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The Defence of Sufism among Twelver Shi'i Thinkers of the early modern and modern Times: Topics and Arguments.

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Introduction

From the pre-modern era – or even sooner – to the present day, the Twelver Shi'i or Imami world has been unremittingly concerned with what one might call the 'Sufi question', a question rife with doctrinal, but also socio-political, issues: should Sufism be accepted as an essential dimension of the 'genuine' Twelver Shi'i religion, or must it be rejected for being a 'condemnable innovation' (*bid'a*) and/or an excrescence of Sunni Islam? It is currently said that during the reign of the Safavids in Iran (906/1501-1134/1722), the lawyers and theologians hostile to Sufism eventually prevailed and ultimately succeeded in wiping out most of the Sufi brotherhoods from their original birthplace.¹ However what is less known is that during the same period, within the Imami '*ulamā*' community itself, an alternative discourse persevered which was apologist and concordist, by promoting the rapprochement, or even the union, between Sufism and Twelver Shi'ism. This discourse made the reinstatement of Sufism in 18th century Iran theoretically possible, although it was practically established by an outside decision.² A series of interrelated works, from the pre-modern period to the modern era, which established this pro-Sufi Shi'i discourse as an authentic intellectual and literary tradition, was transmitted to the present day in certain Sufi circles and is still considered authoritative by certain historians and thinkers.³

¹ Concerning the 'Sufi question' in *Imamī* Shi'ism, see N. Pourjavady, 'Opposition to Sufism in Twelver Shiism', in F. de Jong and B. Radtke, ed., *Islamic Mysticism Contested. Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics* (Leiden, 1999), pp. 614-623; during the Safavid era specifically, see S. A. Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam* (Chicago, London, 1984), pp. 112-119; 'A. al-Ḥ. Zarrīnkūb, *Dunbāla justujū dar taṣawwuf-i īrān* (Tehran, 1389 Sh./2010-2011), in particular pp. 223-266; L. Lewisohn, 'Sufism and the School of Iṣfahān: *Taṣawwuf* and '*Irfān* in Late Safavid Iran ('Abd al-Razzāq Lāhījī and Fayḍ-i Kāshānī on the Relation of *Taṣawwuf*, *Hikmat* and '*Irfān*)', in L. Lewisohn and D. Morgan, ed., *The Heritage of Sufism* (Oxford, 1999), 3 vols., vol. 3, pp. 63-134, see pp. 67-77; K. Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs, Cultural Landscapes of Early Modern Iran* (London, 2002), pp. 403-437.

² Concerning the reinstatement of the Ni'matullāhī in Iran at the 18th century, see F. Speziale, 'À propos du renouveau ni'matullāhī. Le centre de Hyderabad au cours de la première modernité', *Studia Iranica*, 42, 2013, pp. 91-118, and his chapter in this volume.

³ One can find a revived version of this discourse, with references to the works and authors mentioned in this article, in the historical encyclopaedia of Sufism written by an eminent member of the Ni'matullāhī order, Ma'ṣūm 'Alī Shāh (d. 1344/1925-1926), *Tarā'iq al-ḥaqā'iq* (Tehran, 1387 Sh./2008). This discourse is also recurrent in the works of S. Ḥ. Naṣr; e.g. S. Ḥ. Naṣr, 'Le shī'isme et le soufisme. Leurs relations principielles et historiques', in T. Fahd, ed., *Le shī'isme imāmīte* (Paris, 1970), pp. 215-233. See also Sh. Pāzūkī, "Bāzkāvī-yi tārikhī-yi nizā'-i ṣūfiyah va fuqahā", in his *Irfān va hunar dar dūrah-i mudīrn* (Tehran, 1393 Sh./2014-2015), pp. 216-232.

Without claiming to be exhaustive, the present essay will introduce four great works and their authors as the main milestones of this parallel tradition, which I will refer to as the ‘tradition of reconciliation’, a tradition revitalised century after century, from the Ilkhanate era to the end of the Safavid dynasty. These four works are the *Jāmi‘ al-asrār wa manba‘ al-anwār* (‘The Sum of the Secrets and the Source of Lights’) by Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī (d. after 786/1385);⁴ the *Kitāb al-Mujlī mir’at al-munjī fī l-kalām wa’l-ḥikmatayn wa’l-taṣawwuf* (‘Polishing the Mirror of the Saviour: about Theology, the Twin Wisdoms and Sufism’) by Ibn Abī l-Jumhūr al-Aḥsā’ī (d. after 906/1500-01);⁵ the *Majālis al-mu‘minīn* (‘Sessions of the Believers’) by Nūrullāh Shūshtarī (d. 1019/1610);⁶ the *Maḥbūb al-qulūb* (‘The Beloved of the Hearts’) by Quṭb al-Dīn Ashkivarī (d. between 1088/1677 and 1095/1684).⁷ Although other works could have been considered from writers such as Ḥāfiẓ Rajab Bursī (d. 813/1411) or Shams al-Dīn Lāhijī (d. 918/1512), to name but two,⁸ which state in an implicit manner such a rapprochement, these four works are particularly noteworthy in that they assume explicitly the ecumenist position, are linked by close intertextual relationships, the most recent substantially plagiarising the preceding ones, and thus lend themselves to the analysis of subtle variations within a unique and single discourse. In order to put in light both the common propose of these four works and some distinctive features of each of them, I have preferred, to a linear and chronological description of the documents, setting out the main topics and arguments of this concordist line of thought across the texts.

After a brief presentation of the four authors and their works, a three-fold argumentation will thus be analysed: first a (mytho-)historical argumentation, showing the links of the original Sufī masters to the Shi‘i Imams; then a conceptual argumentation, systematising the relationships between *sharī‘a* (religious law), *ṭarīqa* (spiritual path) and *ḥaqīqa* (essential

⁴ Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī, *La philosophie shi‘ite*, 1. Somme des doctrines ésotériques (*Jāmi‘ al-asrār*). 2. Traité de la connaissance de l’être (*Fī ma‘rifat al-wujūd*), ed. H. Corbin and O. Yahia (Tehran, Paris, 1347 Sh./1968). On this thinker, see ‘A. Kh. Ḥamiya, *‘Irfān-i shī‘ī. Pajūhashī dar bāb-i zandagī va andīsha-yi Sayyid Ḥaydar-i Āmulī* (Tehran, 1392 Sh./2013). In this paper, I will also take in account two other works of this thinker: *al-Muḥīṭ al-a‘zam wa’l-baḥr al-khiḍam fī ta’wīl kitāb Allāh al-‘azīz al-muḥkam*, ed. M. al-Mūsawī al-Tabrīzī (Qom, 1414/1994-5), also ed. unknown, (Beirut, 1433/2012); and his *Anwār al-ḥaqīqa wa aṭwār al-ṭarīqa wa asrār al-sharī‘a*, ed. S. M. al-Mūsawī al-Tabrīzī (Qumm, 1436/1394 h.s./2015-16); also known as *Asrār al-sharī‘a wa aṭwār al-ṭarīqa wa anwār al-ḥaqīqa*, ed. M. Khājavi (Tehran, 1362 Sh./1983). See below for their introduction.

⁵ Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī ibn Abī Jumhūr Al-Aḥsā’ī, *Mujlī mir’at al-munjī fī l-kalām wa’l-ḥikmatayn wa’l-taṣawwuf*, ed. R. Y. Fārmad (Beyrouth, 2013). This is the first critical edition of the book, due to a foundation devoted to the diffusion of the works of Ibn Abī Jumhūr, based on three manuscripts in addition to the earlier lithographic edition by A. al-Shīrāzī – reprinted with an introduction by S. Schmidtke (Tehran, 2009) –, and completed by references to the author’s sources. For the appointing of Ibn Abī Jumhūr’s death date, see Fārmad’s introduction to his edition of the *Mujlī*, p. 67.

⁶ Qāḍī Nūrullāh Shūshtarī, *Majālis al-mu‘minīn*, ed. I. ‘Arabpūr, M. Sitāyish, M. R. Muḥammadyān *et alii* (Mashhad, 1393 Sh./2014-2015). This new edition is the first critical one, based on ten manuscripts, augmented and corrected by references to Shūshtarī’s sources. The earlier, confusing edition due to Intishārāt islāmiyya (Tehran, 1335 Sh./1955-56, reed. 1391 Sh./2012) must also be mentioned.

⁷ Quṭb al-Dīn al-Ashkivarī, *Maḥbūb al-qulūb, al-maqālat al-‘ulā*, ed. I. al-Dībājī and H. Šidqī (Tehran, 1378 Sh./1999); *Maḥbūb al-qulūb, al-maqālat al-thāniya*, ed. Dībājī and H. Šidqī (Tehran, 1382 Sh./2003). The third part has not been published yet. On this work, see M. Terrier, ‘Le *Maḥbūb al-qulūb* de Quṭb al-Dīn Ashkevarī, une œuvre méconnue dans l’histoire de l’histoire de la sagesse en islam’, *Journal Asiatique*, 298.2, 2010, pp. 345-387; ‘Quṭb al-Dīn Ashkevarī, un philosophe discret de la renaissance safavide’, *Studia Iranica*, 40.2, 2011, pp. 171-210; *Histoire de la sagesse et philosophie shi‘ite. L’Aimé des cœurs de Quṭb al-Dīn Aškevarī* (Paris, 2016).

⁸ Ḥāfiẓ Rajab Bursī, *Mashāriq anwār al-yaqīn*, ed. ‘A. al-Māzandarānī (Qumm 1426/1384 Sh./2005-2006); Shams al-Dīn Lāhijī, *Mafāṭīḥ al-i‘jāz fī sharḥ Gulshān-i rāz*, ed. M. R. Barzigar Khāliqī and ‘I. Karbāsī (Tehran, 1391 Sh./2012-2013).

reality or the truth within oneself); finally a linguistic and ‘phenomenological’ argumentation, showing the analogy between specific locutions pronounced respectively by Shi‘i Imams and Sufis.

The tradition of reconciliation and its representatives

Ḥaydar ibn ‘Alī ibn Ḥusayn al-Ḥusaynī al-Āmulī, known as Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī, born in 719/1320,⁹ dead after 787/1385-86,¹⁰ can be considered the founder of this tradition of reconciliation between Shi‘ism and Sufism.¹¹ Member of a large family of *sayyids* from Āmul, in the province of Tabarestān, he belonged to a subset of the Iranian population already converted to Twelver Shi‘ism before the Safavid era, and served as minister the Prince Fakhr al-Dawla Ḥasan ibn Shāh Kay-Khosraw ibn Yazdgard, who was assassinated in 750/1349.¹² According to his short autobiography, which recalls us al-Ghazālī’s *al-Munqidh min al-dalāl* in its apologetic tendency,¹³ Ḥaydar Āmulī relinquished his mundane career probably one year before this event, at the age of thirty, donned the Sufi cloak (*khirqā*), took the road of Mecca in company of a Sufi master called Nūroddīn Tehrānī, and from here came back to the Shi‘i sacred places (‘*aṭābāt*) of Iraq.¹⁴ He may have composed during this Iranian period his theological treatise *Anwār al-ḥaqīqa wa aṭwār al-ṭarīqa wa asrār al-sharī‘a* (“the Lights of Truth, the Stations of the Path and the Mysteries of the Revealed Law”), devoted to the conceptual triad studied in the third part of this essay¹⁵. In Iraq, he was the pupil of Fakhr al-Muḥaqqiqīn al-Ḥillī (d. 771/1370), the son of al-‘Allāma al-Ḥillī (d. 726/1326), from whom he granted an *ijāza* (a permission from the teacher to teach to books studied with him) in 761/1369-70, something which afforded him considerable legitimacy as a Shi‘i scholar. Apparently under the command of Fakhr al-Muḥaqqiqīn, he wrote in 769/1367-68 a polemic and sectarian epistle entitled *Raf‘ al-munāza‘a wa l-khilāf* (“The Resolution of Quarrel and Dispute”) in order to justify, according to Shi‘i tenets, the passive attitude of Imam ‘Alī during the reigns of the three first caliphs.¹⁶ Ḥaydar Āmulī composed most of his works during his Iraqi period, the most important of which are *Jāmi‘ al-asrār wa manba‘ al-anwār*, which Henry Corbin dates around 752/1351-52; his commentary of the Qur’an, or more exactly, his treatise about Qur’anic *Tafsīr* and *Ta’wīl* (respectively ‘exoteric’ and ‘esoteric’ interpretation of the Qur’an), *al-Muḥīṭ al-*

⁹ In the introduction of his *Naṣṣ al-nuṣūṣ*, ed. H. Corbin and O. Yahia (Tehran/Paris, 1988), and now ed. M. Bidārfār (Qumm, 1394 Sh./2015-2016), p. 537 (C-Y), 853 (B), Ḥaydar Āmulī writes that he finished it in 782/1380-1381 at the age of sixty-three. See Ḥamiya, *‘Irfān-i shī‘ī*, p. 8.

¹⁰ The date of his last work, *Risālat al-‘ulūm al-‘āliyya*. See Corbin, introduction to Āmolī, *La philosophie shī‘ite*, p. 20.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-76; K. M. al-Shaybī, *al-Ṣila bayna l-taṣawwuf wa l-tashayyu‘*, 2nd edition (Beirut/Bagdad/Freiberg, 2011), vol. 2, pp. 104-115. See also Ḥamiya, *‘Irfān-i shī‘ī*, pp. 38-41.

¹² Corbin, introduction to Āmulī, *La philosophie shī‘ite*, p. 17.

¹³ Āmulī, *Naṣṣ al-nuṣūṣ*, pp. 535-537 (C-Y), 851-853 (B); Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh min al-dalāl* (*Erreur et délivrance*), ed. F. Jabre (Beirut, 1969). In both reports one can find the same claim of a split from the mundane world for a purely spiritual purpose, and the same silence on the possible political-mundane motives of this decision.

¹⁴ Corbin, introduction to Āmulī, *La philosophie shī‘ite*, pp. 18-23; Henry Corbin, *En Islam iranien* (Paris, 1971-1972), vol. 3, pp. 162-167.

¹⁵ See above, n. 4. Its composition was prior to that of the *Jāmi‘ al-asrār*’s as it mentions the latter, pp. 88 and 367.

¹⁶ *Raf‘ al-munāza‘a wa l-khilāf*, ed. Ḥ. Kalbāsī Ashtarī (Tehran, 1396 Sh./2017).

a'zam wa 'l-baḥr al-khiḍam fī ta'wīl kitāb Allāh al-'azīz al-muḥkam (“The Huge Ocean and the Abyssal Sea: an Esoteric Commentary of the Holly ad Firm Book of God”), achieved in 777/1375-76; and *Naṣṣ al-nuṣūṣ fī sharḥ al-fuṣūṣ* (“The Text of the Texts: a Commentary of the *Bezels [of Wisdom]*”), a commentary of Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (“the Bezels of Wisdom”) achieved in 782/1380. Both latter books go together as Ḥaydar Āmulī was considering the Qur’an as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (*al-nāzil ‘alayhi*) and the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* as proceeding from him (*al-ṣāḍir minhu*).¹⁷ Despite the fact that Ibn ‘Arabī was probably not Shi‘i – an issue that remains problematic –, Ḥaydar Āmulī strived to incorporate his theosophy into mainstream Twelver Shi‘ism, something which can be regarded with Henry Corbin as Āmulī’s foremost contribution to Islamic culture.¹⁸ Corbin edited his *Jāmi‘ al-asrār wa manba‘ al-anwār*, with his *Risāla Naqd al-nuqūd fī ma‘rifat al-wujūd* (“Criticism of the Criticisms, on the Knowledge of the Being”), under the title ‘Shi‘i Philosophy.’ This title remains some enigmatic because of the little part of ‘philosophy’ in the common meaning that it contains, but takes a full meaning in posterior developments of this line of thought.¹⁹ Actually, the *Jāmi‘ al-asrār* doesn’t deal with philosophy, but with both Twelver Shi‘ism and Sufism that he intends to reconcile.

At the time of Ḥaydar Āmulī, under Ilkhanate rule (656/1258 – 756/1355) and post-Ilkhanate / pre-Timurid semi-anarchic interregna (756/1355 – 807/140), Iran was predominantly Sunni. Nevertheless, Shi‘i ideas also permeated throughout the empire, emanating from the residing Sufi brotherhoods which reminded at least nominally Sunni. The *Jāmi‘ al-asrār* was thus written during an age when Shi‘as and Sufis were two minority yet powerful groups in a double process of conflicting and coalescing within a state lacking any fixed religious policy.²⁰ Ḥaydar Āmulī himself states that his book is addressed to Sufis and Twelver Shi‘as with the aim of establishing concord amongst them, and to lead each group to its own truth,²¹ respectively the esoteric part (*al-bāḥīn*) and the exoteric one (*al-ẓāhir*) of the same superior Truth contained in the teachings of the Imams.²² In other words, Ḥaydar Āmulī’s endeavour is to reunite two opposing groups, in conflict only through ignorance of their fundamental kinship. His most famous and bold theory identifies the ‘true Sufi’ (*al-ṣūfiyya al-ḥaqqā*) with the ‘real’ or ‘true Shi‘a’ (*al-shī‘a al-ḥaqīqiyya*) in other words the ‘well-tested believer’ (*mu‘min mumtaḥan*) alluded to in a famous hadith almost identically expressed by the first, fifth and sixth Imams: ‘Our Cause is difficult; the only ones able to bear it are a Prophet

¹⁷ *Naṣṣ al-nuṣūṣ*, pp. 3 and 148 (C-Y), 3 and 216 (B). Ibn ‘Arabī says that the *Fuṣūṣ* had been given to him in dream by the Prophet. See Ibn ‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ed. A. al-‘A. ‘Afīfī (Beirut, 1423/2002), pp. 47-48.

¹⁸ Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, vol. 3, p. 155 ; the same, *Histoire de la philosophie islamique* (Paris, 1986), *passim*.

¹⁹ See D. De Smet, ‘Introduction to Part VIII: ‘Philosophy and Intellectual Traditions’, in F. Daftary and G. Miskinzoda, ed., *The Study of Shi‘i Islam* (London, 2104), pp. 545-562, and my *Histoire de la sagesse et philosophie shi‘ite*, pp. 731-735.

²⁰ See J. Calmard, ‘Le chiisme imamite sous les Ilkhans’, in D. Aigle, ed., *L’Iran face à la domination mongole* (Tehran, 1997), pp. 261-292, notably p. 282; M. Gronke, ‘La religion populaire en Iran mongol’, in *Ibid.*, pp. 205-230, see pp. 205-207; M. Molé, ‘Les Kubrawiyya entre sunnisme et shiisme aux huitième et neuvième siècles de l’hégire’, *Revue des Études Islamiques*, 1961, pp. 61-142; A. Bausani, ‘Religion under the Mongols’, in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 5, *The Saljuq and Mongol Periods*, ed. John. A. Boyle (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 538-549.

²¹ Āmulī, *Jāmi‘ al-asrār*, p. 254 ; Corbin, Introduction, p. 25.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 41 and 222.

missioned by God, an angel of Proximity, and a faithful believer whose heart has been tested by God for faith (*mu'min imtaḥana Allāhu qalbahu li l-īmān*).²³

Muḥammad ibn 'Alī Ibn Abī l-Jumhūr al-Aḥsā'ī (d. after 904/1499), author of the second work studied here, can be seen as the continuator and propagator of this tradition of reconciliation. His birthdate is not certain,²⁴ nor the exact localisation of his homeland al-Aḥsā', a Shi'i region in the north-east of the Arabian Peninsula or a city in Bahrayn.²⁵ However, he certainly inherited a Shi'i traditional lineage dating back to the eighth Imam. Compared to Ḥaydar Āmulī, he seems to have had a more conventional life of Shi'i medieval scholar. After he completed his scientific and religious formation in the Shi'i centres of Najaf and Karak Nūḥ in Jabal 'Āmil, he spent his life between the holy places of Iraq, the city of Ṭūs in Irān – later called Mashhad, where is the sanctuary of Imam Riḍā (d. 203/818) –, and his native country.²⁶ He completed his *Mujlī mir'at al-munjī fi l-kalām wa'l-ḥikmatayn wa'l-taṣawwuf*,²⁷ a super-commentary of a previous theological work,²⁸ in 896/1490. The explicit aim of the book is to integrate with Imami Shi'ism, on the one hand Ash'ari and Mu'tazili *kalām*, and on the other the philosophy of *Ishrāq* and Sufism.²⁹ Greatly borrowing the most esoteric hadiths of the Imams from Ḥaydar Āmulī's *Jāmi' al-asrār*, he also professed the historical and ontological affiliation of Sufism with the "True religion" that is Twelver Shi'ism.

It is particularly noteworthy that this work was written only ten years before the sheikh of the Ṣafawiyya, the young Shāh Ismā'īl, acceded to the throne in Tabriz and established Twelver Shi'ism as the official religion of Iran (906/1500-01) – in other words on the eve of a new era for Shi'ism and Sufism. At the time of the *Mujlī*'s redaction, the foremost holy places and learning centres of Shi'ism, in Iraq and Lebanon, were under Sunni Ottoman rule, and although Iran was still predominantly Sunni, Persian Sufism had to a large extent completed its 'imperceptible transition from Sunnism to Shi'ism.'³⁰ Thus, Ibn Abī Jumhūr is one of the last witnesses of a time during which the two movements he principally aimed to approach or to re-approach, Sufism and Twelver Shi'ism, were on an equal social and political footing. He was also the last to be able to urge reconciliation without having to defend himself from attacks

²³ Ibid., pp. 32-33, 36-37, 39 and 600; Corbin, introduction, pp. 27-29. On this hadith, see M. A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin dans le shi'isme originel* (Paris, 1992-2007), pp. 144, 278 and 328-330.

²⁴ Shaybi proposes that of 838/1435.

²⁵ The first option has the favor of Fārmad in his introduction to Ibn Abī Jumhūr, *Mujlī*, vol. 1, p. 65; the second one has those of Shaybī, *al-Ṣila*, vol. 2, p. 312, of Ṣ. Mowāḥḥed, 'Ibn Abī Jumhūr', in *Dā'erat al-ma'āref-e bozorg-e eslāmī*, ed. Kāzem Mūsawī Bojnūrdī (Tehran, 1367 Sh./1988-), vol. 2, p.635, and of T. Lawson, 'Ebn Abī Jomhūr Aḥsā'ī', in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshalter (Costa Mesa, California, 1996-), vol. 7, p. 662.

²⁶ Fārmad, Introduction to *Mujlī*, vol. 1, pp. 65-67.

²⁷ On this work, see Āqā Buzurg al-Ṭīhrānī, *al-Dharī'a ilā taṣānīf al-shī'a*, 25 vols. (Tehran – Najaf, 1353-1398/1934-1978), vol. 20, p. 13, n. 1726; W. Madelung, 'Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsā'ī's Synthesis of Kalām, Philosophy and Sufism', in *La signification du Bas Moyen Âge dans l'histoire et la culture du monde musulman*, (Aix-en-Provence, 1978), pp. 147-156; Sabine Schmidtke, *Theologie, Philosophie und Mystik im zwölfterschiitischen Islam des 9./15. Jahrhunderts. Die Gedankenwelten des Ibn Abī Ğumhūr al-Aḥṣā'ī (um 838/1434-35 – nach 906/1501)* (Leiden, 2000).

²⁸ Ibn Abī Jumhūr composed a first epistle entitled *Maslak al-afḥām fi 'ilm al-kalām* in 886/1482; then in the merges of it, a commentary entitled *al-Nūr al-munjī min al-zalām* in 893/1488; and finally a commentary of this commentary, the *Mujlī mir'at al-munjī*, achieved in 896/1490. See S. Schmidtke, introduction of the lithographic edition of the *Mujlī*, pp. iv-v, and Fārmad, introduction to Ibn Abī Jumhūr, *Mujlī*, vol. 1, pp. 85-86.

²⁹ Ibn Abī Jumhūr, *Mujlī*, vol. 1, pp. 134-135.

³⁰ Bausani, 'Religion under the Mongols', p. 546.

launched by the Shi‘i or Suni orthodox party, therefore without having to ‘write between the lines’, to quote Leo Strauss. It is unsettling to note that his contemporary ‘Alī al-Karakī (d. 940/1534), who had been a pupil of the same theologian ‘Alī ibn Hilāl al-Jazā’irī in in Jabal ‘Āmil, would become the official theologian of the Shi‘i Safavid State and, within this remit, eventually define an orthodoxy which marginalised the mystical and philosophical form of Shi‘ism represented by Ibn Abī Jumhūr.³¹ The latter’s call for a spiritual ‘revolution’ of Shi‘ism, to quote Kāmil Muṣṭafā al-Shaybī, went mostly unheard by the *fuqahā*’ of his time.³² Moreover, the religious policy of the clergy and the Safavids would shatter his hopes for a sacred union between Shi‘ism and Sufism. Ibn Abī Jumhūr was criticized for his ‘extremist Sufism’ by both Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (d. 1111/1699) and his pupil Mīrzā ‘Abdallāh al-Iṣbahānī Afandī, author of *Riyāḍ al-‘ulamā*’.³³ His collection of hadiths *‘Awālī al-la’ālī* was particularly censured for different motives such as quoting some of its traditions from Sunni sources, comprising traditions of ‘mystical fragrance’ (*tastashimmu al-maṭālib al-‘irfāniyya*), and comprising traditions peculiar to ‘exaggerating’ or ‘extremist’ Shi‘ism (*ghuluww*). This fact attests that Ibn Abī Jumhūr was sharing with Ḥaydar Āmulī both a radical Shi‘i affiliation and an ambiguous ecumenist trend aiming not only to reconcile Shi‘as and Sufis, but also to bring up the positions of Shi‘as and Sunnis.³⁴ Although his works were held in esteem during the Safavid era by scholars with mystical leanings, such as Ashkivarī and Fayḍ al-Kāshānī (d. 1091/1680-1681), the Shi‘i-Sufī concordist discourse would thereafter continue under persecution, in both Sunni and Shi‘i circles, as the two final actors of this intellectual tradition will show *nolens volens*.

Sayyid Ḍiyā’ al-Dīn Nūrullāh ibn al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Ḥusaynī al-Mar‘ashī al-Shūshtarī, known as Nūrullāh Shūshtarī and famous, among the Shi‘as, by the title of the ‘Third Martyr’ (*al-shāhid al-thālith*), was born in 956/1549-50 in Shūshtar, during the reign of the Safavid Shāh ‘Abbās I (r. 996/1588 - 1038/1629), into a lineage going back to al-‘Allāma al-Ḥillī. He became a *faqīh* and, following his grandfather’s footsteps, a member of the Nūrbakhshī Sufī fraternity which had converted to Shi‘ism after the messianic claim of its eponymous founder.³⁵ In 992/1584-85, he emigrated from Mashhad to India in order to escape from the troubles in Khurāsān, probably also with the aim to diffuse Twelver Shi‘ism amongst the scholars of the Mongol court, where he shortly became an intimate of the young sovereign Shāh Akbar (r. 964 – 1014 / 1556 – 1605); thus, his case was different from that of many Sufis

³¹ Shaybī, *Ṣila*, vol. 2, p. 313. About the role of al-Karakī, see Arjomand, *Shadow of God*, pp. 133-137 and 140-142; R. J. Abisaab, *Converting Persia. Religion and Power in Safavid Empire* (London/New York, 2004), pp. 15-20; Newman, *Safavid Iran* (London/New York, 2006), s.v.

³² Shaybī, *Ṣila*, vol. 2, p. 319.

³³ Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, ed. J. al-‘Alawī et alii (Tehran, 1376-1405/1957-1985), vol. 0, pp. 183-184; Mīrzā ‘Abdallāh al-Iṣbahānī Afandī, *Riyāḍ al-‘ulamā*’, quoted by Muḥsin al-Amīn in *A’yān al-shī‘a* (Beirut, 1406-1986), vol. 9, p. 434; see also al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī, *al-Risāla al-ithna ‘ashariyya fī l-radd ‘alā l-ṣūfiyya*, ed. A. al-Jalālī (Qumm 1390 Sh./2011), p. 32.

³⁴ ‘Awālī al-la’ālī (Qumm, 1404/1983), preface of Ayatullāh Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ḥusaynī al-Mar‘ashī al-Najafī, pp. 4-5; Shaybī, *Ṣila*, vol. 1, p. 314; Mowahhed, ‘Ibn Abī Jumhūr’, pp. 635-636. Even Ma‘ṣūm ‘Alī Shāh, in the laudative notice he devotes to him, criticizes his lack of reliability as a traditionist: see *Tarā’iq al-ḥaqā’iq*, vol. 1, p. 249.

³⁵ Shūshtarī, *Majālis*, vol. 1, introduction of the editors, pp. 195-198; vol. 3, p. 456 for the account about his grandfather’s affiliation; vol. 4, pp. 374-388, for a hyper-elogious notice on Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh and his son Shāh Qāsim. See also Zarrīnkūb, *Dunbāla justujū*, p. 186.

among his contemporaries, going incessantly back and forth between India and Iran.³⁶ He served as *qādī* in Lahore, applying *ijtihād* and issuing *fatāwā* according to the four schools of Sunni jurisprudence (*fiqh*). After Shāh Akbar's death, in the beginning of the reign of his son, Jahāngīr (r. 1014 – 1037 / 1605 – 1627), Shūshtarī ceased to conceal his Shi'ī faith (*taqiyya*), or was denounced by his adversaries for having composed, in response to a Sunni refutation, his apology of Shi'ī jurisprudence entitled *Iḥqāq al-ḥaqq*³⁷. He is said to have been the first scholar to openly profess Shi'ism in India,³⁸ for which reason he fell victim to the 'tragic confrontation between the Shi'ī and Sunni *kalām*',³⁹ flogged to death in 1019/1610.⁴⁰

The main work of Shūshtarī, *Majālis al-mu'minīn*, was written in India around 990/1582-1583 and could also have played a role in tragic end of its author.⁴¹ *A priori* it belongs to the *ṭabaqāt* genre, in other words 'categories' or 'generations' of illustrious men. Shūshtarī's intention was to bring together the companions of the Prophet, theologians, philosophers, princes, Sufis, poets, etc., who were secretly or notoriously Shi'as in the widest sense, as defined by the acknowledgment of the sacred right of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib to succeed the Prophet Muḥammad.⁴² The main justification of his large census is that many scholars and rulers of Islam had been forced to practice *taqiyya* or 'sacred concealment of the faith' in order to escape from the persecutions of the Sunni power; however, with the glorious reign of the Safavid Shāhs, the time of concealment was now over⁴³. With this goal in mind, he endeavours to show, especially in the sixth *majlis* of the book, that the great spiritual leaders of Sufism were all Shi'as, although most of them were nominally Sunni⁴⁴. For this reason, Shi'ī authors of prosopographical works consider it unreliable for having 'exaggerated' its inventory, in other words to have classified as Shi'as men who were not.⁴⁵ The aim of the book has also determined its reception by the modern scholarship: the text is still used as an historical trustable source by certain modern historians like Kāmil Muṣṭafā al-Shaybī and Seyyed Ḥossein Naṣr, while being denounced by others like Jean Calmard for its blatant bias.⁴⁶

Quṭb al-Dīn Ashkivarī, also called Bahā' al-Dīn al-Lāhījī or al-Sharīf al-Lāhījī (d. between 1088/1677 and 1095/1684), is the final and least known of our concordist authors. He had been in his youth the student of Mīr Dāmād (d. 1040/1631), then inherited from his father the office of *Shayh al-islām* of the district of Lāhījān, in Gīlān. This position, although containing important prerogatives in justice and economy, reflects a relatively secondary rank

³⁶ Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh, *Ṭarā'iq al-ḥaqā'iq*, vol. 1, p. 254; Arjomand, *Shadow of God*, p. 115.

³⁷ Shūshtarī, *Majālis*, vol. 1, introduction of the editors, pp. 156-173.

³⁸ Amīn, *A'yān al-shī'a*, vol. 10, pp. 228-229, quoting from al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī, *Amal al-'Āmil*.

³⁹ Corbin, *Histoire de la philosophie islamique*, p. 441.

⁴⁰ On this title, see Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh, *Ṭarā'iq al-ḥaqā'iq*, vol. 2 p. 253.

⁴¹ Ṭīhrānī, *Dharī'a*, vol. 19, n. 1652, pp. 370-371.

⁴² Shūshtarī, *Majālis*, vol. 1, p. 29 (ed. Tehran, vol. 1, p. 10).

⁴³ Shūshtarī, *Majālis*, vol. 1, p. 8-9 (ed. Tehran, vol. 1, p. 4-5).

⁴⁴ This includes, among cases less contested, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī and Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-'Arabī. See Shūshtarī, *Majālis*, vol. 4, pp. 480-503 (ed. Tehran, vol. 2, pp. 191-201) for the former; *Ibid.*, vol. 4, pp. 196-212 for the latter (ed. Tehran, vol. 2, pp. 61-69).

⁴⁵ Mīrzā 'Abdallāh al-Isbahānī, quoted by al-Amīn, *A'yān al-shī'a*, vol. 10, p. 229.

⁴⁶ Shaybī, *Ṣīla*, vol. 1, pp. 224-246, on the historical relations between Sufi masters and Shi'ī Imams, referres to Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh, *Ṭarā'iq al-ḥaqā'iq*, himself quoting Shūshtarī's *Majālis*; S. Ḥ. Naṣr, 'Le shī'isme et le soufisme', notably p. 226 where the author doesn't quote his source; Calmard, 'Le chiisme imamite sous les Ilkhans', see p. 261, n.1 and sv..

in the Safavid hierocracy, compared to this of the *ṣadrāt* which is progressively established during the Safavid period, especially in Lāhījān where the central authority faced many difficulties in applying its politics. Due to his socio-historical situation, he was a solitary philosopher and a late-comer to the ‘philosophical renaissance of Safavid Iran’, being active during the reign of Shāh Sulaymān (1077/1666 - 1105/1694), in whose reign anti-Sufi and anti-philosophical reaction intensified. Aside from Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī (d. 1090/1679), his contemporaries included sworn opponents of philosophy and Sufism like al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī (d. 1097/1685) and Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (d. 1111/1698-1699).

His foremost work, the *Maḥbūb al-qulūb*, written at the end of his life, takes resolute issue with this reactionary current. In this work appertaining to both universal history and *ṭabaqāt* genre, he purposes no less than to assemble all the wise men, starting from the first of them, Adam, in three discourses (*maqālāt*): the first covers the sages predating Islam, in particular the Greek philosophers; the second savants (physicians, translators, astrologists) but also philosophers (*falāsifa*) and spiritual masters (*mashā’ikh*) of the Islamic era; and the third the twelve Imams and twelve pre-eminent Shi‘i authorities. In the second volume Ashkivarī dedicates a series of entries to ‘unitarian Sufis’ (*al-ṣūfiyya al-muwahḥida*). Discretely borrowing information as well as a number of allegations from Ḥaydar Āmulī, Ibn Abī Jumhūr et Nūrullāh Shūshtarī, his aim is clearly to harmonise original Sufism with esoteric Shi‘ism, but without explicitly maintaining that all the Sufi masters were Shi‘as. Thus Ashkivarī reactivated the tradition of reconciliation between Sufism and Shi‘ism, but he did so between the lines, and with the concerns of his time: to save what could be of Sufism and philosophy in Safavid Iran. In contrast with Shūshtarī, the all-encompassing category of his encyclopaedia is not that of Shi‘as, but of the sages; Sufis are not defended because they are Shi‘as as such, but because they are wise, as are *a priori* the Greek philosophers and the Imams themselves.

These four works transmit a number of rational (*ma‘qūl*) and traditional (*manqūl*) arguments defending the idea that primitive Sufism is an essential dimension of the Imami Shi‘i ‘True religion’. This marginal yet stubborn discourse resisted the rising tide of anti-Sufism among Shi‘i scholars during the Safavid era, whose exponents included such influential figures as ‘Alī al-Karakī, al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī and Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī.⁴⁷ In the following pages, I will examine the principal strategies of argumentation which inform the four works included.

The history-based argumentation: the Masters of Sufism as Disciples of the Shi‘i Imams

The first strategy is historical in approach, or rather pseudo-historical or even mytho-historical. It purports to show the fundamental identity or harmony that exists between Sufism and Shi‘ism through the genealogy of Sufism, and more precisely by showing the affiliation of the founding great masters of Sufism (1/7th – 3/9th centuries) to the historical Imams. Whereas our four authors are agreed that the first Sufis were disciples of the Imams, they do not trace the origins of Sufism, and consequently of Shi‘ism, to the same dates or to the same protagonists. As the

⁴⁷ Among the anti-Sufi treatises from this period: attributed to the chief of the Akhbāriyyah, Aḥmad al-Ardabīlī, *Hadīqat al-shī‘a*, ed. S. Ḥasanzādeh (Qumm, 1377 Sh./1998); al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī, *al-Risālat al-ithna ‘ashariyya*; Muḥammad Ṭāhir ibn Muḥammad Ḥusayn Qummī, *Tuḥfat al-akhyār* (Qumm, 1973).

historical validity of these arguments is generally rather weak, it is more rewarding to study the constants and the evolution of these different rewritings of the origins of Sufism, as of Shi‘ism; if these works are not reliable for an history of Shi‘ism and Sufism, they are primary materials for an ‘history of the history’ of both, that is to say an history of the representation of their historical origins and developments.

To Ḥaydar Āmulī ‘the particular category of Shi‘as designated as the initiated or “well-tested” believers – the term *mu‘min* meaning broadly “Shi‘a” in the general sense – is that of the Sufis.’⁴⁸ He argues that if Sufis are commonly thought to be Sunni, it is because, like the Shi‘as, they possess many branches, only one of which is the genuine or ‘the true one.’⁴⁹ The true Shi‘as, the ‘believers’ in the exoteric sense (*ẓāhir*) are the Twelvers, which excludes the Ismailis, who are ‘exaggerators’ (*ghulāt*),⁵⁰ and the Zaydis; the true Sufis, who are also the true Shi‘as in the esoteric sense (*bāṭin*), are not those who bear this name among his contemporaries, but men such as Salmān the Persian (supposed to be dead in 35/655-656 or 36/656-657),⁵¹ Uways al-Qaranī (supposed to be dead in 37/657 at the battle of Şiffin),⁵² and the ‘men of the bench’ (*aṣḥāb al-ṣuffa*) at the time of the Prophet; then came al-Miqdād, Abū Dharr and ‘Ammār, companions of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib ; and ‘after them’ Kumayl ibn Ziyād al-Nakha‘ī, Abū Yazīd al-Baṣṭāmī and Junayd al-Baghdādī (d. 298/911), who were ‘pupils, disciples and depositaries of the secrets of the Impeccable Imams.’⁵³ Thus there are three classes or generations of original Sufis and true Shi‘as: first the ‘companions’ of the Prophet (*al-ṣaḥāba*), followed by the ‘successors’ (*al-tābi‘ūn*), who accompanied the first Imam, and finally the contemporaries and disciples of the subsequent Imams. The paradox in this picture is that the ‘particular Shi‘as’, who are the ‘true Sufis,’ predate the ‘Shi‘as in the general sense’ who are the Twelvers, since they came into being following the occultation of the twelfth Imam (260/874 for the lesser one, 329/940-41 for the greater one). It is clear that differentiating between ‘Twelver Imamis’ and Ismailis, Zaydis or *ghulāt* before the end of the 3/9th century is near impossible, and that the boundaries between different Shi‘i groups were porous during these ancient times.⁵⁴ It seems that in Āmulī’s vision of history, for the Shi‘as in the broadest sense, the true Sufis are not only a spiritual elite, but a genuine *avant-garde* testifying to the authentic and elemental character of Twelver Shi‘ism.

The first Sufi mentioned by Ḥaydar Āmulī is Salmān the Persian, a companion of the Prophet and of the Imam ‘Alī, whose social status was modest since he was a non-Arab. He is an emblematic figure of Islamic Persia. Widely recognized as the founder of Sufism, he figures in the initiatory chains of a number of Sunni brotherhoods, where he is placed as a disciple of the first Caliph Abū Bakr.⁵⁵ According to a prophetic hadith currently quoted in the Shi‘i

⁴⁸ Āmulī, *Jāmi‘ al-asrār*, p. 40.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁵⁰ On *ghulūw* and the *ghulāt* (the ‘exaggerators’), see M. G. S. Hodgson, ‘Ghulāt’, *EI2*, vol. 2, pp. 1119-1121; Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 313-317.

⁵¹ See G. Levi Della Vida, ‘Salmān al-Fārisī’, *EI2*, vol. 12, Supplement, pp. 701-702.

⁵² See J. Baldick, ‘Uways al-Qaranī’, *EI2*, French ed., vol. 10, pp. 1035.

⁵³ Āmulī, *Jāmi‘ al-asrār*, pp. 614-615.

⁵⁴ On the technical meaning and the late apparition of the appellation Twelver Shi‘i, see E. Kohlberg, ‘Early attestations of the term “ithnā ‘ashariyya”’, *Jerusalem Studies on Arabic and Islam* 24, 2000: pp. 343-357; Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 247-248.

⁵⁵ Levi Della Vida, ‘Salmān al-Fārisī’; See about it Shaybī, *Şila*, vol. 1, pp. 29-37.

sources, he is considered as a ‘member of the Holy family’ (*ahl al-bayt*), an adoptive familiar of the Fourteen Impeccable.⁵⁶ Moreover, certain traditions accredit him with having received spiritual and secret instruction from ‘Alī, to the extent that he’s said to have learned the ‘Supreme Name’ of God (*al-ism al-a‘zam*).⁵⁷ Following Salmān are Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī (d. 32/652-3), ‘Ammār ibn Yāsir (d. 37/657 at the battle of Şiffīn) and al-Miqdād ibn Aswad (m. 33/653-4), who are chiefly known for their physical and political engagement alongside ‘Alī. These four figures are among the first Muslims of humble and non-Qurayshi origin and are associated with each other in numerous Imami traditions dating back to the Prophet.⁵⁸ They are celebrated as ‘pillars of Shi‘ism’ (*arkān al-shī‘a*) in Imami circles, for having always fought or resisted alongside Imam ‘Alī, especially in the critical times following the death of Muḥammad and the event of Saqīfa.⁵⁹ Whereas Salmān represents the esoteric face of proto-Shi‘ism, the other three characters represent the exoteric, ascetic and especially militant aspect. According to a tradition of al-Kulaynī’s *Kāfi* related to the sixth Imam:

One day, one was mentioning pious dissimulation (*taqiyya*) in presence of ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn [the fourth Imam]. He said: ‘If Abū Dharr had known what was in Salmān’s heart, he would have killed him, although the Messenger of God had established a pact of fraternity between them. So what do you think all the people [would have done]? The knowledge of the [true] knowers (*‘ilm al-‘ulamā*) is difficult and tough. No one can assume it except a Prophet, an angel of proximity or a believer whose heart has been tested by God for faith (*‘abd mu‘min imtaḥana allāh qalbahu li-l-īmān*). Salmān became one of the knowers because he’s a man from us, the People of the Holy Family (*li‘annahu minnā ahl al-bayt*)’.⁶⁰

By identifying these ‘pillars of Shi‘ism’ with the fathers of Sufism, Ḥaydar Āmulī purports to demonstrate the original kinship between these two movements.

In the works of the three succeeding authors, starting with Ibn Abī Jumhūr, the historical reconstructions include the same protagonists, but differ on an important point: the worthy companions of the Prophet, such as Salmān, are initiates, however they are not considered the fathers of Sufism; the particular science of Sufism goes back to certain ‘successors’ of the Prophet who are reputed to have sworn allegiance to ‘Alī. Thus, according to Ibn Abī Jumhūr:

⁵⁶ Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār* (henceforth: Beirut 1403/1983), vol. 10, p. 123 ; vol. 17, p. 170 ; vol. 18, p. 19 ; vol. 22, p. 326. Āmulī, *Jāmi‘ al-asrār*, pp. 25 and 500. On this hadith, see L. Massignon, ‘Salman Pak et les prémices spirituelles de l’Islam iranien’, pp. 453-455.

⁵⁷ Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, p. 232, n. 478. Bursī, *Mashāriq anwār al-yaqīn*, p. 428, records that Salmān was the man with greatest knowledge of God (*a‘raf bi-llāh*) because he was the man with greatest knowledge of ‘Alī.

⁵⁸ A whole chapter of the *Bihār al-anwār* is devoted to them: vol. 22, bāb 10, pp. 315-355.

⁵⁹ Shaybī, *Şila*, vol. 1, pp. 37-50 et 55-57; J. Robson, ‘Abu Dharr al-Ghifārī’, *EI2*, French ed., vol. 1, p. 118; H. Reckendorf, ‘‘Ammār ibn Yāsir’, *EI2*, French ed., vol. 1, p. 461; G. H. A. Juynboll, ‘al-Miqdād ibn ‘Amr’, *EI2*, French ed., vol. 7, pp. 32-33. Their loyalty to ‘Alī after the death of the Prophet and the ‘‘coup d’État’’ of Saqīfa is stressed in *Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays al-Kūfi* or *Kitāb al-saqīfa* (Beirut, s.d.), notably pp. 75-76, 81 and 128. On this book expressing the genuine Shi‘i perception of history, see Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux et le Coran parlant* (Paris, 2011), chapter 1, pp. 27-61; see also Maria Massi Dakake, ‘Writing and Resistance: The Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Early Shi‘ism’, in Daftary and Miskinzoda, *The Study of Shi‘i Islam* (London, 2014), pp. 181-201.

⁶⁰ Muḥammad ibn Ya‘qūb Kulaynī, *Uşūl al-Kāfi* (Beirut, 1426/2005), *Kitāb al-ḥujja*, bāb fīmā jā‘a anna ḥadīthanā şa‘b mustaş‘ab, pp. 238-239; Āmulī, *Jāmi‘ al-asrār*, p. 34; Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 22, p. 343.

‘Among the successors are Kumayl ibn Ziyād al-Nakha‘ī and Ḥasan al-Baṣrī; with these two begins the science of the insiders (*aṣḥāb al-bāṭin*) and that of the Sufis (*ahl al-taṣawwuf*); and similarly Uways al-Qaranī.⁶¹ These three characters are very different both in historical status and also in their relations, according to the historiography, with Sufism and Shi‘ism.

Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) is well known in Islamic and Western historiography as well. Sunni historians recognize that he was a disciple of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, and as such he is present in the initiation chains of numerous Sufi orders. However this ascetic and author of sermons was claimed early on by all the emerging theological schools, starting with the *ahl al-sunna wa-l-jamā‘a* and the Mu‘tazilites.⁶² In Shi‘i early sources, he appears sometimes as a pure supporter of ‘Alī and Ahl al-bayt, sometimes as a doctrinal adversary refuted but the fifth Imam.⁶³ Before Ibn Abī Jumhūr, Ḥaydar Āmulī mentioned him as well as a disciple of Imam ‘Alī.⁶⁴ Ibn Khaldūn, a contemporary of Ḥaydar Āmulī, condemned these latter-day Sufis, influenced by Shi‘i views, who portray Ḥasan al-Baṣrī as a Shi‘a.⁶⁵ To be sure, the Sunni positions of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī are solidly established by traditionists and Sunni – or pro-Sunni – historians, and it can be noticed that Shi‘i ‘*ulamā*’ tend to avoid him rather than try to claim him.⁶⁶ His presence in Ibn Abī Jumhūr’s picture of history is another sign of the ecumenist trend of this thinker. Thus did he gradually disappear from the picture of the origins of Sufism described by our authors: after Ibn Abī Jumhūr, neither Shūshtarī, nor Ashkivarī mention him in their works.

Unlike Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Uways al-Qaranī is a semi-legendary figure which pertains more to sacred history than empirical and scientific history. Within the Sufi community, there are rival claims of his affiliation to both Sunnis and Shi‘as. According to prevailing Islamic tradition, the Prophet designated this Yemenite without having ever seen him, like a hidden saint or an intercessor, and urged both ‘Umar and ‘Alī to seek him out in order to implore God’s forgiveness. ‘Umar is reputed to have found him during the final year of his caliphate; their conversation is related by Farīd al-Dīn ‘Attār in his *Memorial of Saints (Tadhkirat al-awliyā)*.⁶⁷ We know that, in consequence, many Sufis are named, or name themselves, *Uwaysiyya*, since they do not have a visible and contemporary human guide (*murshid*) but rather receive initiation from the ‘spiritual essence’ (*rūḥāniyya*) of a deceased saint.⁶⁸

Amongst our philosophers of reconciliation, Ashkivarī’s treatment of Uways al-Qaranī is the most extensive and also the most significant in that he refers to him as both the first Sufi

⁶¹ Ibn Abī Jumhūr, *Mujlī*, p. 1245.

⁶² H. Ritter, ‘al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī’, *EI2*, French ed., vol. 3, pp. 254-255.

⁶³ E.g. Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 35, p. 59; vol. 38, pp. 101-102, quoted from Shaykh Ṣadūq’s *Āmālī*, for the first case; *Ibid.*, vol. 6, pp. 65 and 91; vol. 24, p. 232, quoted from al-Ṭabarsī’s *Ihtijāj*, for the second one.

⁶⁴ Āmulī, *Jāmi‘ al-asrār*, pp. 4, 223-224.

⁶⁵ Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimāt* (Beirut, 1426/2005), pp. 282-283; *Le livre des exemples*, (Paris, 2002), p. 671. Shaybī, *Ṣila*, vol. 1, pp. 86-87, and Naṣr, ‘Le shī‘isme et le soufisme’, p. 217, quote this passage as a confirmation of the historical link between Shi‘ism and Sufism, something which obviously distorts Ibn Khaldūn’s intend.

⁶⁶ On Ḥasan al-Baṣrī’s Sunni positions, see L. Massignon, *La passion de Husayn ibn Mansūr Hallāj* (Paris, 1975), vol. 1, pp. 195, 376, 520; vol. 3, pp. 172, 203, 223.

⁶⁷ Farīd al-Dīn ‘Attār, *Tadhkirat al-awliyā* (Tehran 1378 Sh./1999), pp. 81-85; pp. 412-413.

⁶⁸ J. Baldick, ‘Uwaysiyya’, *EI2*, French ed., vol. 10, pp. 1035-1036; Corbin, *En islam iranien*, vol. 1, p. 264; *Ibid.*, vol. 4, pp. 453-454; H. Corbin, *L’imagination créatrice dans le soufisme d’Ibn ‘Arabī* (2d ed. Paris 2006), pp. 32-33. Abū Yazīd Baṣṭāmī and Farīd al-Dīn ‘Attār may be considered as *Uwaysī*, according to traditions expressed by ‘Attār.

and as the first Shī'a. He derives his information from the *Majālis al-mu'minīn* of Shūshtarī who, for his part, did not classify Uways as a Sufi but as a believer among the immediate followers of the Prophet (*az tābi'īn*)⁶⁹. While Shūshtarī was quoting 'Aṭṭār's report as a testimony of Uways's disdain towards 'Umar,⁷⁰ Ashkivarī, in the chapter dedicated to him, completely disregards the role of 'Umar, asserting implicitly that Uways was recommended by the Prophet to the sole 'Alī and did not meet any caliph before him. Ashkivarī's rejection of 'Umar is thus more radical than that of Shūshtarī; unlike the latter, the former did not have to compromise with a Sunni milieu. The first tradition quoted by Ashkivarī describes Uways as a famous ascetic, converted to Islam during the Prophet's lifetime, who appeared for the first time in the battle of Ṣiffīn (37/657), dressed in rags and with his head shaven, in order to swear allegiance to 'Alī and fight until death for him.⁷¹ If the woollen coat (*ṣūf*) is a sign that identifies Sufis, and is probably at the origin of the word 'Sufism' (*taṣawwuf*), and if the shaven head is associated with certain Dervish, what defines Uways as the first Sufi ontologically, far more than these exterior sign, is his explicit designation by the Prophet and his complete allegiance to the Imam, until his death.

The third key figure in this reconstruction of the common origins of Sufism and Shi'ism is Kumayl ibn Ziyād. His historicity is established, as is his affiliation to the first followers of 'Alī. He is known to the Shi'as as the Imam's closest companion and confident, an ardent combatant for his cause and also as one of the first Shi'i martyrs. Many Sufi brotherhoods, such as the Nūrbakhshīyya, who wielded great influence under the Safavids, regard him as the first link of their initiation chain, following 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib.⁷² If one asks in what regard Kumayl may be considered to be a Sufi, the reply is that according to several authoritative traditions, he received esoteric instruction from the Imam: it is first of all Shi'i spirituality that underwrites the historical Sufism of Kumayl. The evidence of this rank amongst the insiders seems to be a dialogue concerning spiritual truth (*al-ḥaqīqa*) between the Imam and his disciple, a dialogue that our four authors faithfully reproduce and that is typical of Shi'i esoterism.⁷³ 'It is said that ['Alī] (...) had taken Kumayl behind him on the camel he was riding. Kumayl said: "O Prince of believers, what is Truth?" The Imam answered: "What care you about the Truth?" Kumayl said: "Am I not a companion of your Secret?" "Yes, [answered the Imam], but what spills out from me penetrates into you." There follows a brief series of symbolic and apophatic definitions of the Truth, at the end of which the Imam cuts short his discourse and announces: 'Put out your lamp, dawn has come.' This tradition would seem to prefigure two major trends within Shi'i spirituality: the first part points towards a magical conception of the transmission

⁶⁹ Shūshtarī, *Majālis*, vol. 2, pp. 408-419 (ed. Tehran, vol. 1, pp. 279-283).

⁷⁰ Shūshtarī, *Majālis*, vol. 2, pp. 412-414 (ed. Tehran, vol. 1, pp. 280-281). It is notable that Shūshtarī considered also 'Aṭṭār to be a Shi'a having practicing *taqiyya* under duress.

⁷¹ Ashkivarī, *Maḥbūb*, vol. 2, pp. 493-494; Shūshtarī, *Majālis*, vol. 2, pp. 417-418 (Tehran ed. vol. 1, pp. 282-283).

⁷² About Kumayl in Shi'i traditions, see 'Abbās al-Qummī, *Safīnat al-biḥār* (Tehran, 1373 Sh./1994), vol. 7, pp. 538-539, referring to numerous *loci* of the *Biḥār al-anwār*. About the *silsila kumayliyya*, see Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh, *Ṭarā'iq al-ḥaqā'iq*, vol. 2, pp. 83-108. About Kumayl for the Nūrbakhshīyya, see Shūshtarī, *Majālis*, vol. 2, p. 11.

⁷³ Āmulī, *Jāmi' al-asrār*, pp. 28-29; See the translation and the commentary of this tradition by Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, vol. 1, pp. 110-112. Ibn Abī Jumhūr, *Mujlī*, pp. 481, a fragment only; Shūshtarī, *Majālis*, vol. 4, pp. 28-30 (ed. Tehran, vol. 2, pp. 10-11); Ashkivarī, *Maḥbūb*, vol. 2, pp. 497-498. See also Lāhījī, *Mafātīḥ al-i'jāz*, pp. 247-248.

of the sacred Science through the medium of the humours of the body – here sweat, elsewhere saliva –; the latter part develops a philosophising or spiritualistic discourse which culminates in an injunction to mystical silence.⁷⁴

Kumayl ibn Ziyād personifies the deep-rooted kinship between Sufism and Shi‘ism by virtue of his spiritual initiation on the one hand, but also because he died as a martyr for ‘Alī’s cause at the hands of Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf, the governor of Iraq and a sworn enemy of the Shi‘as. The story, as related by Shūshtarī and Ashkivarī is astonishing: appearing before Ḥajjāj, Kumayl declared he had been foretold by Imam ‘Alī that his assassin would indeed be Ḥajjāj; in response Ḥajjāj accused Kumayl of having taken part in the murder of ‘Uthmān, the third caliph, and ordered his decapitation.⁷⁵ The accusation made by Ḥajjāj is not contradicted, neither by Kumayl in the text (*matn*) nor by the reporter al-Mughīra in his account of the *khbar*.⁷⁶ When one is aware that the murder of ‘Uthmān was at the origin of the great *fitna*, the rift that tore Islam apart during its early centuries, to let any degree of doubt subsist as to the responsibility of Kumayl is particularly significant: this original and most spiritual form of Shi‘ism is revealed to be also the most militant, and it is this Shi‘ism, as spiritual as it is political, that is at the root of Sufism.

Following Kumayl, who was the last disciple of the first Imam, the next connections between Sufis and Imams made by our authors are Abū Yazīd Baṣṭāmī (d. 234/848 or 261/874), affiliated to the sixth imam Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765); Shaqīq al-Balkhī (d. 194/809-810) and Bisr al-Ḥāfi (d. 226-227/841), affiliated to the seventh imam Mūsā ibn Ja‘far al-Kāzim (d. 183/799); Ma‘rūf al-Karkhī (d. 200/815), affiliated to the eighth imam ‘Alī ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā (d. 203/818). All were individual Sufis who predated the foundation of brotherhoods, but nevertheless belonged to numerous *silsilas*, the tradition of which was strictly oral. Before we examine these affiliations more closely, one can already wonder why this initiation of Sufis by Imams ceases between the first and the fifth Imams, and conversely, why this transmission began again with the sixth, given that the initiation of Kumayl already included all the esoteric secrets? Our authors never answer the first question: everything is described as if Sufism went through an eclipse, a temporary occultation between Kumayl and Abū Yazīd Baṣṭāmī, even though Shūshtarī attempts to consider the Sufi Ibrāhīm ibn Adham (m. 160-1/777) as a disciple of the fifth Imam Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī al-Bāqir (d. 115 or 119/732 or 737);⁷⁷ in modern times, Ma‘šūm ‘Alī Shāh, in his *Tarā’iq al-ḥaqā’iq*, contends even that Ibrāhīm ibn Adham is affiliated to the fourth Imam ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn (d. 92 or 95/711 or 714).⁷⁸ To our second question, a more historical answer can be outlined: following the tragedy at Karbalā’, the Imami doctrine was rebuilt on new foundations by the fifth and especially the sixth Imam, Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq, which would imply, according to the logic of esotericism, a new initiation, all the more

⁷⁴ L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, French trans. by G-G. Granger (Paris, 1993), prop. 7, p. 112.

⁷⁵ Shūshtarī, *Majālis*, vol. 4, p. 31 (ed. Tehran, vol. 2, p. 12); Ashkivarī, *Maḥbūb*, vol. 2, p. 498.

⁷⁶ The relater of the hadith could be al-Mughīra ibn Sa‘īd al-Ijlī (m. 119/737), one of the most famous disciples of the fifth Imam considered as *ghulāt*. See Abū ‘Amr Muḥammad al-Kishshī, *Rijāl al-Kishshī* (Beirut, 1430/2009), pp. 164-167.

⁷⁷ Shūshtarī, *Majālis*, vol. 4, p. 58 (ed. Tehran, vol. 2, p.24).

⁷⁸ Ma‘šūm ‘Alī Shāh, *Tarā’iq*, vol. 2, p. 109; Shaybī, *Ṣila*, vol. 2, p. 472-473. This Sufi master is also said to have been affiliated to the sixth Imam Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq. See Ma‘šūm ‘Alī Shāh, *Tarā’iq*, vol. 2, p. 109; Naṣr, ‘Le shī‘isme et le soufisme’, p. 226.

so given that Ja‘far is famous even in Sunni sources for having dispensed a large body of instruction.

Abū Yazīd Baṣṭāmī died on 234/848 or 261/874, yet he is unanimously presented by our authors as the disciple and the water-supplier (*saqqā*) of Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq, who died in 148/765. This hiatus is simply never questioned by either Ḥaydar Āmulī or Ibn Abī Jumhūr. Shūshtarī is the first among our thinkers to mention the objections that can be made to this affiliation, but only in order to better refute them. These objections, apparently originally formulated by Shi‘a Sufis, are corroborated by reliable dates: the traditionist Shaykh Nūr al-Dīn Abū al-Futūḥ deems it possible that Bāyazīd Baṣṭāmī served under the eighth imam, ‘Alī ibn Mūsā ibn Ja‘far, and that the scribes might have made a slip of the pen; while Mīr Sayyid Sharīf, author of *Sharḥ al-muwāfaq*, contends that Abū Yazīd received initiation from the ‘spiritual essence’ (*rūḥāniyya*) of Imam Ja‘far.⁷⁹ Shūshtarī rejects these hypotheses and affirms that Baṣṭāmī was effectively affiliated to the sixth Imam; to resolve the hiatus, he records from the *Mu‘jam al-buldān* that there were two Abū Yazīds in Baṣṭām, ‘the old one’ (*al-kabīr*) and ‘the young one’ (*al-saghīr*), the first being the disciple of the Imam and the second who lived later and the date of whose death is known.⁸⁰ Following in the steps of Shūshtarī, Ashkivarī makes extensive use of this counter-argument, showing just how important the affiliation of Baṣṭām to Imam Ja‘far was to him but also that the historical objections to this affiliation were too important for him to ignore. Ultimately this counter-argument was attributed to Baṣṭāmī himself, as Shūshtarī reports: ‘Had I not found my way to our Master al-Ṣādiq, I would have died apostate. He is among the friends of God as Gabriel is among the angels, as though his point of departure was that of arrival for the seekers of Truth (*al-sālikīn*)’.⁸¹ Similarly, Ashkivarī, refusing to make of Baṣṭāmī an insider having received initiation by the sole spiritual essence of the Imam, that is to say an Uwaysī, asserts on the authority of al-‘Allāma al-Ḥillī that: ‘The greatest among the sheikhs prided themselves on having served the Imams, and Abū Yazīd Baṣṭāmī prided himself on having served as water-supplier in the house of Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (...). This account and the others like it leave no room for allegoric interpretation (*ta‘bā al-ta‘wīl*)’, in other words, they are to be taken at face-value.⁸² I will return later to the significance of Baṣṭāmī for our authors, which may shed some light on their obstinacy in repeating such a problematical assertion. Regardless of what Ashkivarī might think, the meaning of this historical allegation might very well be symbolic: the described role of water-supplier suggests once more the need of a concrete, physical and ‘humoral’ medium for the transmission of the sacred Science of the Imam.⁸³

Two great Sufī masters are then presented by our authors as disciples of the seventh imam Mūsā ibn Ja‘far al-Kāẓim (d. 183/799): Ṣḥāqīq ibn Ibrāhīm al-Balkhī (d. 194/809-810), an important link in the chain of transmission, and who, Shūshtarī argues, died as a martyr for

⁷⁹ Shūshtarī, *Majālis*, vol. 4, p. 53-54 (ed. Tehran, vol. 2, p. 22).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 55-56 (ed. Tehran, vol. 2, p. 23).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 50 (ed. Tehran, vol. 2, p.21). Shūshtarī quoted it from a mysterious Nūr al-Dīn Ja‘far al-Badakhshānī’s *Kitāb al-aḥbāb*.

⁸² Ashkivarī, *Maḥbūb*, vol. 2 pp. 517-518, for all the historical argumentation.

⁸³ Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, pp. 190-195.

having being accused of Shi‘i heresy (*beh tohmat-e rafq shāhed shod*);⁸⁴ and Bishr al-Ḥāfī (150-226 or 227/767-841), who repented and was converted at the hands of the Imam. While this latter account of conversion, borrowed from al-‘Allāma al-Ḥillī’s *Manhāj al-karāma*, might possess an element of historical truth, its literary and mythical character makes it somewhat difficult to believe for our rational minds, all the more so since it is neither mentioned in the great historical works, nor in the Sufi *ṭabaqāt*. One day, as the Imam was passing by the house of Bishr in Baghdad, he is said to have heard the sound of merriment coming from within and asked the servant: ‘The master of this house, is he a free man or a slave (*ḥurr aw ‘abd*)?’ – ‘A free man, of course’ – ‘You speak the truth, since had he been a slave [of God], he would have feared his master (*mawlāhu*).’ When told about the conversation by his servant, as he was sitting at table and drinking, the master went outside barefoot, from whence his sobriquet (*laqab*): *al-ḥāfī*, which means ‘who goes barefoot.’⁸⁵

Ma‘rūf al-Karkhī, another important figure of the origins of Sufism, is presented as the gatekeeper of the eighth imam ‘Alī ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā. Shūshtarī, followed by Ashkivarī, reports a popular narrative in which the Sufi master is revealed to be the operator of the Imam’s theurgic powers, and the Imam is revealed to be the source of the Sufi’s charisma. A merchant, asking for protection during his travels at sea, was given a talisman by the Imam to be invoked in the event of a storm. It read: ‘O sea! By the right of Ma‘rūf al-Karkhī, gatekeeper of ‘Alī ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā, calm yourself!’. Later, as a storm was raging, the distraught trader threw the talisman into sea, and the storm immediately abated.⁸⁶ According to another tale quoted from ‘Attār’s *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*, Ma‘rūf heroically defended the gate of the Imam’s audience chamber against the ‘exaggeration’ or ‘extremism’ (*ghulūv*) of a crowd of Shi‘as, and this was the cause of his death.⁸⁷ The symbol behind this anecdote is powerful: the Sufi is seen as the rampart of the esoteric teaching of the Imam against the extremism of his partisans claiming his divinity. Ironically, this story would itself be deemed an ‘exaggeration’ by the Shi‘i ‘*ulamā*’, who would criticize Shūshtarī for it.

According to the same report, the teachings were transmitted from Ma‘rūf al-Karkhī to Sarī al-Saqatī (d. 253/867) and from him to Junayd al-Baghdādī, ‘the master of the sect of the Sufis’ (*shaykh al-ṭā’ifa*). The latter is included among the direct disciples of the Imams, as are the previously mentioned masters, by Ḥaydar Āmulī, followed by Ibn Abī Jumhūr and Shūshtarī.⁸⁸ However, Junayd is a contemporary of the final Imams, who are not credited with any links with the Sufis, and of the Minor Occultation. Moreover, he is widely considered to be Sunni, which Nūrullāh Shūshtarī explains, as can be expected, by the necessary concealment of the faith (*taqiyya*).⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Shūshtarī, *Majālis*, vol. 4, p. 57 (ed. Tehran, vol. 2, p. 24). See also Shaybī, *Ṣila*, vol. 1, p. 235, quoting al-Ya‘qūbī’s *Tārīkh*.

⁸⁵ Shūshtarī, *Majālis*, vol. 4, p. 32-33 (ed. Tehran, vol. 2, p. 12); Ashkivarī, *Maḥbūb*, vol. 2 p. 511. Shaybī, *Ṣila*, vol. 2, p. 31, expresses his doubts about the authenticity of this event.

⁸⁶ Shūshtarī, *Majālis*, vol. 4, pp. 65-67 (ed. Tehran, vol. 2, pp. 27-28); Ashkivarī, *Maḥbūb*, vol. 2 p. 499; also resumed by Ma‘šūm ‘Alī, *Ṭarā’iq*, vol. 2, p. 290.

⁸⁷ Shūshtarī, *Majālis*, vol. 4, p. 67 (ed. Tehran, vol. 2, p. 28); ‘Attār, *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*, p. 365.

⁸⁸ Āmulī, *Jāmi‘ al-asrār*, pp. 225, 431 and 614-615; Ibn Abī Jumhūr, *Mujlī*, pp. 1246 and 1262; Shūshtarī, *Majālis*, vol. 4, pp. 70-71 (ed. Tehran, vol. 2, p. 30).

⁸⁹ Shūshtarī, *Majālis*, vol. 4, p. 71 (ed. Tehran, vol. 2, pp. 30-31).

Historians of Sufism and Shi'ism have stressed on many occasions that, following al-Riḍā, there is no evidence of contact between Sufis and the Shi'i Imams.⁹⁰ This fact is acknowledged but never explained by the four authors here studied. We know that the ninth imam Muḥammad ibn 'Alī al-Jawwād or al-Taḳī (d. 220/835) died very young and that the following two – 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Hādī (m. 254/868) and al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī al-'Askarī (m. 260/874) – lived under house arrest in Sāmarrā'. An oral tradition, recorded by al-Shaybī, does exist, according to which Imam Riḍā transmitted the 'spiritual path' (*ṭarīqa*), the esoteric dimension of the religion, to Ma'rūf al-Karkhī and after him to the Sufis, while the letter, as opposed to the spirit, of the revelation (*sharī'a*) and its exoteric learning remained in the lineage of the Imams, starting from al-Jawwād.⁹¹ This would imply a first schism between exoteric and esoteric Shi'ism dating back to the time of the historical Imams, and holding one of them responsible for it, although none of our authors seem ready to admit this. As for anti-Sufi Shi'as, they rely on a hadith of the tenth Imam 'Alī al-Hādī: 'All Sufis oppose us, their way is contrary to our, and they are but the Christians or the Mazdeans of this community.'⁹² This hostile tradition is never mentioned by our promoters of reconciliation, not even to refute it.

As a conclusion to this first analysis, one could say that the 'historical' arguments of our authors hardly be considered so in the modern sense of the word: dates are ignored or rejected; the accounts are readily fabulous or hagiographic; moreover, Shūshtarī's paradigmatic use of the notion of *taqiyya* has to be considered as an 'unfalsifiable' argument in the negative sense of the term in Karl Popper's epistemology. It is conceivable that our authors were well aware of this fact and that the significance of these historical allegations resided first and foremost in their symbolism. The chronology of events remains paradoxical nevertheless, as the first 'true' Sufis and 'true' Shi'as predate not only the brotherhoods, which is undoubtedly intentional, but the emergence of Sufism and Shi'ism in the general sense. Finally, it is notable that this (pseudo-)historical argumentation is not defended with the same zeal by the four authors: the manner in which Ḥaydar Āmulī and Ibn Abī Jumhūr repeat these allegations is dogmatic, and their approach to the reconciliation of Sufism with Shi'ism, or the identification of the one with the other, is essentially conceptual. Shūshtarī argues the historical link with the most fervour, at times deliberately exaggerating the Shi'i genealogy of the Sufis. Ashkivarī is more restrained, and refrains from explicitly 'shi'itising' a number of Sufi masters to whom he pays tribute, while nevertheless affirming the affiliation of Baṣṭāmī to Imam Ja'far.

The conceptual argumentation: the triad of the Law, the Path and the Truth

Over and above the historical perspective, our four Shi'i authors share the same underlying theory: the convergence a priori between *sharī'a*, the 'revealed' Law, i.e. the exoteric part of the religion; *ṭarīqa*, the mystical and spiritual 'Path', term also used for 'brotherhood'; and *ḥaqīqa*, the spiritual 'Reality' or 'Truth', i.e. the object that the Gnostic philosophers, sometimes known as the *muḥaqqiqūn*, are searching for. This conjunction is based on, and introduced by, a prophetic hadith which seems not to be present in the 'classical' or 'orthodox'

⁹⁰ Shaybī, *Ṣila*, vol. 1, p. 245 ; Naṣr, 'Le shī'isme et le soufisme', p. 226.

⁹¹ Shaybī, *Ṣila*, vol. 1, pp. 244-245.

⁹² Ḥurr 'Āmilī, *R. ithnā'ashariyya*, p. 27.

collections of hadiths, be they Sunni or Shi'i, but rather to be specific of our heterodox tradition of thought: 'The Law is my speeches (*aqwālī*); the Path is my actions (*af'ālī*); the Truth is my [spiritual] states (*aḥwālī*).'⁹³

Ḥaydar Āmulī develops this conceptual triad in his *Anwār al-ḥaqīqa wa aṭwār al-ṭarīqa wa asrār al-sharī'a* ('the Lights of Truth, the Stations of the Path and the Mysteries of the Revealed Law'). He considers the Law, the Path and the Truth, to be three degrees of the same reality, the highest being the Truth, the medium being the Path and the lowest being the Law. The Law, he says, is true without the Path, but the Path is not true without the Law; just as the Path is true without the Truth, but the Truth is not true without the Path; because each higher level is the perfection of that below. Consequently, the people of the Truth (*ahl al-ḥaqīqa*) are superior to the people of the Path (*ahl al-ṭarīqa*) and the latter are superior to the people of the Law (*ahl al-sharī'a*).⁹⁴ In this early work, composed before that Āmulī relinquished his mundane career and donned the Sufi cloak (*khirqā*), he identifies the people of the Law with the jurists (*al-fuqahā'*), the people of the Truth with the Gnostics (*al-'arīfūn*) and, more surprisingly, the people of the Path with the scholars and philosophers (*al-'ulamā' wa l-ḥukamā'*), avoiding to mention openly the Sufis. For this he quotes a saying of the imam 'Alī: 'The Law is a river and the Truth is a sea. The jurists (*al-fuqahā'*) are making circumambulations around the river, the wise (*al-ḥukamā'*) are plunging in the sea in the search of the pearls, and the Gnostics (*al-'arīfūn*) are wandering on the ships of salvation (*sufun al-najā't*)'. From a universal perspective, he identifies the people of the Law with the community of Moses, the people of the Path with Jesus' one, and the people of the Truth with Muḥammad's one.⁹⁵

While emphasising the hierarchy between these three dimensions on the Revelation (*shar'*), Ḥaydar Āmulī and Ibn Abī Jumhūr, the latter quoting the former, both stress their harmony and complementarity, with the implicit aim to solve the conflict between jurists, Sufis and gnostic philosophers:

Know that the exoteric Law (*sharī'a*), the mystical Path (*ṭarīqa*) and the spiritual Truth (*ḥaqīqa*) are synonymous terms for the single Truth, which is the Truth of the Aḥmadī Muḥammadī Revelation (*ḥaqīqat al-shar' al-aḥmadī al-muḥammadī*), but viewed from different standpoints and at different levels. There is, on examination, no contradiction between these standpoints and these levels. The Revelation (*al-shar'*) is like the complete almond, which contains the shell (*qishr*), the kernel (*lubb*), and the kernel of kernels (*lubb al-lubb*): the shell may be likened to

⁹³ This hadith is quoted by Āmulī in the opening of his Qur'anic *Ta'wīl al-Muḥīṭ al-a'zam*, I, p. 195 (Qom, 1414/1994-5), p. 17 (Beirut, 1433/2012); also in his *Anwār al-ḥaqīqa* (Qumm, 1436/1394 h.s./2015-16), pp. 21 and 70, or *Asrār al-sharī'a* (Tehran, 1362 Sh./1983), pp. 8 and 24; also in *Jāmi' al-asrār*, p. 346. It appears in Ibn Abī Jumhūr controverted collection of hadiths '*Awālī al-la'ālī*' (Qumm: 1403-1983), IV, pp. 124-125, h. 212; also in his *Mujlī*, p. 1073. But this hadith is absent of the *Biḥār al-anwār*, something which suggests that it is not related by a Shi'i Imām but rather appeared in a Sufi-Sunni milieu.

⁹⁴ Āmulī, *Anwār al-ḥaqīqa* (Qumm, 1436/1394 h.s./2015-16), pp. 99-100; or *Asrār al-sharī'a* (Tehran, 1362 Sh./1983), pp. 31-32.

⁹⁵ Āmulī, *Anwār al-ḥaqīqa* (Qumm, 1436/1394 h.s./2015-16), pp. 106-107; or *Asrār al-sharī'a* (Tehran, 1362 Sh./1983), pp. 35-36; the saying of 'Alī is also quoted in *Jāmi' al-asrār*, p. 358-359.

the Law, the kernel to the Path, the kernel of kernels to the esoteric Truth of the Innermost (*al-ḥaqīqa al-bāṭina li-l-bāṭin*), and the almond is the union of all.⁹⁶

The symbolism of the kernel and the shell refers partly to the Qur'an where the word *albāb* (plural of *lubb*) is frequently used for 'spirit' in the expression *ulū l-albāb*, and partly to the *Theology* of Pseudo-Aristotle where the shells (*qushūr*) appear as the material clothes of the soul.⁹⁷ The dual couple of the kernel and the shell seems to have been attributed first to Empedocles (d. around 424 BC) in *Kitāb al-milal wa'l-niḥal* of Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153) and is defined as follows: '[Empedocles] often expressed the body and the spirit by the shell and the kernel'; it also takes part of the doctrine of the Neo-Platonist Proclus (d. 485 AC) in the same source.⁹⁸ For what concerns the notion of 'kernel of kernels,' it is defined in the *Terminology of the Sufis (Iṣṭilāḥāt al-ṣūfiyya)* of 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī (d. 730/1329-30), the famous disciple of Ibn 'Arabī, as the matter of the divine sacred Light which assists intellect so that it purifies itself from the shells.⁹⁹ To my knowledge, this symbolism is absent in the Imamī Hadīth and thus shall be of philosophical and Sufi-mystical origin.¹⁰⁰

By taking up this symbolism in its triadic form (*qishr, lubb, lubb al-lubb*) and not in its dualistic one (*qishr, lubb*), Ḥaydar Āmulī, Ibn Abī Jumhūr and Ashkevarī after them, make it correspond to the Triad of Law, Path and Truth, and thus argues that there is an essential harmony between exoteric religion, the initiation of the Sufis, and the gnosis of the philosophers. There is here a subjacent and authentic philosophical theory. This 'pre-established harmony,' in Leibniz' terms, between *sharī'a, tarīqa* and *ḥaqīqa*, is justified by a conception of reality which comprises varying degrees of depth, from the material to the spiritual and from the apparent to the concealed. This conception, which distinguishes between, and articulates, both an outside and exoteric (*ẓāhir*) and an inside and esoteric (*bāṭin*) aspect in all things, is axial in the teachings of the Imams.¹⁰¹ It is developed in the Shi'i philosophy which accepted and reactivated the strong influence of the Neoplatonic ideas, as it had already appeared in the *Theology* of Pseudo-Aristotle.¹⁰² In the triadic scheme defended by our authors, the intelligible Truth (*ḥaqīqa*) functions as the dialectic synthesis of the traditional opposition between the exoteric Law (*sharī'a*) and the mystical Path (*tarīqa*): here the innermost dimension, that of the Truth, contains the outermost, that of the Law, and the outer facet of the innermost, that of the Path.

The Sufis have often made use of this triadic theme for defensive purposes, arguing that the initiatory Sufi Path (*tarīqa*) is the necessary link between the religious Law (*sharī'a*) and

⁹⁶ Ibn Abī Jumhūr, *Mujlī*, p. 1072; Āmulī, *Jāmi' al-asrār*, pp. 14, 41 and 344; quoted by Ashkivarī, *Mahbūb al-qulūb*, vol. 2, p. 486.

⁹⁷ Qur'an, e.g. 2:179, 197 and 269; 3:7 and 190; *Aflūṭīn 'inda l-'Arab*, ed. 'A. Badawī (Cairo, 1955; Kuwait, 1977), pp. 32, 99-100.

⁹⁸ Al-Imām Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-milal wa'l-niḥal*, ed. M. Badran (Cairo, 1375/1956), vol. 2, p. 74 for Empedocles, p. 160 for Proclus.

⁹⁹ 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī, *Iṣṭilāḥāt al-ṣūfiyya*, ed. 'Ā. Al-Kayālī (Beirut, 2005), p. 68.

¹⁰⁰ The couple *qishr, lubb* is at least absent in the encyclopaedia of hadīths compiled by Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī at the end of the 11th/17th century, the famous *Bihār al-anwār*.

¹⁰¹ M. A. Amir-Moezzi and Ch. Jambet, *Qu'est-ce que le shī'isme ?* (Paris, 2004), pp. 31-35.

¹⁰² *Aflūṭīn 'inda l-'Arab*, p. 84.

the divine Truth (*ḥaqīqa*).¹⁰³ However it would appear that the meaning of the terms and the general conception are different in the case of our Shi'i authors. First of all, they consider the spiritual Truth (*ḥaqīqa*) as the object of a direct contemplation (*mushāhada*) which may coincide with gnosis (*irfān*), something which enable to a certain philosophy to become the ultimate science and arbitrator between the exoteric religion and the different life forms of Sufism. Example giving, Ibn Abī Jumhūr wrote:

To examination (*inda l-tahqīq*), Law is the expression of assent to the speaking of the Prophets and the Messengers and action according to their obligations by conformism and obedience. Path is the expression of realisation of the acts and manners of Prophets and Messengers by the way of certitude and ornamentation. Truth is the expression of contemplation of their spiritual states and stations by the way of the faculties of unveiling and tasting, followed by their abiding by the way of the spiritual state and the ecstatic consciousness (*mushāhadat aḥwālihim wa maqāmātihim kashfan wa dhawqan wa 'l-qiyām bihā ḥālan wa wijdānan*).¹⁰⁴

This system of the Law (*sharī'a*), the Path (*ṭarīqa*) and the Truth (*ḥaqīqa*), is related by analogy to another conceptual triad, the one of the legislative Mission (*risāla*), the Prophecy (*nubuwwa*) and the divine Alliance (*walāya*), the latter being identified by our authors to the exclusive dignity of the Imams in a Shi'i sense. As Ḥaydar Āmulī asserts: 'In reality, the exoteric Law is part of the necessity of the legislative Mission; the mystical Path is part of the necessity of the Prophecy; and the spiritual Truth is part of the necessity of the divine Alliance.'¹⁰⁵ The same thinker criticises those, including al-Shaykh al-Akbar himself, who say that the seal of the saints in the absolute meaning (*khātām al-awliyā' muṭlaqan*) is Jesus son of Maryam and that the seal of the saints in the determined meaning (*khātām al-awliyā' muqayyadan*) is Ibn 'Arabī, by asserting that the former is no one but 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and that the latter is no one but Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan, the awaited Mahdī.¹⁰⁶ However, the definition given for the divine Alliance does not exclude its possession by the Gnostic or the Sufi: 'The divine Alliance is the expression for the direct contemplation of His Essence, His attributes and His actions, in the *loci* of manifestation of His perfections (*maẓāhir kamālātihi*), the *loci* of self-disclosure of His pre-eternal and post-eternal definitional characters (*majālī ta'ayyunātihi al-azaliyya wa 'l-abadiyya*); this is the essence of the Truth.'¹⁰⁷ Ibn Abī Jumhūr infers that no supporter of the Law, the Path or the Truth – it means no Shi'i *faqīh*, Sufi or Gnostic – can deny any other without denying the three together and thereby without being impious (*kāfir*).¹⁰⁸

Concerning the notion of *ṭarīqa*, it should be noticed that both Ḥaydar Āmulī and Ibn Abī Jumhūr take it in a purely spiritual meaning, that one of the inner journey through the

¹⁰³ See I. Goldziher, *Le dogme et la loi dans l'islam* (Paris, 1920 – 2005), p. 146; Corbin, *Histoire de la philosophie islamique*, p. 264 ; É. Geoffroy, *Le soufisme. Voie intérieure de l'islam* (Paris, 2003), pp. 95-104.

¹⁰⁴ Ibn Abī Jumhūr, *Mujlī*, p. 1078.

¹⁰⁵ Āmulī, *Jāmi' al-asrār*, p. 346.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 384-385.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 346-347.

¹⁰⁸ Ibn Abī Jumhūr, *Mujlī*, pp. 1080-1081.

different states (*aḥwāl*) or stations (*maqāmāt*), without its social meaning as ‘brotherhood’, suggesting that the social brotherhood is excluded *a priori* from the spiritual Path. It is this metaphoric use of the notion of *ṭarīqa* that will enable Ashkivarī to put forward this theory two centuries later, during a time when the Sufi brotherhoods, bearing the same name of *ṭarā’iq* (pl. of *ṭarīqa*), were publicly held in contempt.

According to Ibn Abī Jumhūr’s sayings, the reason he recalls this fundamental unity is not only to protect the Sufis from serious accusations made against them, but also to protect these very accusers, the Shi‘i *fuqahā’*, against their own guilty ignorance. In the writings of Ashkivarī, composed during the reign of Shāh Sulaymān when the authority of al-Majlisī was rising, the plea of Ibn Abī Jumhūr, written two centuries earlier, seems all the more topical, something which points what one may call the historicity of concepts:

The reason for the accusation of impiety and heresy (*al-kufr wa’l-zandaqa*) aimed at this sect [that of the Sufis who testify to God’s uniqueness], from what has been said among our [Shi‘i] doctors, by Ibn Abī Jumhūr in his book *al-Mujlī*, is only a reflection of the ignorance of [Sufis’] principles and rules (*bi-uṣūlihim wa qawānīnihim*). Indeed, if [the doctors of the Law] knew the founding principles [of the Sufis], if they realized that the Law, the Path and the Truth are truly synonyms to designate a sole reality (*ḥaqīqa wāḥida*), that of the Revelation (*ḥaqīqat al-shar’*), they would not use such language, and would leave aside this intolerance (*ta’aṣṣub*), this polemic, this rejection and opposition, they would strip their hearts of these envious and thoughtless words, and would free their souls from the abyss of sophisms and doubt.¹⁰⁹

Ibn Abī Jumhūr also bestows a symbolic and spiritual meaning on the term *khirqā*, the coarse garment worn by the first ascetics and symbol of the spiritual initiation of the disciple by the master. The transmission of the *khirqā* is mentioned in ancient sources as the earliest form of initiatic lineage, dating back to the prophet Muḥammad, and constituted the ‘pedestal for the edification of the Sufi orders’ from the 12th century onwards.¹¹⁰ The theme of the *khirqā* is without doubt one in which the Shi‘as recognize their own inheritance, to quote Henry Corbin.¹¹¹ S. H. Naṣr considers that the wearing and the transmission of the cloak as symbols of the spiritual teachings they have received find their origin in the Shi‘i hadith of ‘the Five of the Cloak’ which relates how Muḥammad covered with his cloak his daughter Fāṭima, his cousin ‘Alī, and their two sons al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, as well as himself.¹¹² Ibn Abī Jumhūr maintains that the original cloak, given to the Prophet by the archangel Gabriel during his ascent to heaven (*mi’rāj*), was transmitted to ‘Alī on God’s order, and henceforth from Imam to Imam down to Maḥdī. This archetypal and transcendental cloak gave rise to three others, and three paths of initiation, transmitted from the Imams to the Sufis: from Imam Mūsā al-Kāzīm to Shaqīq al-Balkhī; from Imam Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq to Abū Yazīd al-Baṣṭāmī; from Imam ‘Alī al-Riḍā to Ma‘rūf al-Karkhī, who initiated Sarī al-Saqatī, who in turn initiated Junayd, ‘the Master of

¹⁰⁹ Ashkivarī, *Maḥbūb*, vol. 2, p. 486; Ibn Abī Jumhūr, *Mujlī*, p. 1081.

¹¹⁰ É. Geoffroy, ‘L’apparition des voies : les *khirqā* primitives (XII^e siècle – début XIII^e siècle)’, in A. Popovic et G. Veinstein, ed., *Les Voies d’Allah* (Paris, 1996), p. 45.

¹¹¹ E.g. *En islam iranien*, vol. 3, pp. 153 and 156.

¹¹² Naṣr, ‘Le shī‘isme et le soufisme’, pp. 220-221.

the sect of the Sufis.¹¹³ Following a Neoplatonic schema, Ibn Abī Jumhūr perceives the physical cloak transmitted from Sufi to Sufi as an image pertaining to the archetypal cloak held by the Imam.¹¹⁴ Once more this is a dialectic of integration and overtaking of the social dimension of Sufism within Shi‘i spirituality. This spiritualisation of the notion of *khirqā* was not however as successful as the analogous operation on the notion of *ṭarīqa* as seen before: the notion of *khirqā* will remain associated with Sufi brotherhoods, the latter remaining considered as incompatible with Twelver Shi‘ism. Thus, this argument is not used by Ashkivarī within the contemporary context of extreme hostility of the Shi‘i political and theological establishment towards the Sufis.

This argumentation, based on the triad of Law, Path and Truth, stands side by side with a series of antinomies opposing ‘true’ and ‘false’ Shi‘as, ‘true’ and ‘false’ Sufis, ‘true’ and ‘false’ savants. This antonymic schema is characteristic of Shi‘i spirituality, as shown by M. A. Amir-Moezzi and C. Jambet.¹¹⁵ To our four authors, the reconciliation of true Shi‘ism and true Sufism necessarily implies dissociation from the forms of Shi‘ism and Sufism considered to be false. These false forms of Shi‘ism are Ismailism and ‘exaggeration’ (*ghulūw*), the latter notion including any and all forms of heterodoxy (anti-Sunni positions, messianism, divinisation of the Imam, pretention to the vision of God), especially those from whose our authors intend to dissociate themselves. These false forms of Sufism comprise the organisational aspect of the brotherhoods, the *ṭarīqa* as a social and historical institution, and antinomianism (*ibāhiyya*), in other words the rejection of the obligations of Law (*sharī‘a*) by those who claim having acquired the knowledge of the ultimate Truth (*ḥaqīqa*)¹¹⁶.

It is well-known that Shi‘i scholars have for the major part prevented mystical schools of thought from organizing themselves into brotherhoods or congregations: probably, as Corbin affirms, because Imami Shi‘ism considers itself the spiritual path;¹¹⁷ and probably also because the doctors of Shi‘i law, whose organization was comparable to that of a veritable clergy during the Safavid era, were intent on maintaining total hegemony over Shi‘i society. It is noteworthy that while none of our defenders of reconciliation explicitly condemns the materialisation of the *ṭarīqa* in brotherhoods, they all, with the notable exception of Shūshtarī, denominate as ‘true Sufis’ – who are by this definition also ‘true Shi‘as’ – only spiritual masters who predate the foundation of the first brotherhoods. The exclusion is thus implicit.

In contrast, the explicit condemnation of licentious and antinomian Sufis was commonplace, and even a compulsory exercise for the Gnostic philosophers of Safavid Iran, the latter always being suspected of deviant sympathies.¹¹⁸ The formulation of Ashkivarī is interesting in that it combines philosophical speculation with traditional arguments, from both

¹¹³ Ibn Abī Jumhūr, *Mujlī*, pp. 1245-1246; this passage is quoted by Ma‘šūm ‘Alī, *Ṭarā‘iq*, vol. 1, pp. 525-526.

¹¹⁴ Ibn Abī Jumhūr, *Mujlī*, pp. 1257-1258; Naṣr, ‘Le shī‘isme et le soufisme’, pp. 221-222.

¹¹⁵ Ibn Abī Jumhūr, *Mujlī*, pp. 1257-1258; Naṣr, ‘Le shī‘isme et le soufisme’, pp. 221-222.

¹¹⁶ On this topic, see H. Algar, ‘*Ebāhiyya* (or *Ebāhatīyya*)’, *Elr*; A. Papas, ‘Antinomianism (*ibāha*, *ibāhiyya*)’, *EI3*.

¹¹⁷ To summarize one of Corbin’s arguments in *Histoire de la philosophie islamique*, pp. 55-58; *En islam iranien*, vol. 2, p. 11.

¹¹⁸ E.g. Ashkivarī, *Maḥbūb* vol. 2, p. 489-490, and vol. 1, p. 73, in his autobiography. See M. Terrier, ‘Apologie du soufisme par un philosophe shī‘ite de l’Iran safavide. Nouvelles remarques sur le *Maḥbūb al-qulūb* d’Ashkevarī’, *Studia Islamica* 109 (2014), pp. 248-252, for the first part; *Histoire de la sagesse et philosophie shi‘ite*, pp. 77-78 and 98, for the second part.

Shi‘i and Sufi authorities. Thus, he quotes Junayd in order to assert that the connection with the divine (*wiṣāl*) does not spare one from respecting social and cultural obligations, that knowledge of the Path (*ṭarīqa*) does not exempt anyone from obeying the Law (*sharī‘a*), and that believing otherwise is tantamount to satanic imagination. Then, in his own words, Ashkivarī develops the idea that the exterior forms (*ṣuwar*) of the cult are the ‘loci of manifestation’ (*mazāhir*) of the ‘spiritual realities’ (*al-ma‘ānī*). The dualist schema opposing true to false is here converted into a twofold schema which articulates the apparent with the hidden, the exoteric outermost (*ẓāhir*) with the esoteric innermost (*bāṭin*). Finally, he quotes a hadith of Imam Ja‘far taken from the *Kitāb al-Kāfi* of al-Kulaynī: ‘God only approves an action made with knowledge, and only approves of knowledge with action. Thus, to him who knows God, knowledge shows the action. He who does not act has no knowledge. However, in faith, the one comes from the other.’¹¹⁹ The correlation between knowledge and action is also an axial principle of philosophy or wisdom (*ḥikma*) in the sense of the ancient Greeks that Ashkivarī reactivates in the first part of his *Maḥbūb al-qulūb*.¹²⁰ It is the correlation between the apparent and the hidden, the physical action and the spiritual state of being, that appears to Ashkivarī as the common vocation of Imami Shi‘ism, Sufism and philosophy.

This principle of the unity of knowledge and action leads Ashkivarī to distance himself from both legalist or literalist lawyer-theologians on the one hand and from licentious or passive mystics on the other. Both criticisms echo one another: as he expresses in his notice devoted to Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (m. 587/1191), ‘the murdered master’ (*al-shaykh al-maqtūl*), just as antinomian dervishes do not deserve the title of Sufī, doctors of the law condemning rational sciences and the spiritual path usurp the title of *fuqahā*.¹²¹ Expounding an original exegesis of the last verse of the Sura *al-Fātiha*, Ashkivarī identifies ‘those who earned [God’s] anger’ (*al-maghḍūb ‘alayhim*) with Sufis discarding exoteric religious law in the name of their knowledge of spiritual truths (*ḥaqā‘iq*), and ‘those who went astray’ (*al-dāllīn*) with the doctors who reject spiritual truth and esoteric science in the name of the letter of the law.¹²²

To conclude this second analysis, it seems that for our thinkers the transcendental unity between the Law, the Path, and the spiritual Truth implies the conciliation of Shi‘ism and Sufism under the auspices of philosophical gnosis. The more the defence of this thesis appears marginalised and of little account, the more the issue becomes all important, since ultimately the survival of Sufism depends on it, as does the place of philosophy in a Shi‘i state.

The linguistic argumentation: the analogy of Imam’s and Sufis’ ‘language-games’

Our authors employ a further, and noteworthy, mode of argument. It is founded neither on traditional authority, nor indeed on rigorous conceptions, but on the similarities or the analogies

¹¹⁹ Ashkivarī, *Maḥbūb* vol. 2, p. 490. Kulaynī, *Uṣūl al-Kāfi*, Kitāb faḍl al-‘ilm, bāb man ‘amila bi-ghayr ‘ilm, p. 29.

¹²⁰ See Terrier, *Histoire de la sagesse et philosophie shi‘ite*; P. Hadot, *Qu’est-ce que la philosophie antique ?* (Paris, 1995).

¹²¹ Ashkivarī, *Maḥbūb*, vol. 2, p. 349.

¹²² Ibid., p. 492. It is worthy to say that Rajab Bursī interprets the formers as the Sunnis and the latter as the *ghulāt*. See Ḥāfiẓ Rajab Bursī, *al-Durr al-thāmin fī khamsami‘a āya nuzilat fī mawlānā amīr al-mu‘minīn*, ed. ‘A. ‘Ashūr (Beirut, 1424/2003), pp. 29-30.

between certain types of discourse, Shi‘i or Sufi, which I will refer to, borrowing Ludwig Wittgenstein’s expression, as ‘language-games.’¹²³ Specifically, I will be highlighting parallels and consonances between certain particularly esoteric declarations made by the Imams and some of the most paradoxical statements of the Sufis. The first language-game pertains to certain sermons during which the Imam proclaims his own divinity and goes so far as to verbally identify himself with God, which M. A. Amir-Moezzi technically qualifies as ‘theo-imamosophical’ sermons.¹²⁴ These declarations have played a crucial role within Shi‘ism: on the one hand they may well have given rise to the branches of Shi‘ism associated with ‘extremism’ or ‘exaggeration’ (*ghulāt*) – the exaggeration residing not in *what* is said regarding the divine status of the Imam, but in that it *is* said, and hence implies a break with the discipline of the arcane, or *taqiyya* –; and on the other hand, the preservation or the censorship of these sermons distinguishes the Shi‘as who have remained attached to this original tradition, known as the *akhbārī*, from the rationalist Shi‘i scholars, known as the *uṣūlī*. The second language-game is that of the *shaṭaḥāt*, or ‘paradoxes of the Sufis,’ those famous ecstatic utterances in which the Sufi speaks in the name of God, or God speaks through the mouth of the Sufi, and which Louis Massignon translates as ‘theopathic locutions.’¹²⁵ Baṣṭāmī and Ḥallāj are two of their most illustrious authors. These phrases have been the object of countless condemnations, emanating from both Sunnis and Shi‘as, and even from certain Sufis such as al-Hujwīrī, Ibn ‘Arabī or al-Jurjānī.¹²⁶ Yet, in a bold gesture, Ḥaydar Āmulī identifies the *shaṭaḥāt* with the theo-imamosophical sermons of Imam ‘Alī:

An individual, when he contemplates True-God (*al-ḥaqq*) in the light of True-God, knows only one station which is the station of his extinction within Him, called ‘extinction of the knower in the known,’ or ‘extinction of the contemplator in the contemplated,’ or ‘extinction of the servant in the Lord,’ etc. This can only proceed from lifting the duality of the simple point of view, the disappearance of creational multiplicity, and the vanishing of egoity which prevent true connection. As one of them [Ḥallāj] declared regarding this spiritual station (*maqām*): ‘Between You and I, my I holds me back/ By your grace, remove my I from the interval!’. As says another: ‘When poverty is perfected, he is God.’ As says another [Baṣṭāmī]: ‘Glory to you, how great is my cause!’. As says another [Ḥallāj]: ‘I am True-God’ (*‘anā l-ḥaqq*). As says our guide and master, the Pole of the lords of divine unicity, the Prince of the believers, [Imam ‘Alī]: ‘I am the

¹²³ L. Wittgenstein, *Investigations philosophiques*, French trans. By F. Dastur et alii (Paris, 2004). On this subject, see P. Hadot, *Wittgenstein et les limites du langage* (Paris, 2004).

¹²⁴ M. A. Amir-Moezzi, ‘Aspects de l’imamologie duodécimaine I. Remarques sur la divinité de l’Imâm’, *Studia Iranica*, 25, 2 (1996), pp. 193-216, in *La religion discrète* (Paris, 2006), pp. 89-108; (in English) ‘Some Remarks on the Divinity of the Imam’, in *The Spirituality of Shi‘i Islam* (London, 2011), pp. 103-131, see p. 105.

¹²⁵ On the *shaṭaḥāt*, see L. Massignon, *Essai sur les origines du lexique technique de la mystique musulmane* (Paris, 1922), s.v.; the same, *Passion*, s.v.; Corbin’s introduction to Rūzbehān Baqlī Shīrāzī, *Sharḥ-e shaṭḥiyyāt*, ed. H. Corbin (Paris – Tehran, 1962, 2d ed. 2004); P. Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique* (Beirut, 1970), s.v.; C. Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism* (New York, 1995).

¹²⁶ Massignon, *Passion* vol. 1, p. 431-432 ; vol. 3, p. 359-367 ; see the definition of *shaṭḥ* in ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī, *Kitāb al-Ta’rīfāt*, ed. G. Flügel (Leipzig, 1845), p. 132 ; on Ibn ‘Arabī’s position, see P. Lory, *La science des lettres en islam* (Paris, 2004), pp. 129-131.

face of God, I am the flank of God, I am the hand of God, I am the proof of God, I am the First and the Last, I am the Manifest and the Concealed.’¹²⁷

For Ḥaydar Āmulī, a Shi‘a first and foremost, Sufi masters and Imams are doubtless not on an equal footing: the Sufi momentarily attains identity with God at the culmination of the contemplative exercise whereas the Imam is the actual manifestation of the Science and of the Power of God.¹²⁸ The semantic and phenomenological comparison between the ecstatic verbalisations of the Sufis and the self-glorifying sermons of the Imams does not imply that they are ontologically equivalent, but suggests that, through his own effort and then only intermittently, the Sufi can say what the Imam says, the latter by virtue of his very essence. The fact remains that the interpretation proffered by Ḥaydar Āmulī with regard to these utterances, and which was subsequently echoed by Ibn Abī Jumhūr and Ashkivarī, bestow qualities on the Sufi that Imamate orthodoxy normally attributes exclusively to Imams.

Our thinkers Ḥaydar Āmulī and then Ibn Abī Jumhūr, also record certain mystical hadiths of Imam ‘Alī, on the topics of love, intoxication and ecstasy. For example:

God has a potation for His friends. When they drink it, they become intoxicated. When they are intoxicated, they go into a trance. When they go into a trance, they better themselves. When they better themselves, they melt. When they melt, they purify themselves. When they purify themselves, they search. When they search, they find. When they find, they join. When they join, they connect themselves. When they connect themselves, there is no difference between them and their loved one.¹²⁹

Here also, these conceptions are frequently taxed with exaggeration (*ghulūw*) in Shi‘i circles.¹³⁰ The analogy which this tradition suggests between esoteric Shi‘ism and ecstatic or ‘intoxicated’ Sufism is probably the reason why it is rejected by most traditionalists – since it does not appear in the authoritative literature –, but it is probably also the reason why it is adopted by Ḥaydar Āmulī, Ibn Abī Jumhūr or even Fayḍ al-Kāshānī. It enables Ibn Abī Jumhūr to justify the ecstatic discourse of the Sufis Bastāmī and Ḥallāj. His philosophical exegesis is reiterated word for word by Ashkivarī in his apology of Ḥallāj:

¹²⁷ Āmulī, *Jāmi‘ al-asrār*, pp. 364-365. See also p. 172, where Āmulī traces the parallel between a sermon of Imam ‘Alī addressed to Kumayl and an ecstatic speaking by Ḥallāj. Rajab Bursī, *Mashāriq anwār al-yaqīn*, pp. 309-321, records these sermons in extensive versions.

¹²⁸ Amir-Moezzi, *Guide divin*, p. 314.

¹²⁹ Āmulī, *Jāmi‘ al-asrār*, pp. 363-364 and 676; *Anwār al-ḥaqīqa* (Qumm, 1436/1394 h.s./2015-16), pp. 86-87; or *Asrār al-sharī‘a* (Tehran, 1362 Sh./1983), p. 28, where Āmulī brings this tradition together with the *shataḥāt* of the Sufis under the station of “extinction in the assumption of God’s unity” (*al-fanā’ fī l-tawḥīd*); Ibn Abī Jumhūr, *Mujlī*, p. 1682. Shaybī, *Ṣila*, vol. 1, p. 241, makes analogy with a passage of al-Ḥallāj’s *Kitāb al-Ṭawāsīn*, ed. L. Massignon (Paris, 1913), see pp. 32-33.

¹³⁰ Fayḍ Kāshānī, *Kalimāt maknūna*, ed. ‘A. al-Ḥ. Ḥājji Abū l-Ḥasanī (Tehran, 1390 Sh./2011), pp. 185-186, quotes these traditions from *al-Mujlī*. In a footnote, the editor denounces the “corruption” of these hadiths and the influence of “extremist Sufism” on Ibn Abī Jumhūr.

Ibn Jumhūr, hallowed be his secret, declared, in his book *al-Mujlī*, that the soul, when it is united to certain immaterial lights during certain furtive occasions and is stripped of its body, through the power of intellectual delectations and spiritual elations which adhere to it, through the intensity of the shining auroras, retires from its essence and from the conscience of its essence. The sovereign of the immaterial and intellectual lights takes hold of it and it then disappears from its own essence (*tafnā ‘an dātihā*). They describe this state as ‘unification’ (*ittiḥād*). When the traveller towards God reaches this station, that the weaker light is extinguished in that which is more powerful and intense, that [traveller] is drunken from the pleasures of the victorial lights, that these immaterial lights became the *loci* of manifestation where rational minds unite, then this soul is in such a state that it only sees the *locus* of manifestation, and speaks only with the language of this *locus* of manifestation. Till the point where al-Ḥusayn al-Ḥallāj, who had reached this station, prayed to God and said to Him: ‘O Lord, my “I” is holding me back, lift hence through your “It is I” my “it is I”!’ God granted his prayer and said: ‘I am True-God’.¹³¹

For Ashkivarī, the defence of Sufi *shataḥāt* in the name of the ascendancy of mystical states of being can justify certain forms of antinomianism. In this state of mystical intoxication, he writes, ‘the pilgrim on the path of God leaves the sphere of prescription and the domain of reason (*az dā’ire-ye taklif va tūr-e ‘aql birūn oftād*); his heart can no longer respect the seemingly practices prescribed by the Saint [the Prophet]; however in this state, the abandonment of right behaviour is the right behaviour in itself (*tark-e adab ‘ayn-e adab bāshad*).’¹³² The apparent antinomianism, on the exoteric level, could mask, on the esoteric level, an inner comprehension and a superior respect of the Law. Ashkivarī concludes with a call for tolerance with regards to the ecstatic utterings of the Sufis, quoting a verse in Persian of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī:

If men, drunk from the pure beverage of junction, express themselves, in this drunkenness and this spiritual state, in such a way that, if compared to the learned and lucid people of the schools, they might appear a wrong behaviour (*sū’e adab*), one must nevertheless not admonish them. In consideration of the place and the state from which they speak, one must be accepting and seek no quarrel.

Forgive him, whom You have intoxicated and then deprived, if he strays due to his drunkenness.¹³³

This is without a doubt our Shi‘i authors’ boldest defence of Sufism, for this ‘intoxicated Sufism’ hailed by Ḥallāj was generally abhorred by their lawyer-theologians. This is in all likelihood the reason why all four support, regardless of the overwhelming evidence, the historical affiliation of Abū Yazīd al-Bastāmī to Imam Ja‘far, since Bastāmī is the father of this form of ecstatic Sufism, which reached its paroxysm with Ḥallāj. The two later thinkers of our

¹³¹ Ashkivarī, *Maḥbūb*, vol. 2, p. 540; Ibn Abī Jumhūr, *Mujlī*, p. 649. This interpretation is resumed from Shams al-Dīn Shahrāzūrī, *Rasā’il al-shajarat al-ilāhiyya*, ed. N. Ḥabībī (Tehran, 1385 Sh./2006), vol. 3, pp. 474-475.

¹³² Ashkivarī, *Maḥbūb*, vol. 2, p. 542. On this notion of “ascendancy” (*ghalaba*), see Abū Bakr Muḥammad al-Kalābādhī, *Al-ta’arruf li-maḡhab ahl al-taṣawwuf*, ed. Y. al-Jayb Ṣādir (Beirut, 1427/2006), p. 82; Kalābādhī, *Traité de soufisme*, French trans. by R. Deladrière (Paris, 1981), p. 126.

¹³³ Ashkivarī, *Maḥbūb*, vol. 2, p. 542-543. Jalāl al-Dīn Mowlavī (Rūmī), *Mathnavī ma’navī*, ed. R. Nicholson (Tehran, 1390 Sh./2011), p. 194. See also Lāhijī, *Mafātīḥ al-i’jāz*, p. 252.

study, Shūshtarī and Ashkivarī, are also eager to show that Ḥallāj was Shi‘a. My hypothesis is that the pseudo-‘Shi‘itisation’ of these historical figures is a tactic which aims to defend ecstatic Sufism and its theopathic locutions, and this defence is itself devised in order to ultimately pave the way for the new experiences and new ecstatic utterances of the Gnostics (‘*urafā*’) like Ashkivarī’s first master Mīr Dāmād.¹³⁴ It is worth noting that the specialist *par excellence* of the Ḥallāj dossier, Louis Massignon, classifies Ashkivarī as ‘pro- Ḥallājian’ and isolated in the midst of the rationalist (*uṣūlī*) clergy.¹³⁵ This begs the following question: could one be both pro-Ḥallājian and *faqīh uṣūlī*? It seems rather that this defensive stance was emblematic of the resistance of the original, non-rational and esoteric form of Sufism, against the rise in power of the rationalist *uṣūlī*, without ever becoming an *akhbārī* discourse.

Conclusion

The works of these four authors thus form a coherent intellectual system, which serves a cause both spiritual and political: the peaceable and fertile coexistence between Twelver Shi‘ism, Sufism and Gnosticism. Notwithstanding the apparent repetition of the same discourse, the originality of each work in its particular historical context is apparent, both in the differing emphasis placed on particular modes of argumentation and in the development or elision of different elements of information. Whereas the first authors in this tradition of reconciliation were confident of its own true orthodoxy, later authors had progressively to come to terms with its minority status and marginality. Given subsequent history, from a contemporary perspective the reconciliation attempted by our thinkers is between the most esoteric forms of Shi‘ism and Sufism, the first frequently accused of exaggeration by the Shi‘as themselves, and the second equally repudiated by a great number of Sufis. In other words, and not least paradoxically, it is a synthesis of heterodoxies which has been elevated here to a veritable intellectual tradition.

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¹³⁴ Those ecstatic reports have been related by Ashkivarī himself in the last notice of the third volume of the *Mahbūb*. The text is edited in Mīr Dāmād, *Kitāb al-qabasāt*, ed. T. Izutsu and M. Mohaghegh (Tehran, 1977), pp. 31-53. See a French translation and a commentary in H. Corbin, ‘Confessions extatiques de Mīr Dāmād, maître de théologie à Ispahan (ob. 1041/1631-1632)’, in H. Massé ed., *Mélanges offerts à Louis Massignon* Damas, 1956), vol. 1, pp. 331-378; and in *En Islam iranien*, vol. 4, pp. 9-53.

¹³⁵ Massignon, *Passion*, vol. 1, p. 87 ; vol. 2, pp. 23 et 44-45.

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