والحسين ومحسن.

¹³ For the expression اللطف الخفي, see also al-Makzūn al-Sinjārī, *al-Risāla al-mawsūma bi-tazkiyat al-nafs fī bawāṭin al-‘ibādāt al-khams*, in A. ‘Alī, *Ma‘rifat Allāh wa-l-Makzūn al-Sinjārī*, Beirut 1972, vol. 2, p. 274

س ٢٢ ما هي أسماء باب الله العظيم الجليل الكبير المنير المطوق بالنور؟

ج هم سيدي جبرائيل وياييل وحام ودان وعبد الله وروزبه وسيدنا سلمان الفارسي (6b) علينا من ذكرهم السلام وسفينته أبو عبدالرحمن وهو قيس ابن ورقة الرياحي ورُشيد الهجري وكُنُكر أبو خالد وهو عبدالله ابن غالب الكابلي ويحيى ابن مَعْمَر ابن أم الطويل الثمالي وأبو الطيبات محمد ابن أبي زينب الكاهلي وهو البزاز الموصللي والمفضل ابن عمر الجعفي ومحمد ابن المفضل وعمر ابن الفرات الكاتب والسيد أبي شعيب محمد ابن نُصير وسلسل وسلسبيل ودحية ابن خليفة الكلبي وسيدتنا أم سلمة المخولة بالأنعام الدالة بولايتها على ظهورات المعنى والاسم والباب.

س ٢٣ أخبرني عن أسماء أشخاص الباب في كتب أهل التوحيد.
ج إن أسماء أشخاص الباب في كتب أهل التوحيد هم الكرسي، الماء، السماء، الباب، الروح الأمين، روح القدس، رب الناس، جبل طور سين (!)، الغراب، الفُلك، الناقة، العصا،¹⁴ الخاتم، النملة، الهدد، (7a) الكالي، المهدي، العرش، سلسل، سلسبيل، دان، القدوم، الصور، السور، الخلق، الشراب، الشاة، الدلو، السبب، الكوثر، الميزان، العدل، القسط، البرهان، البيان، الداعي، المنادي، السبيل، البشير، النذير، النور، القمر، النية، النصير، المسجد، الحية، الرسول، النبي، الحفيظ، أخو يوسف، السفينة، سبحان الله، العليم، اللوح والقلم، سارق الصاع، سفراء، البقرة، جبرائيل؛ علينا منهم السلام. هذه هي أسماء الباب الرمزية في كتب أهل التوحيد.

س ٢٤ أخبرني عن أسماء أشخاص الباب في الستة مقامات الروحانية.

ج أعلم أن أسماء أشخاص الباب في المقام الأول جبرائيل عليه السلام وأيتامه مكائيل وإسرافيل وعزرائيل¹⁵ ورضوان.

س ٢٥ أخبرني عن أسماء أشخاص الباب في المقام الثاني.

ج أعلم أنهم يائل¹⁶ ابن فاتن وأيتامه أفقييل وإفراقون وقينان وإفريق وإفريقا.

¹⁴ Ms. العصاة

¹⁵ Ms. عزرائيل

¹⁶ Ms. ياييل

س ٣٥ ما هي أسماء الباب وأيتامه في المطلع الرابع؟
 ج أسماؤها³⁸ أبو خالد عبدالله ابن غالب الكابلي ولقبه كنكر
 ويكنى بأبي التحايا صلوات الله عليه؛ وأيتامه سعيد ابن المسيب³⁹
 وحكيم ابن جبير وجابر ابن عبدالله السلمي الأنصاري والقاسم
 وحبيب ابن محمد ابن أبي بكر.

س ٣٦ ما هي أسماء الباب وأيتامه في المطلع الخامس؟
 ج أسماؤها⁴⁰ يحيى ابن معمر ابن أم الطويل الثمالي صلوات
 الله عليه وكان في الظاهر ابن داية مولانا علي ابن الحسين عز
 وجل ويكنى بأبي الحسين؛ وأيتامه يحيى ابن (9b) أبي العقب
 الثمالي وأبي حمزة ثابت ابن أبي صفية الثمالي وكميل ابن زياد
 وفرات⁴¹ ابن أحنف وحرمان⁴² ابن أعين.

س ٣٧ ما هي أسماء⁴³ الباب [وأيتامه] في المطلع السادس؟
 ج أسماء⁴⁵ الباب في المطلع السادس هو أبو محمد جابر ابن
 يزيد الجعفي صلوات الله عليه ويكنى بأبي التحف؛ وأيتامه فرات
 ابن أحنف وحرمان ابن أعين وجابر ابن يحيى المعبراني وبنان⁴⁶
 ابن المغيرة وميمون ابن إبراهيم التبان.

س ٣٨ ما هي أسماء الباب وأيتامه في المطلع السابع؟
 ج أسماؤها⁴⁷ أبو إسماعيل محمد ابن اسماعيل ابن أبي
 زينب الكاهلي والبزاز الموصللي ويكنى بأبي الطيبات صلوات الله
 عليه؛ وأيتامه إسماعيل وولده وأبو محمد سفيان ابن مصعب
 العبدى وبشار الشعيري والمعلّى ابن خنيس وأبو أيوب القمي.

س ٣٩ ما هي أسماء الباب وأيتامه في المطلع الثامن؟

³⁸ Ms. إسمه

³⁹ Ms. المسبب

⁴⁰ Ms. إسمه

⁴¹ Ms. فرة

⁴² Ms. حمدان

⁴³ Ms. هو

⁴⁴ Ms. إسم

⁴⁵ Ms. إسم

⁴⁶ Ms. بنات

⁴⁷ Ms. إسمه

ج أسماؤها⁴⁸ أبو عبدالله المفضل ابن عمر الجعفي ويكنى بأبي الزكيات صلوات الله عليه؛ وأيتامه أبو أيوب القمي ويونس ابن ظبيان (10a) الصخري وأبو الغصن حُجى وهو ثابت ابن الدُكَيْن ويحيى ابن يزيد وأبي الغمر الثمالي.

س. ٤٠ أخبرني عن أسماء الباب وأيتامه في المطلع التاسع.
ج أسماء⁴⁹ الباب في المطلع التاسع أبو جعفر محمد ابن المفضل ابن عمر الجعفي ويكنى بأبي الطيبات صلوات الله عليه؛ وأيتامه أسد ابن إسماعيل والحر النخاس الدواب وصالح ابن عبد القدوس ومحمد ابن عبدالله الهرتمي وقيل عبدالله ابن محمد الهرتمي وعلي ابن عبدالله الملك القمي.

س. ٤١ أخبرني عن أسماء⁵⁰ الباب وأيتامه في المطلع العاشر.
ج أعلم أن أسماء⁵¹ الباب في المطلع العاشر أبو القاسم عمر ابن الفرات الكاتب ويكنى بأبي السهل صلوات الله عليه؛ وأيتامه الحسن ووهب ابني⁵² قاران وخالد ابن أبي الاشعث⁵³ ونصر ابن سلام ومحمد ابن عمر الكناسي.

س. ٤٢ أخبرني عن أسماء⁵⁴ الباب وأيتامه في المطلع الحادي عشر.
ج أعلم أن أسماء⁵⁵ الباب في المطلع الحادي عشر أبو شعيب محمد ابن نصير البكري النميري العبدي صلوات الله عليه ويكنى بأبي القاسم ومن (10b) كناه العربية أبو طالب وأبو الحسن؛ وأيتامه محمد ابن جندب وعلي ابن ام الرقاد وفادويه الكردي وإسحاق ابن عمار الكوفي وأحمد ابن محمد ابن الفرات الكاتب على جميعهم أفضل الصلاة والسلام.

س. ٤٣ أخبرني عن أسماء مولانا أمير المؤمنين بسائر اللغات المختلفة مع تفصيلها ومعناها.

⁴⁸ Ms. اسمه

⁴⁹ Ms. إسم

⁵⁰ Ms. أسم

⁵¹ Ms. اسم

⁵² Ms. إبنائي

⁵³ Ms. الاشعة

⁵⁴ Ms. الاسم

⁵⁵ Ms. اسم

ج إعلم أن العرب سمّت مولانا أمير المؤمنين عليا وسمّي الأنزع البطين وبيضة الوادي وأصلع قريش وسمّته أمه حيدرة وسمّاه أبوه زيد (!) والصميدع وظهيراً وسمّاه النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم رجلاً وسمّاه عمّه المقوم ابن عبد المطلب الصلصال وسمّته دايته ظهيراً وميموناً ومجمع ميمون وسمّته جدته خبيراً وسمّاه أخوه جعفر رضيعاً وسمّاه الراهب الناموس الأعظم وشمعون الصفا وسمّي نفسه على المنبر أرسططاليس واسمه في التوراة بريئاً واسمه في الإنجيل إيليا تفسيره علياً واسمه عند الكهنة بوباً (11a) واسمه عند الهند كنكرا واسمه في الزبور أريا واسمه عند الروم بطرسيا واسمه عند الفرس باريا واسمه عند الزنج حبيباً⁵⁶ واسمه عند الحبشة تبريك وسمّته الأرمن إفريقا وسمّته العامة والخاصة الدرياق والفاروق وقال في بعض خطبه: "أنا الصديق الأكبر والفاروق الأعظم." وسمّته الديلم هو وكان سليمان يقول في دعائه: "يا هو يا هو يا من لا يعلم ما هو إلا هو." ومن أسمائه سبحانه تعالى الذي كان يدعو به الأمم الذين كانوا في الدار قبل البشر وهم الحن والبن والطم والرم والجان والجن⁵⁷ البر الرحيم وقوله جل من قائل إخبار (!) عنهم إنّنا كنّا ندعوه من قبل هو البر الرحيم فهذين (!) من أسمائه التي كان يدعو بهها من أسميناه من هاؤلاء العوالم الخمسة ولله تعالى أسماء كثيرة لا تُحصى ولا تُعدّ من وقت أبدأ العوالم إلى وقت عالمنا هذا لم يسمّي (!) بها غيره وله في القرآن تسعة وتسعون اسماً منها المسيح المقدس الثاني الشاكر الذاكر الحامد المصلّي (11b) وما أشبهه وهذه⁵⁸ من الأسماء وهي معروفة مشهورة كما قال عز وجل "ولله الأسماء الحسنی فادعوه بها" تصلح أن تكون في شدة فتقول يا مسيطر يا مدمدم يا سلام سلّمني يا حافظ احفظني وتخصّه سبحانه تعالى من هذه الأسماء بثلاثة أسماء وهي⁵⁹ حياً عالماً قادراً وسمّي الموت وسمّي في يوم بدر السُنْحَنَح وسمّاه السيد محمد الإيمان والهادي والوكيل والقاضي والمفتي والسلام والمؤمن والمهيمن والغني والحميد ولا إله إلا هو الحق المبين والولي والساعة وأرحم الراحمين.

س ٤٤ أخبرني عن بقية أسماء مولانا أمير المؤمنين مع شرحها وتفصيلها.

⁵⁶ Ms. حبيناً

⁵⁷ Cf. below, question 52.

⁵⁸ Ms. وهذا

⁵⁹ Ms. وهم

ج إعلم أن أسماء مولانا أمير المؤمنين في⁶⁰ صحف شيت وإدريس ونوح وإبراهيم بالسرياني (!) الهيولي والأمين والبيان واليقين والإيقان والناصر وفي كتب الفرس نمير وهو اسم النار وفي كتب الترك تبيرا وفي لغة الزنج كيينا وفي لسان الحبشة تبريك وسُمِّيَ يوم القليب وقد سقط ابن دايته الهلالية (12a) فيه فعلقه برجله وأخرجه ميمونا.

س ٤٥ ماذا تدعى بالظاهر أم مولانا أمير المؤمنين؟
ج تدعى فاطمة ابنة أسد ابن هاشم ابن عبد مناف ولم يكن في زمانه هاشمي ابن هاشمية غيره.

س ٤٦ من هم إخوة مولانا أمير المؤمنين؟
ج هم حمزة وجعفر وطالب وعقيل.

س ٤٧ من هم أبناء مولانا أمير المؤمنين بالظاهر؟
ج هم حسن والحسين وابنتاه⁶¹ زينب وأم كلثوم.

س ٤٨ أين يوجد مشهد مولانا أمير المؤمنين؟
ج إعلم أن مشهده تقدست أسماؤه موجود بالدكوة البيض غربي الكوفة.

س ٤٩ ما هي الأسماء التي هي خاصة لمولانا أمير المؤمنين ولا يجوز أن يُسمَّى بها غيره ولا يشار باطناً بالدعاء إلا إليه؟
ج هي المعنى، الأزل، الفرد، القديم، الأحد، الصمد، العلي، معنى المعاني، رب المثاني، غاية الغايات، نهاية النهايات، مؤزل الازل، مؤبد الأبد، حي، داري، الحي القيوم، أمير النحل، العلي، العظيم، سيدي ومولاي، هابيل، شيت، يوسف، يوشع، آصف، شمعون، أمير المؤمنين، الأنزع البطين.

س ٥٠ لماذا ندعي (!) مولانا أمير المؤمنين أمير النحل وما (12b) هو معناه الرمزي؟
ج إعلم أن المؤمنين تشبّهت⁶² بالنحل لأنها تلتقط من الأزهار

⁶⁰ Ms. من, and cf. Khaṣībī, *al-Hidāya al-kubrā*, p. 92.

⁶¹ Ms. ابنتيه

⁶² Ms. تشبّهة

أحسنها وبما أن مولانا علي بن أبي طالب هو أمير المؤمنين فلُقِّبَ
بأمير النحل.

س٥١ ماذا كانت تدعي (!) مولانا أمير المؤمنين الأمم الذين (!)
كانوا (!) بالعالم قبل البشر؟

ج كانت تدعيه (!) الهو أعني الذي هو ولهذا سليمان كان يقول
في دعائه: "يا هو يا هو يا من لا يعلم ما هو إلا هو."

س٥٢ من هم الأمم الذين (!) كانوا (!) بالدار قبل البشر؟
ج هم الجن والبن والطم والرم والجان.

س٥٣ كم هي العوالم؟
ج أعلم أن العوالم هي كثيرة لا يعلم عددها إلا خالقها ومنها
العالم الكبير النوراني والعالم الصغير البشري الترابي الجنس.

س٥٤ ما هو العالم الكبير النوراني؟
ج هو السماء التي هي نور الأنوار.

س٥٥ ما هو العالم الصغير البشري الترابي الجنس؟
ج هو الأرض.

س٥٦ ماذا يحتوي العالم الكبير النوراني؟
ج يحتوي على السبعة (!) مراتب قبل ظهورهم (!) في العالم
البشري وهم الأبواب والأيتام والنقباء والنجباء والمختصين
والمخلصين والممتحنين.

س٥٧ اشرح لي أسماء درج السبعة (!) مراتب. (13a)
ج أعلم أن أسماء درج المرتبة الأولى وهي الأبواب الاربعمائة
هي الأسماء والحجب والآيات⁶³ والأنوار والشموس والأفلاك
والغمام.

س٥٨ ما هي المرتبة الثانية؟
ج هي الأيتام خمسمائة ولها سبعة (!) من الدرج وهم (!)
المشارك والمغرب والأقمار والأهله والنجوم والرعود والبروق.

والآية Ms. 63

س ٥٩ ما هي المرتبة الثالثة؟
ج هي مرتبة النقباء ستمائة ولها سبعة (!) من الدرج وهم الصلاة والزكاة والحج والصيام والهجرة والجهاد والدعاء.

س ٦٠ ما هي المرتبة الرابعة؟
ج هي مرتبة النجباء سبعمائة ولها سبعة (!) من الدرج سوهم (!) الجبال والمعصرات والبحار والأنهار والرياح والسحاب والصواعق.

س ٦١ ما هي المرتبة الخامسة؟
ج هي مرتبة المختصين ثمان مائة ولها سبعة (!) من الدرج وهم (!) الليل والنهار والغداة والعشاء⁶⁴ والغدو والأصيل والسييل.

س ٦٢ ما هي المرتبة السادسة؟
ج هي مرتبة المخلصين تسعمائة ولها سبعة (!) من الدرج وهم (!) الأنعام والدواب والإبل والنحل والطير والصوامع والبيع.

س ٦٣ ما هي المرتبة السابعة؟
ج هي مرتبة الممتحنين ألف ومائة ولها سبعة (13b) من الدرج وهم البيوت والمساجد والنخل والأعنان والرمان والزيتون والتين فهذه السبعة (!) مراتب وكل مرتبة لها سبع درجات؛ الجملة تسعة وأربعون درجة.

س ٦٤ إشرح لي كيف السبع مراتب قبل ظهورهم (!) في العالم الصغير البشري كانوا (!) في العالم النوراني.
ج أعلم أن سبعة (!) مراتب العالم الكبير النوراني كان لها غير أسماء في السماء قبل ظهورها على الأرض وقبل أن تُسمّى عندنا هذه الآلات في الدنيا مثل التين والزيتون والنخل والأعنان وغيرها من الأسماء المذكورة في نطق القرآن فصارت هذه الأسماء لهذه الآلات في الدنيا بإزاء أسماء درج المراتب في العالم النوراني فيكون نطق القرآن بهذه الأسماء التأويلية ظاهراً على آلات الدنيا وباطناً على أسماء الدرج والمراتب من العالم النوراني.

س ٦٥: ماذا يحتوي العالم الصغير البشري الترابي الجنس؟

⁶⁴ Ms. والعشاء

س٧١ كم كتب أهل التوحيد؟
ج أعلم أن كتب أهل التوحيد هي مائة وأربعة عشر كتاب.

س٧٢ ما هو القرآن؟
ج هو دليل سابق على ظهور مولانا بالإنسانية.

س٧٣ من علم القرآن لحمد صلى الله عليه وسلم؟
ج مولانا أمير المؤمنين وهو المعنى على لسان جبرائيل الذي هو روح القدس وهو الباب.

س٧٤ ما هي عدة اخواننا المؤمنين؟
ج أعلم أن عدتهم في كل وقت وحين عين ميم سين وهي العين العلية والميم المحمدية والسين السلسلية.

س٧٥ هل أن المسيح صُلبَ وقُتِلَ كما تقول عنه النصارى في قصته؟

ج أعلم أن لا حقيقة لذلك "وما قتلوه ولا صلبوه اليهود ولكن شُبَّهَ لهم والله رفعه إليه"⁷⁸ كما قوله تعالى "ولا تحسبن (16a) الذين قُتِلُوا في سبيل الله أمواتاً بل هم أحياء عند ربهم يرزقون.

س٧٦ ما هو القدّاس؟
ج هو تقديس الشراب وشربه بسر النقباء والنجباء.

س٧٧ ما هو القربان؟
ج هو الخبز الذي يقربوه المؤمنين (!) عن أرواح إخوانهم وبه يقال القداس.

س٧٨ من هو الذي يقدر القداس ويقرب القربان للمؤمنين؟
ج هو إمامهم وخطيبهم العظيم.

س٧٩ ما هو سر الله الأكبر؟
ج هو سر اللحم والدم الذي قال المسيح عنه لتلاميذه عليه

⁷⁸ This is a deviation from the Qurānic text (4:157-158): "وما قتلوه وما صلبوه ولكن شُبَّهَ لهم بل رفعه الله إليه"

⁷⁹ This word is not part of the Qurānic verse (3:169).

السلام هذا لحمي ودمي فكلوا واشربوا منه لأنه حياة الأبدية.

س ٨٠ إلى أين تذهب أرواح اخوتنا المؤمنين عند خروجها من قبورها التي هي قمصانها اللحمية الدموية؟
ج تذهب إلى العالم الكبير النوراني وتحظى بالنعيم والحياة الدائمة إلى أبد الأبدين ودهر الداهرين وتلبس قمصان الأنوار وهم النجوم.

س ٨١ ماذا يحلّ بالمشرّكين الكافرين الجاحدين لاهوت مولانا؟
ج يحلّ بهم العذاب في جميع الأدوار والأقوار.

س ٨٢ ما هو سر إيمان (16b) الموحّدين الذي هو سرّ الأسرار وعقيدة الأبرار؟
ج هو سرّ الاثنين⁸⁰ (+إعلم أنّ هذا السرّ يُدعى أيضاً سرّ الخير والشرّ، سرّ النور والظلمة، سرّ الماء والنار، سرّ اللحم والدم، سرّ الأكل والشرب، سرّ الموت والحياة، سرّ الحرّ والبرد، سرّ النور والظلمة). وهو معرفة الله بالحقيقة وهو سرّ كريم وخطاب عظيم وعلم جليل وخطر ثقیل فلا تحمله الجبال لعظم محله وشرفه وهو الترياق الشافي لمن حفظه ودان به واتّقاه والسم القاتل لمن إلى غير أهله كشفه وفسّاه وهو سرّ احتجاب مولانا في النور أعني عين الشمس وظهوره في عبده عبد النور.

س ٨٣ ماذا يحلّ بالذي يعرفه ويدخله به شك أو ريب؟
ج يكون من المبذرين الذين هم الكافرين إخوان الشياطين ويستحقّ المسوخية والسلوك في القمصان الردية الدنية ويزيّقه⁸¹ الله حرّ الحديد وبرده.

س ٨٤ ما هم (!) الشروط الواجب على المؤمن حفظهم (!) عند قبوله سرّ الأسرار؟
ج الأمر الأول الواجب عليه هو أن يفرغ جهده بمحافظته اخوانه ومراعاتهم ومداراتهم والمواظبة على تفقدهم وبرّهم وصلاتهم وجميع ما يرضاه لنفسه يرضاه لهم ويجعل خمس ماله حلالاً مطلقاً لهم

⁸⁰ The ms. has here the vernacular التنتين.

⁸¹ Ms. ويدوقه

س ٩٥ إن كان مولانا احتجب بالنور فبأي شيء يظهر؟
ج أعلم أن مولانا يظهر بالحق كقوله في النوروز.

س ٩٦ لماذا يوجّه المؤمن وجهه حين الصلاة إلى الشمس؟
ج أعلم أن الشمس هي نور الأنوار وقبله أهل الولاء والجلال لأنها ستر الجميل ومحل التفضيل الساكن بها الأزلي الدائم الأبدي القائم سرّ الاسرار (18b) ونور الأنوار.

س ٩٧ لماذا ندعي (!) مولانا أمير المؤمنين صاحب الكرات والرجعات؟
ج لأنه يكرّر ويرجع ويظهر في الأكوار والأدوار وهم القباب البهمنية من هابيل إلى أبي تراب.

س ٩٨ ما هو الباطن وما هو الظاهر؟
ج أعلم أن لفظة الباطن تدل على لاهوت مولانا والظاهر يدل على إنسانيته ففي الظاهر نقول مولانا علي ابن أبي طالب ومعناه في الباطن المعنى والاسم والباب وهو الله الرحمن الرحيم.

س ٩٩ من هو شيخنا الذي أشرع لنا الأديان في سائر البلدان؟
ج هو سيدنا أبو عبدالله الحسين ابن حمدان عليه وعلى تلاميذه من الله افضل الصلاة والسلام.

س ١٠٠ لماذا ندعى الطائفة الخصبية؟
ج لأننا تابعين (!) تعليم شيخنا ابو (!)^{٩١} عبدالله الحسين ابن حمدان الخصبى قدس الله سرّه.

س ١٠١ قد فهمت ما شرحت لي فأخبرني الآن عن أسماء أشخاص الصلاة وفروضها ونوافلها.

ج أعلم أن الصلاة بالجملة السيد محمد وبالتفصيل لها واحد (!) وخمسون (19a) ركعة لواحد وخمسون (!) شخص. الوقت الأول صلاة الظهر الزوال^{٩٢} ثمانية (!) ركعات وهم القاسم والطاهر وعبدالله وزينب ورقية وأم كلثوم واسمها آمنه وفاطمة الزهراء فهؤلاء السبعة أولاد رسول الله من خديجة ابنة خويلد وإبراهيم

^{٩١} Ms. ابن

^{٩٢} Ms. الزول



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THE NUṢAYRĪS – ALSO KNOWN AS ‘ALAWĪS – have been in power in Syria for the past three decades. Little is known of their origins or their long history, while their religious creeds and thought are somewhat better known. The main reason for our fragmentary knowledge of the Nuṣayrī religion is that, since its beginnings, it has always been the secret faith of a self-conscious elite that zealously guarded its sectarian literature.

The Nuṣayrī-‘Alawī faith is a clear example of a syncretistic religion. It combines and fuses elements of cults and creeds of very disparate, and remote, origins. Among these are various pagan beliefs (residues of ancient Mesopotamian and Syrian cults), as well as Persian, Christian, Gnostic, and Muslim – both Sunnī and Shī‘ī – religious precepts and practices. All these components have been brought together in a syncretistic religious system that has assumed a heterodox Shī‘ī garb.

This book presents a mosaic of fundamental aspects of Nuṣayrī theology and liturgy. It demonstrates the complexity of Nuṣayrī theology and the diversity of religious thought within the Nuṣayrī fold.

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