

VI

ИСЛАМСКИЙ МИСТИЦИЗМ

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ISLAMIC MYSTICISM

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NOTES ON IMĀMĪ-SHĪ'Ī WALĀYA

As it is widely known, Shi'ism is centred on the notion of *walāya*. The Shi'is refer to themselves as 'the people of *walāya*' (*ahl al-walāya*). The charisma of the imam, the very nature of his Person seems entirely focussed on this concept. The following study attempts to examine the content of *walāya* — especially, the ways in which the term is understood — to enable a better appreciation of what may be considered the very substance of the Shi'i faith in general and Imami in particular.

Walāya and the Qur'an

Considered on the basis of the earliest Imami sources that have come down to us, that is to say sources mainly from the pre-Buyid period, one realises that by almost all the Shi'is, the so-called 'uthmānian Qur'anic vulgate was considered a censured and falsified version of the original revelation, received by Muḥammad. This version, much more voluminous than the one known to everybody today, is recorded in the recension of 'Alī and remains in the possession of the Imams to be revealed universally by the *Qā'im* at the End of Time.¹ This particularly explosive belief was apparently abandoned ever since the Buyid period by the dominant trend of Imamism, yet to some extent it is still held secretly and continues to nourish certain minority branches until the present day.² Early

¹ On this topic see: Kohlberg E. and M.A. Amir-Moezzi. Revelation and Falsification *The Kitāb al-Qirā'āt* of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Sayyārī. Leiden: Brill, 2009. P. 24–46.

² Regarding the extension of this question to the modern and contemporary period see: Brunner R. Die Schia und die Koranfälschung. Würzburg: Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft, 2001.

sources report quotations from this “complete Quran,” containing words, expressions or parts of sentences that at times differ significantly from the official recension.³ Now, among these expressions “censured” by the “enemies” of the Shi'is, those that recur most frequently would have concerned 'Alī, descendants of the Prophet (i.e. the imams) and their *walāya*.⁴ To cite a few examples (expressions in addition to the official vulgate are in italics):

Q. 2:87: “...and whenever there came to you *Muḥammad* (instead of a “messenger”) to reveal something *concerning the muwālāt of 'Alī* (here *muwālāt* is synonymous with *walāya*, see below) with that your souls had not desire for, did you not become arrogant, and cry lies to some *among the Family of Muḥammad*, and slay some?”⁵

Q. 4:167–70: “Surely, the unbelievers who are unjust (instead of “those who deny and are unjust”), *regarding the rights of the Family of Muḥammad*, God would not forgive them, neither would He guide them on any road / but the road to Gehenna, therein dwelling forever and ever; and that for God is an easy matter. / O men, the Messenger has now come to you with the truth *about the walāya of 'Alī* from your Lord; so believe; better is it for you. And

³ For these quotations see: *Tisdall W.St.Cl.* Shi'ah Additions to the Koran // *The Moslem World* 3.3, July 1913. P. 227–41 (based on a manuscript of the Quran from Bankipore, India, dated 16th or 17th century); *Amir-Moezzi M.A.* Le Guide divin dans le Shi'isme originel. Paris: Lagrasse, 1992 (2nd ed. 2007 with the same pagination). P. 210–14 and especially *Bar-Asher M.M.* Variant Readings and Additions of the Imāmī-Shī'a to the Quran // *Israel Oriental Studies* 13, 1993. P. 39–74, 51–72.

⁴ The reader will forgive us for not translating immediately either this term or others belonging to the same root WLY. This study attempts to show, among other things, the semantic complexity of these terms and, thus, the difficulty of translating them univocally. Let us specify right now that this work deals exclusively with the Shi'i technical meanings and not the entire, especially wide-ranging semantic field related to this root; to cite just one example, the root WLY takes up almost ten folio pages formatted in two columns in Ibn Manẓūr's *Lisān al-'arab* (3^d ed. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1414/1994. P. 15, 406–15). Among these numerous studies, let us confine ourselves to citing some decisive works, mainly bearing upon mysticism: *Chodkiewicz M.* Le Sceau des saints: Prophétie et sainteté dans la doctrine d'Ibn 'Arabī. Paris, 1986. Index s.v. WLY; *van Ess J.* Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra: Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam. Bd. I–VI. Berlin: 1990–97. Bd. IV. Index of technical terms, *sub. w-l-y*; *Landolt H.* Walāyah // *The Encyclopedia of Religion*. Vol. 15 (1995). P. 316–23; *Radtke B. and J. O'Kane.* The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism. London, 1996; *Elmore G.* Islamic Sainthood in the Fullness of Time: Ibn al-'Arabī's Book of the Fabulous Gryphon. Leiden: Brill, 1999. Particulary P. 111–40 (on the influence of Shi'ism upon the eschatological hagiography in Ibn 'Arabī); *Walker P.* Chapter “Wilāya,” in *Shī'ism // EP*. Vol. 10. P. 208–9, and the recently published: *Dakake M.* The Charismatic Community: Shi'ite Identity in Early Islam. New York, 2007.

⁵ *Al-Kulaynī.* Al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfī fi 'ilm al-dīn. Ed. J. Muṣṭafawī. 4 vols. Tehran, non-dated. Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb fīhi nukat wa nutaf min al-tanzīl fi 'l-walāya, 2: 285, n° 3. Cf. *Al-Sayyārī.* Kitāb al-Qirā'āt (= *Kohlberg E. and M.A. Amir-Moezzi.* Revelation and Falsification). P. 18, n° 51 (Arabic text) and P. 76 (notes).

if you deny *the walāya of 'Alī* know that to God belongs all that is in the heavens and in the earth..."⁶

Q. 5:67: "O Messenger, deliver that which has been sent down to thee from the Lord *regarding 'Alī...*"⁷

Q. 7:172: "And when thy Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their seed, and made them testify touching themselves, 'Am I not your Lord?' *Is Muḥammad not the messenger of God, 'Alī not the Prince of initiates?* They said, 'Yes, we testify'..."⁸

Q. 16:24: "And when it is said to them, 'What has your Lord sent down *regarding 'Alī?*' they say, 'Fairy-tales of the ancients.'"⁹

Q. 17:89: "We have indeed turned about for men in this Qur'an every manner of similitude; yet most men refuse all but unbelief in the *walāya of 'Alī.*"¹⁰

Q. 33:71: "Whosoever obeys God and His Messenger concerning the *walāya of 'Alī* and the *walāya of the imams after him*, has won a mighty triumph."¹¹

⁶ *'Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī*. Tafsīr. Ed. al-Mūsawī al-Jazā'irī. Najaf, 1386–87/1866–68. Vol. 1. P. 159; *Muḥammad al-'Ayyāshī*. Tafsīr. Qumm, 1380/1960. Vol. 1. P. 285; *al-Kulaynī*. al-Uṣūl. Vol. 2. P. 295, n° 59; *Hāshim b. Sulaymān al-Bahrānī*. Al-Burhān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān. 5 vols. Tehran, n.d. Vol. 1. P. 428; *al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī*. Al-Ṣāfi fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān. 2 vols., Tehran, n.d. Vol. 1. P. 414; *Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī*. Biḥār al-anwār. 110 vols. Tehran, 1376–92/1956–72. Vol. 36. P. 99; cf. *Al-Sayyārī*. Kitāb al-Qirā'at. P. 39, n° 138 (Arabic text) and P. 106 (notes).

⁷ *Al-Sayyārī*. Kitāb al-Qirā'at. P. 45, n° 165 (Arabic text) and P. 115–116 (notes); *al-Qummī*. Tafsīr. Vol. 2. P. 201; *al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī*. Al-Ṣāfi. Vol. 1. P. 460, 462–63; *al-Bahrānī*. Al-Burhān. Vol. 1. P. 501a, instead of *fī 'Alī*, the expression *anna 'Aliyyan mawlā l-mu'minīn*.

⁸ *Al-Sayyārī*. Kitāb al-Qirā'at. P. 52, n° 195 (Arabic text) and P. 125–126 (notes); *al-'Ayyāshī*. Tafsīr. Vol. 2. P. 41; *al-Bahrānī*. Al-Burhān. Vol. 2. P. 50; *al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī*. Ithbāt al-ḥudāt. Tehran, 1364/1985. Vol. 3. P. 545; *al-Majlisī*. Biḥār al-anwār. Vol. 9. P. 256. For this technical translation of *amīr al-mu'minīn* (i.e., 'Alī), literally "Prince of believers" and the notion of *mu'min* as the loyal-faithful Shi'i initiated to the teaching of the imams see: *Amir-Moezzi M.A.* Guide divin. P. 174–99 and index s.v. *īmān* and *mu'min*. On this verse see also the article by R. Gramlich (in *Der Islam* 60 (1983). P. 205–30).

⁹ *Furāt b. Furāt b. Ibrāhīm al-Kūfī*. Tafsīr. Ed. M. al-Kāzīm. Tehran, 1410/1990. P. 234; *al-Qummī*. Tafsīr. Vol. 1. P. 383; *al-'Ayyāshī*. Tafsīr. Vol. 2. P. 257; *al-Bahrānī*. Al-Burhān. Vol. 2. P. 363; *al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī*. Al-Ṣāfi. Vol. 1. P. 920; *al-Majlisī*. Biḥār. Vol. 9. P. 102 and Vol. 36. P. 104.

¹⁰ *al-'Ayyāshī*. Tafsīr. Vol. 2: 317; *al-Bahrānī*. Al-Burhān. Vol. 2. P. 445; *al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī*. Al-Ṣāfi. Vol. 1. P. 989; *al-Majlisī*. Biḥār. Vol. 9. P. 102 and Vol. 36. P. 105; cf. *Al-Sayyārī*. Kitāb al-Qirā'at. P. 79, n° 301 (Arabic text) and P. 161–162 (notes). On "the majority" (*akthar al-nās*), in its technical sense denoting non-Shi'is as not uninitiated Shi'is, as opposed to "the minority" (*aqall al-nās*), i.e. initiated Shi'is, see: *Amir-Moezzi M.A.* Guide divin. *Index s.v.*, and, in particular: *Kohlberg E.* In Praise of the Few // *Hawting G.R., J.A. Mojaddedi and A. Samely* (eds.). Studies in Islamic and Middle Eastern Texts and Traditions. In Memory of Norman Calder. JSS, Supplement 12 (2000). P. 149–62.

¹¹ *Al-Sayyārī*. Kitāb al-Qirā'at. P. 111, n° 428 (Arabic text) and P. 202 (notes); *al-Qummī*. Tafsīr. Vol. 2. P. 198; *al-Kulaynī*. al-Uṣūl. Vol. 2. P. 279, n° 8; *al-Bahrānī*. Al-Burhān. Vol. 3. P. 340; *al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī*. Al-Ṣāfi. Vol. 2. P. 369.

Q. 40:13: "...because when God was called to alone, *as well as that [the unicity] of the People of walāya* you disbelieved..."¹²

Q. 41:27: "So We shall let the unbelievers *who have forsaken the walāya of the Prince of the initiates* taste a terrible chastisement *in this world*, and shall recompense them with the worst of what they were working."¹³

Q. 42:13: "He has laid down for you, *o Family of Muḥammad*, as religion that He charged Noah with, and that We have revealed to thee, *o Muḥammad*, and that We charged with Abraham, Moses and Jesus: '[Establish] the religion of the Family of Muḥammad, and scatter not regarding it *and be united*.' Very hateful is that for the associationists, *those that associate to the walāya of 'Alī* (i.e. other *walāyas*), thou callest them to *concerning the walāya of 'Alī*. *Surely* God guides, *o Muḥammad*, towards this religion he who repents, *he who accepts your call to the walāya of 'Alī* (instead of "God chooses unto Himself whomsoever He will, and He guides to Himself whosoever turns, penitent")."¹⁴

Q. 67:29: "...and thou shalt certainly know them, *o denying people; whereas I brought you a message from my Lord concerning the walāya of 'Alī and of the imams after him...*"¹⁵

Q. 70:1–3: "A questioner asked of a chastisement about to fall / for the unbelievers *in the walāya of 'Alī*, which none may avert, / from God, the Lord of the Stairways."¹⁶

One may continue to extend this list much further.¹⁷ Beyond the "Qur'an of the imams," let us confine ourselves to pointing out that, according to Shi'ī scribes, the manuscript of the Qur'an discovered by St. Clair Tisdall (see note 3 above) contains an entire sura of seven verses precisely entitled the sura of *walāya*, totally deleted from the original Revelation by the imam's adversaries:

¹² *Al-Sayyārī*. Kitāb al-Qirā'āt. P. 125, n° 478 (Arabic text) and P. 216 (notes); *al-Kulaynī*. al-Uṣūl. Vol. 2. P. 291, n° 46.

¹³ *Al-Sayyārī*. Kitāb al-Qirā'āt. P. 129, n° 489 (Arabic text) and P. 219 (notes); *al-Kulaynī*. al-Uṣūl. Vol. 2. P. 291, n° 45.

¹⁴ *Furāt al-Kūfī*. Tafsiṛ. P. 387; *al-Kulaynī*. al-Rawḍa min al-Kāfī. Text and Persian transl. by H. Rasūlī Maḥallātī. Tehran, 1389/1969. Vol. 2. P. 163, n° 502; *al-Kulaynī*. al-Uṣūl. Vol. 2. P. 285, n° 32 (shorter version); *al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī*. Al-Ṣāfi. Vol. 2. P. 509; cf.: *Al-Sayyārī*. Kitāb al-Qirā'āt. P. 131, n°s 491 and 492 (Arabic text) and P. 220–221 (notes).

¹⁵ *Al-Kulaynī*. al-Uṣūl. Vol. 2. P. 291, n° 45; cf. *al-Sayyārī*. Kitāb al-Qirā'āt. P. 163, n° 594 (Arabic text) and P. 249 (notes).

¹⁶ *Al-Sayyārī*. Kitāb al-Qirā'āt. P. 165, n° 601 (Arabic text) and P. 251 (notes); *al-Kulaynī*. al-Rawḍa. Vol. 1. P. 83, n° 18; *al-Kulaynī*. al-Uṣūl. Vol. 2. P. 291, n° 47; *al-Bahrānī*. Al-Burhān. Vol. 4. P. 381; *al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī*. Al-Ṣāfi. Vol. 2. P. 742.

¹⁷ Apart from the citations in works already referenced (note 2 and especially note 3), see also for example, *al-Majlisī*. Biḥār. Vol. 23. P. 374, n° 55; Vol. 24. P. 336, n° 59; Vol. 27. P. 159, n° 7; Vol. 36. P. 100, n° 44 and Vol. 51. P. 59, n° 57.

“In the Name of God the Compassionate the Merciful / You who believed, believe in the Prophet and the *walī* that We have sent in order that they may guide you upon the right path / A Prophet and a *walī* one from the other and I am the Omniscient / He who knows all / Those that remain loyal to the Pact of God, for them a Garden of delights / Whereas those that deny Our verses after hearing them / They will be ushered into the Gehenna until the Day of Resurrection when they shall be asked to account for the oppressors and negators of the messengers. / (God) created the messengers (sic) especially for (the cause of) the truth and He shall soon manifest them / Praise the Glory of your Lord and (know that) ‘Alī is among the witnesses.”¹⁸

This insistence on the original Revelation disclosed to Muḥammad concerning the *walāya* of the imams is, among other things, supposed to provide a literal Qur’anic basis for the policies and theological doctrines of imamat. However, not containing any literal indication of the *walāya* of the imams — and with reason, all indications of this kind were systematically deleted by the latter’s adversaries — the official vulgate seems to abound in allusions to this notion. Exegetic annotations traced to the imams often refer to this.

According to several exegetic hadiths attributed to the sixth imam, Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq, in verse 2:257: “...He brings them forth from the shadows into the light,” “darkness” refers to the imams’ adversaries and “light” to the imams and/or their *walāya*.¹⁹

Practically all Imami and even Shi‘i sources in general unanimously affirm that the reason for the “descent” of the famous verse 5:3: “...Today I have perfected your religion for you, and I have completed My blessing upon you...” is the proclamation of the *walāya* of ‘Alī by Muḥammad. Hence the regular association of this verse with events at Ghadīr Khumm. There are countless hadiths that refer to this matter.²⁰ One therefore often finds in Shi‘i works expressions

¹⁸ *Tisdall St.Cl.* Shi‘ah Additions. The Arabic text of “the sura” on page 226; English translation on page 234. For a discussion on this “sura” see: *Amir-Moezzi M.A.* Guide divin. P. 224–28; also: *Brunner R.* Die Schia. P. 16, 95–96.

¹⁹ *al-‘Ayyāshī.* Tafṣīr. Vol. 1. P. 138–39; *al-Majlisī.* Biḥār. Vol. 15 (1). P. 17, 129; *al-Baḥrānī.* Al-Burhān. Vol. 1. P. 244; *Bar-Asher.* Scripture and Exegesis. P. 197.

²⁰ See for example *al-‘Ayyāshī.* Tafṣīr. Vol. 1. P. 293; *al-Qummī.* Tafṣīr. Vol. 1: 190; *Furāt al-Kūfī.* Tafṣīr. P. 117–20; *Abū Ja‘far al-Ṭūsī.* Tafṣīr al-tibyān. 10 vols. Najaf, 1957. Vol. 3. P. 435ff.; *Abū ‘Alī al-Faḍl al-Ṭabrisī.* Majma‘ al-bayān fi tafṣīr al-Qur‘ān. Tehran, 1395/1975. Vol. 3. P. 159; *al-Majlisī.* Biḥār. Vol. 9. P. 306; *al-Baḥrānī.* Al-Burhān. Vol. 1. P. 444; *al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī.* Al-Ṣāfi. Vol. 1. P. 421; *Sharaf al-Dīn al-Najafī al-Astarābādī.* Ta’wīl al-āyat al-zāhira. Qumm, 1417/1997. P. 151–52; *Bar-Asher.* Scripture. P. 197. For the especially important role of this verse among Ismailis see e.g. *al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān.* Da‘ā‘im al-Islām. Ed. A.A.A. Fyze. Vol. 1. Cairo, 1370/1951. P. 16 and passim; *Abū Ḥatīm al-Rāzī.* Kitāb al-zīna. Ed. ‘A.S. Sāmarrā‘ī (*Al-Ghuluww wa l-firaq al-ghāliyya fi l-ḥaqārat al-Islāmiyya*). Baghdad, 1972. P. 256ff. See also the sources indicated by E. Kohlberg in “The Attitude of the Imāmi-Shī‘īs to the Companions of the Prophet” (Ph.D. thesis, Oxford, 1971), P. 81 n. 5, as well as in general; *Amīnī ‘A.H.* Al-Ghadīr fī l-kitāb wa l-sunna wa l-adab. Tehran, 1372/1952 (repr. 1986). On Ghadīr Khumm, see the article by L. Veccia Vaglieri in *EI*², s.v.; also *Encyc. Iranica*, s.v.

such as “Religion is perfected by *walāya*,” “The cause of *walāya* (or imamat) completes the faith” and “It is by *walāya* (or imamat) that religion and the (divine) blessing is perfected.”²¹

Sources unanimously consider verse 67 of the same sura 5 to be an allusion to the *walāya* of the imams; in effect God therein commands Muḥammad to openly reveal the truth regarding the *walāya* of ‘Alī and his descendants (see above); this verse might have been revealed prior to Ghadīr Khumm, whereas verse 5:3 that we have just examined is said to have “descended” shortly thereafter:

Q. 5:3: “...Today I have perfected your religion for you and rendered My blessing perfect...”²²

Imam al-Bāqir is said to have stated that “the way that is straightest” (*aqwam*) mentioned in verse 17:9: “Surely, this Qur’an guides to the way that is straightest,” refers to *walāya* of the imams.²³

In a commentary of Qur’an 27:91 that tradition attributes to ‘Alī:

“Whosoever comes with a good deed (*al-ḥasana*), he shall have better than it; and they shall be secure from terror that day. And whosoever comes with an evil deed (*sayyi’a*), their faces shall be thrust into the Fire: ‘Are you recompensed but for what you did?’ it is said: ‘The good deed is recognition of our *walāya* and love (*ḥubb*) for us, the Family of the Home (*ahl al-bayt*). The evil deed is denial of our *walāya* and hatred (*bughḍ*) for us.’”²⁴

²¹ *Ibn Bābūya*. Kamāl al-dīn bi l-walāya; amr al-walāya/al-imāma min tamām al-dīn; bi l-walāya/al-imāma kumila l-dīn wa tummat al-ni‘ma; see for example: *Faḍl b. Shādhān*. Kitāb al-Īdāh. Beirut, 1402/1982. P. 185; *al-Kulaynī*. al-Uṣūl. Vol. 1. P. 278; *Ibn Bābūya*. Kamāl al-dīn (even the title refers to it). Ed. ‘A.A. Ghaffārī. Reed. Qumm, 1405/1985. Vol. 2. P. 658. See also the index in *Biḥār* of al-Majlisī and: *Bayhom-Daou*. The Imam’s Knowledge and the Quran. P. 195, n. 55 (the interpretation of the third expression mentioned above, in which the verbs are put into the active form, seems problematic).

²² *al-‘Ayyāshī*. Tafṣīr. Vol. 1. P. 331–32; *al-Qummī*. Tafṣīr. Vol. 1: 199–202; *Furāt al-Kūfī*. Tafṣīr. P. 129–31; *Ibn Bābūya*. Amālī (al-Majālis). Text and Persian translation by M.B. Kama-reyī. Tehran, 1404/1984. “Majlis” 56, hadith n° 10; *al-Ṭūsī*. Tafṣīr al-tibyān. Vol. 1. P. 574ff.; *al-Bahrānī*. Al-Burhān. Vol. 1. P. 489; *al-Majlisī*. Biḥār. Vol. 9. P. 207; *al-Astarābādī*. Ta’wīl. P. 161–65. On commentaries by imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir on these and other verses, see: *Lalani A.R.* Early Shī‘a Thought: The Teachings of Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir. London, 2000. P. 61ff. See n. 6 above and the relevant text (remarking that an allusion to the *walāya* of ‘Alī appeared in the original text of the Qur’an).

²³ *al-‘Ayyāshī*. Tafṣīr. Vol. 2: 283; *al-Bahrānī*. Al-Burhān. Vol. 2. P. 409; *al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī*. Al-Šāfi. Vol. 1. P. 960; *al-Majlisī*. Biḥār. Vol. 7. P. 120; *al-Astarābādī*. Ta’wīl. P. 273 (according to *Kāfi* by al-Kulaynī, this work reports a tradition going back to imam Ja‘far that says “imam” instead of *walāya*).

²⁴ *al-Kulaynī*. al-Uṣūl. Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb ma‘rifat al-imām. Vol. 1. P. 262, n° 14. Cf. also: al-Uṣūl al-sittat ‘ashar. Qumm, 1405/1984. P. 117; *Furāt al-Kūfī*. Tafṣīr. P. 311–12; *al-Qummī*. Tafṣīr. Vol. 2. P. 132 (where other occurrences of the term *ḥasana* are also commented upon as meaning the *walāya* of the imams); *al-Majlisī*. Biḥār. Vol. 7. P. 117, n° 54; *al-Astarābādī*. Ta’wīl. P. 403–5. Regarding the translation of *ahl al-bayt* as “the Family of the Home”, see: *Amir-Moezzi M.A.* Considerations sur l’expression *dīn ‘Alī*, aux origines de la foi shi‘ite // *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 150/1 (2000). P. 48ff.

According to a tradition going back to the Prophet regarding the same verse:

“The *walāya* of ‘Alī is a good deed that cannot give rise to an error... Just as the *walāya* of his adversaries (*addād*) is a misdeed that nothing can efface”²⁵.

By hadiths going back to several imams the exegesis of Qur’an 39:56: “Lest any soul should say, ‘Alas for me, in that I neglected my duty to God and was a scoffer...’” establishes synonymy between “the duty to God” and the figure of the imam and/or his *walāya*.²⁶

Here again one may cite many more examples over dozens of pages. Very often, while speaking of the unfaithful, when the Qur’anic text employs the root KFR (to negate, deny, disbelieve, be impious, etc.), exegetic traditions attributed to the imams add *bi-nubuwwat Muḥammad wa walāyat ‘Alī* (“to deny” the prophetic mission of Muḥammad and the *walāya* of ‘Alī). We have just seen that certain Qur’anic terms are associated with *walāya* — namely *nūr* (light), *aqwam* (the most direct path), *ḥasana* (good deed), *janb Allāh* (God’s side).

Other terms are likewise associated — in some cases even more frequently — in doctrinal literature: *al-ḥaqq* (the truth, real, right), *ḥikma* (wisdom), *sabīl* (path), *ṣirāṭ mustaqīm* (straight path), *na‘īm* (benefit, delight), *raḥma* (mercy), *‘ahd* (pact), *dhikr* (remembrance) and of course *īmān* (faith) and *amr* (cause, the *res religiosa*). One only needs to refer to the exegetic glosses that deal with these Qur’anic occurrences; just turning, for example, to pre-Buyid *tafsīrs*, one is convinced that, according to the Shi‘is, numerous passages of the ‘Uthmānian vulgate are devoted to different aspects of the *walāya* of the imam — in spite of the censorship. Hence, the following hadith, attributed to imam Ja‘far: “God has made of our *walāya*, we the Family of the Home, the Axis (*quṭb*), around which the Qur’an gravitates.”²⁷

Pillars of Islam

In the economy of the sacred, *walāya* is essential and of such fundamental importance that it is considered one of the Pillars (*da‘ā’im*), if not *the* Pillar, of Islam. M.M. Bar-Asher’s observation that, for Shi‘is, the imams’ *walāya* is the most important canonical obligation and a pre-condition for all the rest is very pertinent. The great many traditions, describing *walāya* as one of the Pillars, as well as a number of differences among these traditions, lead him (just as J. Eliash before him) to wonder whether one must count *walāya* among the five Pillars or rather

²⁵ *al-Majlisī*. Bihār. Vol. 8. P. 300, n° 50; cf. also: *ibid.* Vol. 8. P. 352ff.

²⁶ *Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī*. Baṣā’ir al-darajāt. Ed. Mīrzā Kūčebāghī. Tabriz, n.d. (circa 1960). Section 2. Chapter 3. P. 61–63; *Furāt al-Kūfī*. Tafsīr. P. 366ff.; *al-Majlisī*. Bihār. Vol. 4. P. 9, n° 18 and Vol. 7. P. 200, n° 78; *al-Astarābādī*. Ta’wīl. P. 508–9.

²⁷ *al-‘Ayyāshī*. Tafsīr. Vol. 1: 5; *al-Bahrānī*. Al-Burhān. Vol. 1. P. 10; *al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī*. Al-Ṣāfī. Vol. 1. P. 12; *al-Majlisī*. Bihār. Vol. 19. P. 8.

as a sixth in itself. Indeed, to cite al-Kulaynī (d. 329/940–41) as only one example, in a chapter of his *Uṣūl min al-Kāfi*, treating the subject of the Pillars of Islam, he reports 15 traditions, all going back to the fifth and sixth imams, in which *walāya* as the case may be is counted separately among the Pillars:²⁸

“Islam is built upon five elements: canonical prayers, alms, the fast, pilgrimage to Mecca and *walāya*. More than the others, it is to the latter that people are called to.”²⁹

“The components of the faith (*ḥudūd al-īmān*) are: the *shahāda* that there is no god except God and Muḥammad is the messenger of God; belief in what the prophet brought on behalf of God; the five canonical prayers, alms, fasting during the month of Ramaḍān, the pilgrimage to Mecca, *walāya* with regard to the *walī* among us (the imams); hostility towards our enemy (‘*adāwat ‘aduwwinā*’) and, finally, frequenting the truthful (*al-dukhūl ma‘a l-ṣādiqīn*).”³⁰

“Islam rests upon a tripod (*athāfi*): prayer, alms and *walāya*. None of the three may have priority over the others.”

One must bear in mind that when canonical duties, such as canonical prayers, the fast or pilgrimage to Mecca, do not appear on a list, it does not mean that

²⁸ *Al-Kulaynī*. al-Uṣūl. Kitāb al-īmān wa l-kufr, bāb da‘ā’im al-islām. Vol. 3. P. 29–38.

²⁹ *Al-Kulaynī*. al-Uṣūl. Vol. 3. P. 29, n° 1 (tradition attributed to al-Bāqir); also: *ibid.* Vol. 3. P. 29–30, n° 3 (al-Bāqir), the same text with an additional sentence, “and the people accepted the (first) four and abandoned the last.” In another tradition, also attributed to al-Bāqir (*ibid.* Vol. 3. P. 30–32, n° 5), it is said that among the five Pillars, *walāya* is the supreme Pillar, for it is “the key” (*miftāḥ*) to all the others; then follow in sequence: prayers, alms, the pilgrimage and fast. The imam’s *walāya* is the highest degree of religion to such an extent that “if a man were to spend the entire night praying and all day fasting, offer all his possessions as alms and all the time he has to making the pilgrimage, but not recognise *walāya* of the *walī* of God, in order to undertake all his actions as guided by the latter, well then God would not reward him at all and he is not considered among people of the faith (*ahl al-īmān*).” (see: *ibid.* Vol. 3. P. 33, n°s 7 and 8 [al-Bāqir]). See also: *al-‘Ayyāshī*. Tafsīr. Vol. 1. P. 259; *Ibn Bābūya*. Amālī (= al-Majālis). Tehran, 1404/1984. “Majlis” 45, n° 14, 268.

³⁰ *Al-Kulaynī*. al-Uṣūl. Vol. 3. P. 29, n° 2 (Ja‘far); also: *ibid.* Vol. 3. P. 35, n° 11 (Ja‘far); *Muḥammad b. Ahmad Khwājagī Shīrāzī*. al-Nizāmiyya fī madhhab al-imāmiyya. Tehran, 1375/1996. P. 153–55. I will return to the idea of hostility towards enemies of the imams. The latter expression, *al-dukhūl ma‘a al-ṣādiqīn*, is still enigmatic to me: is it a question of associating with Shī‘is, in particular, the initiated among them, as a number of traditions recommend? (See, for example: *al-Kulaynī*. al-Uṣūl. Kitāb al-īmān wa l-kufr and Kitāb al-‘ishra and, especially: *Ibn Bābūya*. Muṣādaqat al-ikhwān. Tehran, n.d. (circa 1325/1946).) Regarding this list of the “terms of the faith,” see also: *al-Kulaynī*. al-Uṣūl. Vol. 3. P. 32–34, n°s 6 and 9 (Ja‘far), where prayers, the fast and pilgrimage are not counted; *ibid.* V. 3. P. 34–35 and 36, n°s. 10 and 13 (al-Bāqir), where the list is extended by duties such as awaiting the *qā‘im*, piety, making an effort, humility, submission to the imams, etc.; see also: *al-Nu‘mānī*. Kitāb al-ghayba. Ed. ‘A.A. Ghaffārī. The Persian translation by M.J. Ghaffārī. Tehran, 1363/1985. Chapter 11, n° 16.

they are not one of the Pillars, rather that they are integrated into *walāya* since the latter is “the Key” to all the rest.³¹

As it is unthinkable for it not to be among the Pillars of Islam, the most telling example is the *shahāda*. When missing from a list, it is included in *walāya*, since, for a Shi‘i, the *shahāda* implicitly contains a triple profession of faith: the unicity of God; Prophet Muḥammad’s mission; the *walāya* of ‘Alī and the imams in his lineage.³² Without the imam, the *walī* of God and his *walāya*, there would be no religion at all. Without *walāya*, none of the religious duties are accepted by God.³³ In *al-Maḥāsin*, Abū Ja‘far al-Barqī (d. 274/887 or 280/893) devotes three chapters of his “Kitāb ‘iqāb al-a‘māl” to the consequences of not recognising the imams and their *walāya*.³⁴ To cite a few typical examples of traditions from these chapters:

“God established ‘Alī as a point of reference (*‘alam*) between Himself and His creation and there are none others. He who follows ‘Alī is a believer; he who rejects him is an unbeliever and he who doubts him, an associationist.”³⁵

“...(God says to the Prophet): ‘I created the seven heavens and what they contain; I created the seven earths and what they contain. If one of My followers invoked Me from the beginning of creation (to the Resurrection) or if I were to encounter him while he rejects the *walāya* of ‘Alī, I would swiftly rush him to hell.’”³⁶

³¹ *Al-Kulaynī*. al-Uṣūl. Vol. 3. P. 30, n° 4 (Ja‘far). Tradition n° 15 (Ja‘far; ibid. Vol. 3. P. 38) refers only to prayers, alms and the holy war. It is true that the last is not one of the Pillars of Islam and seems out of place in this chapter. See also: *Abū Ja‘far al-Ṭabarī*. Bishārat al-Muṣṭafā li-shī‘at al-Murtaḍā. Najaf, 1963. P. 81; *‘Imād al-Dīn al-Ṭabarī*. Tuḥfat al-abrār fī manāqib a‘immat al-aḥbār. Tehran, 1376/1997. P. 155ff.

³² See, for example: *Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī*. Baṣā‘ir al-darajāt. Section 2. Chapter 10, n° 7. P. 78; *al-Qummī*. Tafsīr. Vol. 2. P. 208; *Ibn Bābūya*. Kamāl al-dīn. Vol. 1. P. 258; *Ibn Bābūya*. Amālī (= al-Majālis). “Majlis” 63, n° 13. P. 409 (“...the attestation of Unicity (*al-tawḥīd*) is only accepted due to ‘Alī and his *walāya*”); *al-Majlisī*. Biḥār. Vol. 3. P. 14, n° 39; 37; P. 141, n° 35; Vol. 38. P. 118, n° 60. For other sources, see: *Eliash*. On the Genesis... of Three-tenet Shahāda, especially P. 266ff.; cf. *Bar-Asher*. Scripture and Exegesis. P. 198 (the latter believes that differences in various lists of the Pillars seem to reflect internal debates within the Imami community).

³³ See above n. 32; *Amir-Moezzi*. Guide divin. P. 304–5.

³⁴ *Al-Barqī*. Kitāb al-maḥāsin. Ed. J. Muḥaddith Urmawī. Tehran, 1370/1950. Kitāb ‘iqāb al-a‘māl. Chapters 15 (*‘iqāb man shakka fī amīr al-mu‘minīn*), 16 (*‘iqāb man ankara Āl Muḥammad ḥaqqahum wa jahala amrahum*) (we have seen that often *ḥaqq* and *amr* are synonymous with *walāya*) and 17 (*‘iqāb man lam ya‘rif imāmahu*). Vol. 1. P. 89–93.

³⁵ *Al-Barqī*. Kitāb al-maḥāsin. Chapter 15, n° 34. Vol. 1. P. 89 (tradition going back to al-Bāqir). The accusation of *shirk* is probably levelled at those who associate other *walāyas* to that of ‘Alī. See above verse 42:13 according to “the Qur’an of the imams” (note 14 and the related text; also n. 86 below).

³⁶ *Al-Barqī*. Kitāb al-maḥāsin. n° 38. Vol. 1. P. 90 (Ja‘far).

“...If at Mecca (lit. between *al-Rukn* and *al-Maqām*, two sacred sites, considered places of worship in the holy city) a follower worshipped God for a hundred years; if he devoted his days to fasting and nights to prayer until old age but all the while remained unaware of our truth (or “rights,” *ḥaqq*, i.e. *walāya*) he would receive no reward (from God).”³⁷

“He who dies without having known his imam dies a pagan’s death as in the Age of Ignorance (i.e. pre-Islamic times — *al-jāhiliyya*).”³⁸

Other early compilers of imami hadiths report many other traditions of the same kind:

“...The man who fasts the entire day and prays all night long, but encounters God (upon the Day of Resurrection) without (having professed) our *walāya*, will find God dissatisfied and even angry with him.”³⁹

“...Are you not satisfied (you who are faithful to the imams) that due to your *walāya* towards us your prayer is accepted whereas theirs (i.e. of the imams’ adversaries) is not; that your alms are accepted whereas theirs is not; that your pilgrimage is valid whereas theirs is not....”⁴⁰

“The Prophet: The imams that will follow are twelve in number; the first is Abū Ṭālib and the last is the *qā’im*. Within my community, after me they are my caliphs, legatees, my *awliyā’* and the Proofs of God. He who recognises them is a believer and he who does not, an infidel.”⁴¹

³⁷ *Al-Barqī*. Kitāb al-maḥāsīn. Chapter 16, n° 40. Vol. 1. P. 90 (Ja’far).

³⁸ *Al-Barqī*. Kitāb al-maḥāsīn. Chapter 17, n° 46. Vol. 1. P. 92 (Ja’far). Regarding this very famous tradition, *mīta jāhiliyya* and the early sources that report it, see: *Amir-Moezzi*. Guide divin. P. 301 and n. 671. For similar traditions see also: *Ibn Bābūya*. Kitāb thawāb al-a’māl wa ‘iqāb al-a’māl. Ed. ‘A.A. Ghaffārī. Tehran, 1391/1971. P. 242–44.

³⁹ *Al-‘Ayyāshī*. Tafsiṛ. Vol. 2. P. 89; *Bar-Asher*. Scripture and Exegesis. P. 196.

⁴⁰ *Al-Kulaynī*. al-Rawḍa min al-Kāfi. Vol. 2. P. 43, n° 316 (tradition going back to Ja’far). Tradition also reported by al-Majlisī (Biḥār. Vol. 8. P. 300 and 352), as well as a similar tradition that ends with the sentence: “...Those who excuse themselves from fulfilling their canonical duties will in this world benefit from comfort, health or influence (*al-ni’am wa l-ṣiḥḥa aw al-si’a*), but in the Hereafter they will solely experience eternal punishment”. See also: *Al-Kulaynī*. al-Rawḍa. Vol. 1. P. 154, n° 80 (Ja’far) or Vol. 2. P. 89, n° 399 (Ja’far), “God made five elements obligatory for Muḥammad’s community: prayer, alms, fasting, the pilgrimage to Mecca and our *walāya*. Now, for the first four, He allowed exemptions; in special circumstances (*rukḥṣa*, in cases such as illness, menstruation and financial difficulties) these duties may be abandoned, whereas our *walāya* must never be abandoned.”

⁴¹ *Ibn Bābūya*. Kamāl al-dīn. Vol. 1. P. 259 (tradition going back to Ja’far which he received from his father and paternal ancestors); also: *ibid.* Vol. 1. P. 261 (tradition attributed to al-Riḍā). See also: *Ibn Bābūya*. Amālī (al-Majālīs). “Majlis” 73, n° 12. P. 484–85 and “Majlis” 85, n° 28. P. 583–84. Among the Isma’īlis, it is quite telling that a great thinker such as al-Qāḍī al-Nu’mān (d. 363/974), begins his monumental profession of faith, the *Da’ā’im al-Islām* with the “Kitāb al-walāya” (*al-Qāḍī al-Nu’mān*. Da’ā’im al-Islām. Ed. A. Fyzee. Vol. 1. P. 1–120). He reports a number of traditions that we have just mentioned. It is true that a great majority of traditions from the corpus, going back to imams Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Ja’far al-Ṣādiq, are

Semantical levels and their theological and eschatological implications

A central issue and motivating factor for the revelation of the Qur'an, both in its original complete version and in the so-called censored *textus receptus*, as the supreme Pillar of Islam and a canonical duty with greatest priority determining the validity of all the others, for the Shi'i *walāya* constitutes the core of the faith without which the religion loses its substance. Where does this sacred significance attached to it stem from?

What does it mean exactly for the Shi'i religious consciousness? H. Corbin devoted studies of some consequence to this very issue.⁴² The following brief summary is a modest attempt to supplement the renowned French scholar's work, mainly by drawing from the earliest sources of Imami hadith, relatively less explored even considering that those works by Corbin were published posthumously.⁴³

In a note from *The Divine Guide*, I proposed a cursory definition of *walāya*:

"In contrast to the semantic complexity of the term *walāya* in the administrative, social, and religious language of the beginnings of Islam and later in the technical terminology of Sufism, *walāya*, in the context of early Shi'ism, has a quite simple translation with two interdependent and complementary meanings: applied to the imams of different prophets, it refers to their ontological status or their sacred initiatory mission; several nuances of the root *WLY* are found in the meaning: the *walī* — imam is the 'friend' and the closest 'helper' of God and His prophet; he immediately 'follows' the latter in his mission; he is the 'chief,' the 'master' of believers par excellence. In this acception, *walī* is a synonym of *waṣī* (the inheritor, the heir [of the sacred cause of the prophets]) or the *mawlā* (applied to the imam, the term means the master, the guide, the protector, the *patronus*). Applied to the faithful of the imams, *walāya* denotes the unfailing love, faith, and submission that the

common among the Imamis and Ismailis (see: *Fyzee A.A.A. "The Book of Walaya" // The Pillars of Islam: Da'ā'im al-islām* of al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān. Completed, revised and annotated by I.K. Poonawala. Vol. 1. New York-Oxford, 2002; also see the important article by A. Nanji: *Nanji A. An Ismaili Theory of Walāya in the Da'ā'im al-islām* of al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān // *Little D.P.* (ed.). *Essays on Islamic Civilization Presented to Niyazi Berkes*. Leiden: Brill, 1976. P. 260–273).

⁴² See particularly: *Corbin H. En Islam iranien, Aspects spirituels et philosophiques*. 4 vols. Paris: Gallimard, 1971–72. Vol. 1. "Le shī'isme duodécimain." Chapters 6 and 7. P. 219–329; also: *idem. Histoire de la philosophie islamique*. Paris: Gallimard, 1986, sections II.A. 4. and II.A. 5. P. 78–98.

⁴³ Al-Kulaynī's "Al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfī" is practically his only early source. In his studies, H. Corbin bases his argument mainly on philosophical and mystical texts of a much later period. May I reiterate that "Le Guide divin" is also a monograph devoted entirely to imamate and the figure of the imam in early Shiism. See also the excellent summary by H. Landolt: *Landolt H. Walāyah // The Encyclopedia of Religion*. Vol. 15 (1995). P. 316–23 (on Shi'ī *walāya* — P. 319–20), as well as: *Walker P. Chapter "Wilāya," in Shī'ism // EI²*. Vol. 10. P. 208–9, s.v.

initiated owe to their holy initiating guide; in this acceptance, the term becomes the equivalent of *tawallī* (being the faithful friend or the obedient protégé of someone); 'true Shiites' are called the *mutawallī* of the imams...⁴⁴

Let us consider these two semantic levels more closely.

1. *Walāya in relation to the imam*

Walāya as a sacred mission of imams is equivalent to imamate, i.e., briefly stated, the spiritual and temporal direction of the faithful. In this case, one may translate it as "power," even "sacred power," since it is granted to the imams by divine election. If the imam is called upon to direct the faithful after the Prophet's death, it is because the imamat/*walāya* is the indispensable complement to prophethood (*nubuwwa*) in accordance with the Shi'ī pair *zāhir/bāṭin* that operates at every level of reality.⁴⁵

According to this conception, the prophet (*nabī*) is a messenger of the letter of the Revelation (*tanzīl*) for the masses ('*amma/awāmm*) that constitute the majority (*akthar*) of a given community. In the same way, the imam (*walī*), complementing the prophet's mission, teaches the hidden spiritual meaning (*ta'wīl*) of the Revelation to a minority (*aqall*) that constitutes the elite (*khāṣṣa/khawāṣṣ*) of this community.⁴⁶ Without the initiatory teaching of the imam, the profound meaning of the Revelation would remain unfathomed, just as a text interpreted in letter but not in spirit would remain forever poorly understood.

Which is why the Qur'an is called the mute, Silent Book or Guide, (*imām ṣāmit*) whereas the Imam is said to be the speaking Qur'an (*qur'ān nāṭiq*).⁴⁷ "Among you there is someone, the Prophet is said to have stated, who fights for a spiritual interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of the Qur'an as I fought for the revelation in letter (*tanzīl*), and this person is Abū Ṭālib."⁴⁸

⁴⁴ *Amir-Moezzi*. Guide divin. P. 74, n. 151.

⁴⁵ See: *Amir-Moezzi M.A.* Du droit à la théologie: Les niveaux de réalité dans le Shi'isme duodécimain // *L'Esprit et la Nature*. Actes du colloque tenu à Paris les 11 et 12 mai 1996. *Cahiers du groupe d'études spirituelles comparées* 5. Paris, 1997. P. 37–63.

⁴⁶ See the recently published: *Kohlberg E.* In Praise of the Few // *Studies in Islamic and Middle Eastern Texts and Traditions*. Oxford: OUP, 2000. P. 149–62.

⁴⁷ *Ayoub M.* The Speaking Qur'an and the Silent Qur'an: A Study of the Principles and Development of Imāmī Tafsīr // *Rippin A.* (ed.). Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an. Oxford: OUP, 1988. P. 177–98; *Bar-Asher*. Scripture and Exegesis. P. 88ff.

⁴⁸ *al-'Ayyāshī*. Tafsīr. Vol. 1. P. 15–16 (tradition n° 6 going back to Ja'far; he received it from his paternal ancestors. See also tradition n° 13 (going back to the same imam): "God taught the prophet the letter of the Revelation; as for the interpretation of its hidden meaning, the Prophet of God taught it to 'Alī"); *al-Khazzāz al-Rāzī*. Kifāyat al-athar. Qumm, 1401/1980. P. 76, 88, 117, 135 (on P. 66, it is the *qā'im* who is said to be the warrior of *ta'wīl*); *al-Shahrastānī*. al-Milal wa l-niḥal. Beirut, n.d. P. 189; *al-Baḥrānī*. Al-Burhān. Vol. 1. P. 17; *al-Majlisī*. Biḥār. Vol. 19. P. 25–26; for other sources, see: *Bar-Asher*. Scripture. P. 88, n. 1; also section 9, n. 30 and the related text.

As we know, in early Shi'i hadith, Muḥammad as the archetype of *nubuwwa* and legislating prophet *par excellence* may symbolise prophethood and all the prophets as a whole; just as 'Alī, imam *par excellence*, archetype of *walāya*, may be the supreme symbol of imamate or of all the imams as a whole.⁴⁹ For, according to the imami prophetology, all the prophets as messengers of various divine revelations in letter (the *zāhir*) were accompanied in their mission by one or several imams whose task was to unveil the hidden meaning (the *bāṭin*) of the Word of God.⁵⁰

This dimension and meaning of *walāya*/imamate are rather well known and so there is no need to elaborate much further. However, there is more to the term. *Walāya* also denotes the essential nature of the Figure of the imam, his ontological status. Now, the imam/*walī*, in the ultimate reality of his being, is the locus for the manifestation of God (*maḥzar*, *majlā*), the vehicle of the divine Names and Attributes (*al-asmā' wa l-ṣifāt*). "By God, imam Ja'far supposedly stated, we (the imams) are the Most Beautiful Names (of God)."⁵¹

The imam reveals God, he provides access to what may be known of Him, the *Deus Revelatus*, the *zāhir* of God. The *bāṭin* of God, His Face, forever unknowable and hidden, is the level of the Essence (*al-dhāt*), the *Deus Absconditus*.⁵² One cannot overemphasise this fundamental conception of *walāya* in Shi'i esoterism. Whether, as I believe, it is a matter of an early doctrine professed by the imams themselves,⁵³ at least — according to M.G. Hodgson⁵⁴ — since the period of Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765), or the beliefs emanating from "extremist" Shi'i circles, having later influenced the so-called "moderate" imamism, as H. Modarressi maintains,⁵⁵ it is nonetheless true that this conception of the divine

⁴⁹ See the beginning of this article.

⁵⁰ See, for example, the entire first part of the important early work, "Ithbāt al-waṣiyya li l-imām 'Alī b. Abū Ṭālib," attributed to al-Mas'ūdī (d. 345/956) (one of its most recent editions: Qumm, 1417/1996. P. 20–90). See also *Rubīn U. Prophets and Progenitors in the Early Shī'a Tradition // Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 1, 1979. P. 41–65.

⁵¹ *al-'Ayyāshī*. Tafsīr. Vol. 2. P. 42; *Al-Kulaynī*. al-Uṣūl. Kitāb al-tawḥīd, bāb al-nawādir. Vol. 1. P. 296, n° 4.

⁵² See: *Amir-Moezzi*. Du droit à la théologie. P. 47–48 and 62–63.

⁵³ In several publications, apart from "Le Guide divin" and "Du droit à la théologie," mentioned already; see also: *Amir-Moezzi M.A. Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī* (d. 290/902–3) et son *Kitāb Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt // Journal asiatique* 280 (3–4, 1992). P. 221–50. Briefly stated, in my opinion, taking into consideration the fluctuating descriptions that heresiographers and other authors provide of the *ghulāt* and considering traditions related to theories attributed to the *ghulāt*, as reported by the earliest compilations of Imami hadith, and in view of our lack of knowledge regarding the nature of relations between different Shi'i branches in the earliest centuries, the distinction between "moderate" and "extremist" Shi'is during these early times seems artificial and not based on textual evidence.

⁵⁴ *Hodgson M.A.* How did the Early Shi'a Become Sectarian // *JAOS*. LXV (1955). P. 1–13, especially P. 8ff.; *idem*. Dja'far al-Ṣādiq; *Ghulāt // EP*, s.v.

⁵⁵ *Modarressi H.* Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shī'ite Islam: Abū Ja'far ibn Qiba al-Rāzī and His Contribution to Imāmite Shī'ite Thought. Princeton: PUP, 1993. Part One, especially P. 19–53. The debate bearing upon both the history of ideas and simply history of the early centuries of Islam is obviously beyond the scope of the present study.

nature of the imam is reported ever since the second half of the 3rd/9th century⁵⁶ in the earliest of hadiths, said to be authorised, and thus form an integral part of the imami religious consciousness for at least a thousand years. This is often forgotten by scholars, surely because the Shi‘ites themselves hardly speak of it or if so allusively only, no doubt due to the discipline of the arcanum.

Hence certain sayings traced back to the imams that are inevitably associated with *shatahāt* (“ecstatic utterances”) of the mystics:⁵⁷

“...I am the Rewarder (*dayyān*) of men on the day of Retribution,” ‘Alī is supposed to have said; “I am he who allocates between Garden and Fire, none is to enter without my allocation. I am the Supreme Judge (*al-fāriq al-akbar*)... I possess the decisive Word (*faṣl al-khiṭāb*); I hold the penetrating View of the Path of the Book... I have Knowledge of the fortunes and misfortunes, as well as of the judgements. I am the Perfection of Religion. I am God’s Blessing for His creatures.”⁵⁸

And:

“I am the Queen Bee (*ya’sūb*) of the initiates; I am the First among the Ancients; I am the successor to the Messenger of the Lord of the worlds; I am the Judge of Garden and Fire...”⁵⁹

In a tradition going back to the Prophet, Muḥammad stated regarding ‘Alī:

“Here is the most radiant imam, the longest Spear of God, the most ample Threshold of God; let he who seeks God enter by this Threshold... Without ‘Alī, the truth shall not be distinguished from the false, nor the faithful from the unfaithful; without ‘Alī, God would not have been worshipped... Neither

⁵⁶ On the most important and earliest of these compilations, namely those by al-Barqī (d. 274/887 or 280/893), al-Ṣaffār (d. 290/902–3) and al-Kulaynī (d. 329/940–41), now see: Newman A.J. *The Formative Period of Twelver Shī‘ism: Hadīth as Discourse between Qum and Baghdad*. Richmond, 2000.

⁵⁷ These are sayings in which “God speaks in the first person through the lips of the mystic”; see, for example: *Massignon L.* *Essai sur les origines du lexique technique de la mystique musulmane*. Paris, 1922, s.v.; *idem.* *La passion de Hallāj, martyr mystique de l’Islam*. 4 vols., reed. Paris, 1975, index s.v.; *Corbin H.* *Introduction // Rūzbihān Baqlī Shīrāzī*. Sharḥ-i shatḥiyyāt. Ed. H. Corbin and M. Mo‘īn. Paris–Tehran, 1966 (reed. Tehran, 2004); *Ernst C.* *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism*. New York: SUNY, 1985; *Ballanfat P.* *Réflexions sur la nature du paradoxe: La définition de Rūzbehān Baqlī Shīrāzī // Kār Nāmeḥ*. Vol. 2–3. Paris, 1995. P. 25–40. It is important, however, to clarify that the bases, as well as the theological and anthropological implications, of the Sufis’ “words of ecstasy” and the sayings of the imams seem different.

⁵⁸ *Furāt al-Kūfi*. Tafsīr. P. 178. The last two sentences are clearly allusions to Qur’an 5:3 on the “perfection of religion and blessing,” as we have stated above.

⁵⁹ *al-‘Ayyāshī*. Tafsīr. Vol. 2. P. 17–18; *al-Majlisī*. Biḥār. Vol. 3. P. 389; *al-Baḥrānī*. *Al-Burhān*. Vol. 2. P. 20. Regarding the Shi‘is symbolised as bees or ‘Alī as the “Commander of Bees” (*amir al-naḥl*), see: *Goldziher I.* *Schi‘itisches // Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 64, 1910. P. 532–33 (reprinted in: *Gesammelte Schriften*. Ed. J. de Somogyi. Hildesheim, 1967–70. Bd. 5. P. 213–14).

Curtain (*sitr*) nor Veil (*hijāb*) between God and him... No!... ‘Alī himself is Curtain and Veil...’⁶⁰

A tradition has al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī saying:

“We (the imams) are the First and the Last; we are the Commanders; we are the Light. The Light of spiritual beings comes from us. We illuminate by the Light of God. We render joyful by His Joy (or: we spiritualise by His spirit — *nurawwiḥu bi rawḥih/rūḥih* — the possessive adjective, here as well as below, may refer to the Light as well as to God; the ambiguity is undoubtedly intended); within us is His abode; towards us is His source. Our first is identical to our last and our last identical to our first.”⁶¹

According to a tradition reported by a number of sources imam ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-‘Ābidīn once transformed himself into a winged being and, to the amazement of his disciples, disappeared into the heavens. Upon his return, he declared that he had travelled to the loftiest of heavens (*a’lā ‘illiyīn*) and is said to have responded to an adept thus:

“We (the imams) are the ones who built the most elevated heaven; why then would we not be able to scale its heights? We are the Bearers of the (divine) Throne (*‘arsh*) and we are seated upon the Throne. The Throne and Pedestal (*kursī*) belong to us.”⁶²

According to a hadith, attributed to imam Ja‘far:

“We manifest Light in darkness. We are the Oft-Frequented Abode (*al-bayt al-ma‘mūr* (Q. 52:4)) where one who enters, enters in safety. We are the Magnificence and Grandeur of God... We are beyond all description; due to us eyes are brightened, ears listen; hearts are filled with faith...”⁶³

The same sixth imam is said to have declared:

“God has made of us His Eyes among His worshippers, His Eloquent Tongue among His creatures, His benevolent and merciful Hand extended over His servants, His face due to which one is led to Him, His Threshold that guides one to Him, His Treasure in the heavens and on the earth... It is by our act of worship that God is worshipped; without us God would not be worshipped.”

⁶⁰ *Furāt al-Kūfi*. Tafsiṛ. P. 371. This kind of declarations already prefigure what I have called “theo-imamosophic prones” of ‘Alī, reported by later sources.

⁶¹ *Al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr*. Nawādir al-mu‘jizāt. Qumm, 1410/1990. P. 103; *idem*. Dalā’il al-imāma. Qumm, 1413/1994. P. 168–69; *al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī*. Ithbāt al-hudāt. Vol. 5. P. 157; *al-Bahrānī*. Madīnat al-ma‘ājiz. Tehran, n.d. (circa 1960). P. 204–5.

⁶² *Al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr*. Nawādir al-mu‘jizāt. P. 116; *idem*. Dalā’il al-imāma. P. 201; *al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī*. Ithbāt al-hudāt. Vol. 5. P. 256; *al-Bahrānī*. Madīnat al-ma‘ājiz. P. 294.

⁶³ *Al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr*. Dalā’il al-imāma. P. 270–71; *al-Bahrānī*. Madīnat al-ma‘ājiz. P. 394–95.

The last sentence (*bi 'ibādatinā 'ubida 'llāh law lā naḥnu mā 'ubida 'llāh*) may also be read: "It is by virtue of the fact that we (the imams) are worshipped that God is worshipped; without us God would not be worshipped"; here too the rather audacious ambiguity seems deliberate.⁶⁴

To end this hardly exhaustive list, let us report the following dialogue between Ja'far al-Ṣādiq and one of his disciples, who asks him if on the Day of Resurrection the initiated believers (*al-mu'minūn*) will be able to see God. The imam replies:

"Yes, but they will have already seen him long before the advent of this Day. 'When was this?' 'When God asked them: "Am I not your Lord?" and they replied "yes, most certainly" (Q. 7:172).' The disciple reports, his master then remained silent for a long time before declaring: 'The initiates see Him already in this world before the Day of Resurrection. Do you not see Him at this very moment, even before you now? (i.e. in my very being).' 'If I were to serve as ransom, may I with your permission report these words?' 'No, for a denier unaware of their true meaning will use them to accuse us of assimilationism and unfaithfulness.'"⁶⁵

This aspect of *walāya* characterises the Imam (with the 'i' in upper case) in its cosmic, archetypal and metaphysical sense: the divine Perfect Man, if not Man-God, — that is to say, *walāya* as the locus of manifestation for the Attributes of God. The last part of the dialogue between Ja'far al-Ṣādiq and his disciple demonstrates well that this concept constitutes a secret that must be kept from the unworthy. It is even *the* ultimate Secret teaching of the imams.⁶⁶

"All things have a secret, the secret of Islam is Shi'ism (literally: the Shi'is, *al-shī'a*) and the secret of Shi'ism is the *walāya* of 'Alī."⁶⁷

⁶⁴ *Ibn Bābūya*. Kitāb al-Tawḥīd. Ed. H. al-Ḥusaynī al-Tīhrānī. Tehran, 1398/1978. Chapter 12, n° 8. P. 151–52. According to another tradition, someone asks imam Ja'far: "What would happen on earth if a physical living Sage ('*alim ḥayy zāhir*'; i.e., the imam), to whom people have recourse for what is licit and illicit, were not present?" Ja'far answers: "God could not be worshipped (in such a world)" (*al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī*. Nawādir al-akhbār. Ed. M. al-Anṣārī al-Qummī. Tehran, 1375/1996. Kitāb al-nubuwwa wa l-imāma, tradition n° 2. P. 129 (based on: *Ibn Bābūya*. 'Ilal al-sharā'i'. Chapter 153, n° 3. Vol. 1. P. 195).

⁶⁵ *Ibn Bābūya*. Kitāb al-Tawḥīd. Chapter 8, n° 20. P. 117; *Amir-Moezzi*. Guide divin. P. 141, n. 277 (with other hadiths similar in content). It is symptomatic that W. Chittick, who provides an English translation of this tradition in "A Shi'ite Anthology" (New York, 1981. P. 42), does not point out the *shāḥ* that it contains and which constitutes its focal point.

⁶⁶ *Amir-Moezzi*. Du droit à la théologie. P. 47–48, 55, 62–63.

⁶⁷ *Ibn 'Ayyāsh al-Jawharī*. Muqtaḍab al-athar. Tehran, 1346/1927. P. 23 (tradition attributed to Ja'far); see also a shorter version in: *al-Kulaynī*. al-Rawḍa. Vol. 2. P. 14. Although each imam in every cycle during mankind's sacred History has been the locus of manifestation for this cosmic Imam, 'Alī remains His supreme vehicle and symbol *par excellence*. Which is why in a number of traditions — apart from the obvious meaning — 'Alī also signifies the cosmic Imam or *walāya* / imamate in general; just as Muḥammad, beyond the obvious meaning, may also signify the archetypal Messenger-Prophet or prophethood (*nubuwwa*) in general. One may

If we were to apply the technical meaning to these terms we would understand that a secret veiled behind the letter of a religion is the esoteric teaching of its initiated, and the key secret of this teaching is the divinity of the Imam, the divine Guide.

“Something in you resembles Jesus the son of Mary,” — the Prophet is supposed to have said to ‘Alī, — “and had I not feared that some groups within my community would say what is said of Jesus by the Christians, I would have revealed something about you that would have made people gather the dust beneath your feet to seek blessings.”⁶⁸

This secret dimension of *walāya* may be considered the esoteric of the esoteric (*bāṭin al-bāṭin*) of the imams’ teachings. Thus state the *hadiths*, such as:

“Our teaching is the truth; truth of the truth; it is the exoteric, esoteric and esoteric of the esoteric; it is the secret and secret of a secret, a well-guarded secret, hidden by a secret.”⁶⁹

“Our doctrine (*amr*: cause, order, affair, teaching ... as we have seen, the term is often identified with *walāya*) is a secret, contained within a secret, a well-guarded secret, a secret whose only benefit is a secret, a secret veiled by a secret.”⁷⁰

“Our doctrine is hidden, sealed by the original Pact (*al-mūthāq* — I shall return to this matter regarding the pre-existence of *walāya*). God will render him who reveals it contemptible.”⁷¹

One may say that the historical imam/*walī*, physical, initiating master *par excellence* is the guardian of a Secret, whose content is the metaphysical Imam, throne of the cosmic *walāya*: “We are the Treasure (*khazāna*) and the Treasurers (*khuzzān/khazana*) of God’s Secret.”⁷² Both meanings of *walāya* vis-à-vis the

make a similar comment regarding the terms *islām* (strictly referring to the Muslim religion and, in a wider sense, the exoteric dimension, the “letter” of each religion) and *shī‘a* (referring to the Shi‘is of Islam; and, in a wider sense, to the initiatic, esoteric dimension — “the spirit” of each religion) (see note 93 below). Thus the hadith attributed to Ja‘far may also be understood as follows: “All things have a secret; the hidden secret, the ‘letter’ of every religion is its initiatic, esoteric dimension and the secret of the latter is *walāya* of the cosmic Man.”

⁶⁸ *al-Kulaynī. al-Rawḍa*. Vol. 1: 81.

⁶⁹ *Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī. Baṣā’ir al-darajāt*. Section 1. Chapter 12, n° 4. P. 28 (Ja‘far).

⁷⁰ *Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī. Baṣā’ir al-darajāt*. Section 1. Chapter 12, n° 1. P. 28 (Ja‘far).

⁷¹ *Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī. Baṣā’ir al-darajāt*. Section 1. Chapter 12, n° 2. P. 28 (al-Bāqir). On the duty of preserving a secret (*taqīyya, kitmān, khab’*), now see: *Kohlberg E. Taqīyya in Shī‘ī Theology and Religion // Kippenberg H.G. and G.G. Stroumsa* (eds.). *Secrecy and Concealment. Studies in the History of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Religions*. Leiden: Brill, 1995. P. 345–80 (which supplements a previous study by the same author: *Kohlberg E. “Some Imāmī-Shī‘ī Views on taqīyya // JAOS 95, 1975. P. 395–402* (reprinted in: *Belief and Law in Imāmī Shī‘ism*. Aldershot, 1991. Section III).

⁷² *Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī. Baṣā’ir al-darajāt*. Section 2. Chapter 3; *al-Kulaynī. al-Uṣūl*. Kitāb al-ḥujja. Chapters 13 and 14; *al-Kulaynī. al-Rawḍa*. Vol. 1. P. 101f.; *Ibn Bābūya. ‘Uyūn akhbār*

imam are therefore inseparable: first, the historical imam is the locus of manifestation for the cosmic Imam, just as the latter, theophany *par excellence*, is the locus of manifestation for God. Secondly, the ultimate content, the very “marrow” of the historic imams’ teachings, is, therefore, the secret substance of different Revelations, the veritable spirit hidden behind the letter of these revelations, the Mystery of the ontological Imam.

At this level, *walāya* may be translated as “Friendship” (with God), “Alliance” (with God), Proximity (of God) — all qualities implying the profound meaning of “Saintliness” (the conventional translation of *walāya*) — yet, although obviously corresponding to some of the meanings that the root WLY harbours, none of these terms is equal to the theological content of this very special dimension of the concept at hand. It is in this sense that *walāya* constitutes the esoteric dimension of the prophet’s message and mission: *al-walāya bāṭin al-nubuwwa*, as other Shi‘is have tirelessly emphasised. It is the central term of an entire series of “complementary pairs” that characterise the dialectic of the manifest and hidden in Shi‘ism.

<u>the manifest</u>	<u>the hidden</u>
<i>Zāhir</i>	<i>Bāṭin</i>
<i>Nabī</i>	<i>Walī</i>
Muḥammad	‘Alī
<i>Tanzīl</i>	<i>Ta’wīl</i>
<i>Islām</i>	<i>Īmān</i>
<i>Muslim</i>	<i>Mu’min</i>
<i>akthar/‘amma</i>	<i>aqall/khāṣṣa</i> ⁷³

Whether it relates to the imam’s mission or his ontological status, in other words to the historical or metaphysical sense of imamate, the imam’s *walāya* is said to be as ancient as creation.

“When God the Most High created the Heavens and the Earth,” — the Prophet is supposed to have said, — “He summoned them and they replied, then He introduced my *nubuwwa* and the *walāya* of Abū Ṭālib and they accepted. Then God created all beings and entrusted us the matter of (their) religion (*amr al-dīn*). So it came to be that the fortunate are fortunate by us and

al-Riḍā. Ed. M.H. Lājevardī. Tehran, 1398/1978. Vol. 1. Chapters 19 and 20; *Ibn Bābūya*. Ma’ānī l-akhbār. Ed. ‘A.A. Ghaffārī. Tehran, 1379/1959. P. 132; *Ibn Bābūya*. Ṣifāt al-shī‘a (+ Faḍā’il al-shī‘a). Ed. H. Fashāhī. Tehran, 1342/1963–64. P. 60ff.; *Ibn ‘Ayyāsh al-Jawhārī*. Muṭaḍāb al-athar. P. 39.

⁷³ See: *Amir-Moezzi*. Le Guide divin. P. 308; for the pair *islām/īmān*, technically referring to “Islam in the Majority/the religion of the Initiated (i.e. Shi‘ism)” and “submission exclusively to the letter of the Exoteric religion/initiation into the Esoteric religion,” as well as *muslim/mu’min*, signifying “common” Muslim/initiated Shi‘i, see: *ibid.* Index s.v., and n. 92 below.

the unfortunate — unfortunate by us. We render what is licit for them licit and what is illicit for them illicit.”⁷⁴

Walāya permeates the entire History of mankind and constitutes its spiritual substance, since it is at the heart of all Revelations and prophetic missions. Al-Şaffār al-Qummī (d. 290/902–3) devoted several chapters in the second part of his book, *Başā’ir al-darajāt*, to these issues.⁷⁵ According to a number of traditions, going back mainly to the 5th and 6th imams, Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Ja‘far al-Şādiq, the pre-temporal Pact (*al-mīthāq*) — concluded between God and his creatures at the dawn of creation and to which the Qur’anic verse 7:172 supposedly alludes — mainly concerns *walāya*.⁷⁶

Other hadiths specify that only the “elite” of creation pledged an oath of allegiance with regard to the *walāya* of ‘Alī (i.e. the cosmic Imam) — namely, the Closest (*al-muqarrabūn*) among angels, the Messengers (*al-mursalūn*) among prophets and the Tested (*al-mumtaḥanūn*) among believers.⁷⁷ According to a tradition attributed to the Prophet, in the pre-existential World of Shadows (*‘alam al-ażilla*), the status of prophets only attained its final stage once they recognised the *walāya* of the Impeccable Ones.⁷⁸ Similarly, the Pact accorded Adam (as referred to in Qur’an 20:115) concerns *walāya*⁷⁹ — the essential purpose of every prophetic mission.

“Neither prophet nor any messenger was ever commissioned when not by (or ‘for’) our *walāya* (*bi-wilāyatīnā*).”⁸⁰

⁷⁴ *Ibn Shādhān*. Mi’a manqaba. Qumm, 1413/1993. “Manqaba” 7, n° 48; *al-Irbilī*. Kashf al-ghumma. Ed. H. Rasūlī Maḥallātī. Tabriz, n.d.; reed. Qumm, 1381/1962. Vol. 1. P. 291; *al-Khwārazmī*. Maqāl al-Ḥusayn. Qumm, n.d. Vol. 1. P. 46.

⁷⁵ *Al-Şaffār al-Qummī*. *Başā’ir al-darajāt*. Section 2. Chapters 6–16; 67–90. See also: *al-Majlisī*. Bihār. Vol. 26. P. 280ff.

⁷⁶ *Al-Şaffār al-Qummī*. *Başā’ir al-darajāt*. Section 2. Chapters 7–12; see also notes 8 and 74 above, as well as the relevant texts.

⁷⁷ *Al-Şaffār al-Qummī*. *Başā’ir al-darajāt*. Section 2. Chapter 6. P. 67–68. For the technical term “tested,” derived from the expression *al-mu’min imtaḥana llāhu qalbahu li l-īmān* (the believer — or initiate whose heart is tasted by God for faith), see: *Amir-Moezzi*. Le Guide divin. Index s.v. *imtiḥān* (*al-qalb*).

⁷⁸ *Al-Şaffār al-Qummī*. *Başā’ir al-darajāt*. Section 2. Chapter 8. On “the Worlds before this world,” see: *Amir-Moezzi*. Guide divin. Section II. P. 1, 75ff.

⁷⁹ *Al-Şaffār al-Qummī*. *Başā’ir al-darajāt*. Section 2. Chapter 7. P. 70–71. *Al-Qummī*. Taf-sīr. Vol. 2. P. 64–65; *al-Astarābādī*. Ta’wīl al-āyāt al-ẓāhira. P. 313–14. According to some traditions, the allusion to *walāya* in this verse featured textually in the original revelation made to Muḥammad and was subsequently censured: “We have entrusted Adam with Words concerning Muḥammad, ‘Alī, Fāṭima, al-Ḥasan, al-Ḥusayn and the imams in their lineage but he forgot them...” (*Al-Şaffār al-Qummī*. *Başā’ir al-darajāt*. P. 71; *Al-Kulaynī*. al-Uṣūl. Vol. Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb fīhi nukat wa nutaf min al-tanzīl fī l-walāya. Vol. 2. P. 283, n° 23; *al-Baḥrānī*. Al-Burhān. Vol. 3. P. 45; *al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī*. Al-Şāfi. Vol. 2. P. 80; *Amir-Moezzi*. Guide divin. P. 212; *Bar-Asher*. Variant Readings. P. 64).

⁸⁰ *Al-Şaffār al-Qummī*. *Başā’ir al-darajāt*. Chapter 9. P. 74–75 (Ja‘far).

“Our *walāya* is the *walāya* of God. Every prophet was only ever sent (by God) for/by it.”⁸¹

“The *walāya* of ‘Alī is inscribed in all books of the prophets; a messenger was only ever sent to proclaim the prophethood of Muḥammad and the *walāya* of ‘Alī.”⁸²

As we have already seen, the Qur’an in its “original complete version” would have clearly mentioned the fact that:

Q.42:13: “He has laid down for you, *o Family of Muḥammad*, as religion that He charged Noah with, and that We have revealed to thee, *o Muḥammad*, and that We charged with Abraham, Moses and Jesus: ‘Establish the religion of the Family of Muḥammad and scatter not regarding it and be united.’ Very hateful is that for the associationists, *those that associate to the walāya of ‘Alī* (i.e. other *walāyas*) that thou callest them to *concerning the walāya of ‘Alī*. Surely God guides, *o Muḥammad*, towards this religion he who repents, *he who accepts your call to the walāya of ‘Alī* (instead of ‘God chooses unto Himself whomsoever He will, and He guides to Himself whosoever turns, penitent’).”⁸³

Adam was banished from paradise because he had forgotten the *walāya*.⁸⁴ Prophet Jonah was enclosed in the stomach of a whale because he had for a moment denied loyalty to *walāya*.⁸⁵ Certain Israelites were transformed into fish or lizards because they had neglected *walāya*.⁸⁶

Without *walāya* there is no religion. Without its spirit, the letter is barren, an empty, lifeless shell. It is therefore not surprising that Islam, ultimate religion of the most perfect of prophets, should – more than the others — be centred on the concept of *walāya*; what is more, if Muḥammad is Muḥammad it is so because — even more than the other prophets — during his celestial ascensions he was initiated into the mysteries of the *walāya* of the Imam, the Man-God, symbolised by the cosmic ‘Alī: “‘Alī is a Sign of God (*āya* — just as a verse from the Qur’an) for Muḥammad. The latter did no more than summon (people) to the *walāya* of ‘Alī.”⁸⁷

⁸¹ *Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī*. Baṣā’ir al-darajāt. P. 75 (al-Bāqir).

⁸² *Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī*. Baṣā’ir al-darajāt. Chapter 8. P. 72 (al-Riḍā). See also: *al-Qundūzī*. Yanābī‘ al-mawadda. No place (Iraq), 1385/1965. P. 82; *al-Baḥrānī*. Ghāyat al-marām. Qumm, n.d. P. 207.

⁸³ See n. 14 above.

⁸⁴ In addition to references provided in note 79, see: *Ibn Bābūya*. Ma‘ānī l-akḥbār. P. 107–9; *idem*. al-Khiṣāl. Najaf, 1391/1971. P. 246; *Ibn Shahrāshūb*. Manāqib āl Abī Ṭālib. 3 vols. Najaf, 1375–76/1956. Vol. 1. P. 214.

⁸⁵ *Furāt al-Kūfī*. Tafṣīr. P. 94; *al-Majlisī*. Biḥār. Vol. 14. P. 401 and Vol. 26. P. 333ff. See also: *Bar-Asher*. Scripture and Exegesis. P. 200.

⁸⁶ *al-‘Ayyāshī*. Tafṣīr. Vol. 2. P. 35; *al-Majlisī*. Biḥār. Vol. 5. P. 345 and Vol. 14. P. 55; *al-Baḥrānī*. Al-Burhān. Vol. 2. P. 44; *Bar-Asher*. Scripture. P. 200–201.

⁸⁷ *Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī*. Baṣā’ir al-darajāt. Chapter 7, n° 5 and 8 (P. 71–72) (al-Bāqir) and chapter 9, n° 5 (P. 77) (Ja‘far).

Commenting Qur'an 91:1, on Muḥammad's destiny as prophet, imam Ja'far is said to have proclaimed: "God opened his chest [heart] to the *walāya* of 'Alī."⁸⁸

"Angel Gabriel came to me," — the Prophet supposedly reported, — "and said: 'Muḥammad! Your Lord prescribes for you the love (*ḥubb*) and *walāya* of 'Alī.'⁸⁹

"The Prophet was elevated to the heavens twenty times, not once; did God not entrust the *walāya* of 'Alī — and the imams (that come) after him — even more so than what He recommended regarding canonical duties."⁹⁰

Which is why "the *walāya* of 'Alī beside the Prophet has nothing earthly about it; it descends from heaven, even from the Lips of God (*mushāfahatan*); i.e. a message transmitted orally to Muḥammad during his celestial ascensions)."⁹¹

Walāya therefore constitutes the central message of Islam and of all religions before it:

"God made [of our] *walāya*, we being the Family of the Home, the axis (*qutb*) around which the Qur'an gravitates; as well as the axis of all [sacred] Books."⁹²

⁸⁸ *Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī*. Baṣā'ir al-darajāt. Chapter 8. P. 73.

⁸⁹ *Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī*. Baṣā'ir al-darajāt. Chapter 8. P. 74.

⁹⁰ *Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī*. Baṣā'ir al-darajāt. Chapter 10. P. 79 (Ja'far).

⁹¹ *Al-Majlisī*. Biḥār. Vol. 28. P. 306, n° 13 (Ja'far). As compared with: *Ibn al-Bitrīq*. Khaṣā'ish. Ed. M.B. al-Maḥmūdī. Tehran, 1406/1986. P. 98, and: *Ibn Ṭāwūs*. Al-Ṭarā'if fī ma'rifa madhāhib al-ṭawā'if. Qumm, 1400/1979. P. 101.

⁹² A tradition going back to Ja'far: *al-'Ayyāshī*. Tafṣīr. Vol. 1. P. 5; *al-Baḥrānī*. Al-Burhān. Vol. 1. P. 10; *al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī*. Al-Ṣāfi. Vol. 1. P. 12; *al-Majlisī*. Biḥār. Vol. 19. P. 78; Al-Uṣūl al-sittat 'ashar. P. 60; see also note 29 above and the relevant text. Let us recall that, in the technical lexicon of Shi'ism, the word "faith" (*īmān*) means "the teaching of the imams, esoteric dimension of religion, Shi'ism." In response to the question, "What is the difference between Islam and faith?" imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq is said to have answered: "Islam is the exoteric dimension (of religion), to which people adhere (*al-islām huwa l-zāhir alladhī 'alayhi l-nās* — the latter term is one of the names by which Shi'is refer to non-Shi'is), the twofold profession of faith regarding the Oneness of God and Muḥammad's mission as Prophet, canonical prayers, alms, the pilgrimage to Mecca and fasting during the month of Ramaḍān. Now, in addition to this, Faith is knowledge of our teachings. He who professes and practices the former without knowing the latter, though he may be a Muslim, has gone astray (because, as we have seen, he neglects the principal canonical obligation, *walāya*)" (*al-Kulaynī*. al-Uṣūl. Kitāb al-īmān wa l-kufr, bāb anna l-islām yuḥqanu bihi l-dam wa anna l-thawāb 'alā l-īmān. Vol. 3. P. 39, n° 4). The same sixth imam is supposed to have further stated: "Islam is the profession of divine Oneness and the acceptance of our Prophet's mission; it is by Islam that the price of blood is exacted, the conditions of marriage and rules of heritage established. There is a whole series of exoteric laws that the majority of people (*akthar al-nās*; another technical term for non-Shi'is, exoterist Muslims) obey. As for faith, it is guidance manifested in the heart. Exoterically, faith is linked to Islam, whereas esoterically Islam is not linked to faith (*inna l-īmān yushāriku l-islām fī l-zāhir wa l-islām lā yushāriku l-īmān fī l-bāṭin*). Faith is therefore superior to Islam" (*al-Kulaynī*. al-Uṣūl. Vol. 3. P. 41–42). For the equivalence accorded to "faith" and the imams' teachings see also: *al-Nu'mānī*. Kitāb al-ghayba. P. 131, 188; *Ibn Bābūya*. Amālī (= al-Majlisī). "Majlis" 93. P. 639ff.

Thus denying the imam’s *walāya* amounts to denying all heavenly revelations. And justifiably so: the *walāya* of the Impeccable Ones, of the theophanic Guides, living examples of the potential of divinisation in man, is the ultimate aim of creation:

“The *walāya* of Muḥammad and his descendants is the ultimate aim and most noble goal (*al-gharaḍ al-aqṣā wa l-murād al-aḍḍal*). God created his beings and commissioned his messengers especially to summon to the *walāya* of Muḥammad, ‘Alī and the successors of the latter.”⁹³

An omnipresent message, whether explicit or implicit, in the early Imami corpus, *walāya* constitutes the central meaning and purpose of *nubuwwa*, just as the *bāṭin* is the *zāhir*’s *raison d’être*.⁹⁴

2. *Walāya in relation to the followers of the imams*

The second semantic level of *walāya* relates to the imams’ followers, sometimes referred to as *ahl al-walāya*. It denotes love, faithfulness, devotion, loyalty and the submission that an adept owes to his master initiator — all qualities inherent in the root WLY. In this case, it is synonymous with other forms (*maṣḍars*) stemming from the same root, such as *tawallī/tawallā* (5th form) and *muwālāt* (3rd form). In this sense, one may say that Shi‘ism is the religion of love for the Divine Guide: as the lapidary phrase attributed to Ja‘far declares, “*walāya* is love (*al-walāya al-maḥabba*).”⁹⁵

“By God,” — the sixth imam allegedly remarked, — “if a stone were to love us, God would revive it by us [i.e. by our force]; is religion anything other than love?”⁹⁶

⁹³ (*Pseudo?*) *al-imām al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī*. Tafsīr. Qumm, 1409/1988. P. 379, n 264. Regarding this source, see: *Bar-Asher M.M.* The Qur’ān Commentary Ascribed to Imam Ḥasan al-‘Askarī // *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 24, 2000. P. 358–79. In this article, a section is devoted to the doctrine of *walāya* (P. 377–78). The tradition just cited is referred to on P. 375.

⁹⁴ However, the superiority of *walāya* over *nubuwwa* or *bāṭin* over *zāhir* does not imply (at least for the Imamīs) superiority of the *walī* over the *nabī* (more specifically, the legislating prophet), since, in his person, the latter accumulates *walāya* as well as *nubuwwa*, constituting a source of wisdom for his imams. On the other hand, the *Walī*/cosmic Imam is superior to both; as the revealed Face of God, he is the ultimate aim of teachings proffered by all *nabīs* and *walīs*. On this point, see: *Amir-Moezzi M.A.* Notes sur deux traditions ‘hétérodoxes’ imamites // *Arabica* 41, 1994. P. 127–30.

⁹⁵ *Ibn ‘Ayyāsh al-Jawharī*. Muqtaḍab al-athar. P. 45. “Al-Matāwīla,” a term designating certain Shi‘īs from Lebanon and Syria, seems to be the irregular plural of the active participle in the 5th form (*mutawallī*; “métouali” in French). However, this etymology is not entirely certain (see: *Ende W.* *Mutawālī* // *EI*², s.v.). It would thus denote “people practising *walāya* of the imams.”

⁹⁶ *al-‘Ayyāshī*. Tafsīr. Vol. 1. P. 167; *Ibn Bābūya*. al-Khiṣāl. Qumm, 1403/1983. P. 21, n°74; *al-Baḥrānī*. Al-Burhān. Vol. 1. P. 277; *al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī*. Al-Šāfi. Vol. 1. P. 254; *al-Majlisī*. Biḥār. Vol. 7. P. 377.

In addition, “All things have a foundation (*asās*); the foundation of Islam is love for us, the Family of the Home (of the Prophet).”⁹⁷

This is certainly how one must understand these kinds of expressions that recur very frequently in the hadith: *inna walāyat ‘Alī* (and/or *al-a’imma*) *walāyat rasūl Allāh wa walāyat rasūl Allāh walāyat Allāh*, “love of ‘Alī (and/or the imams) is love for the Messenger of God (Muḥammad) and love of the Messenger of God is love for God.”⁹⁸

However, in a doctrine strongly marked by a dualist conception of the world and its History, love for the imam is inevitably accompanied by hatred for his enemy. According to this conception, the faithful cannot only ally himself to the forces of Light, he must at the same time detach himself from the forces of darkness. Given the fundamental role of knowledge in the Shi‘i vision of the world,⁹⁹ to fervently adhere or belong to the forces of the initiation is inextricably linked to hostility towards those who are “anti-initiation,” for the latter use their power and violent means to repress, even eliminate, people of salutary gnosis. In this case, therefore, *walāya/tawallī* is inseparable from its opposite, namely *barā’a/tabarrī-tabarrā*.¹⁰⁰

“The firmest handle of faith (...more so than prayer, alms, fasting, the pilgrimage to Mecca and the holy war...) is love (*ḥubb*) for God and the ha-

⁹⁷ *Al-Barqī*. Kitāb al-maḥāsin. Kitāb al-ṣafwa wa l-nūr wa l-raḥma. Chapter 20, n° 66. Vol. 1. P. 150; *al-Khazzāz al-Rāzī*. Kifāyat al-athar. P. 71; *Ibn Bābūya*. Al-Mawā‘iz. Qumm, n.d. P. 29; *idem*. Amālī (Majālis). P. 221. See: *Bar-Asher*. Scripture and Exegesis. P. 194 (the distinction he makes between “the duty to love the imam” (P. 192–95) and “the duty of *walāya* towards the imam” (P. 195–202) does not seem pertinent, as these two notions are inseparable if not, depending on the context, identical).

⁹⁸ See, for example: Al-Uṣūl al-sittat ‘ashar. P. 60; *al-Majlisī*. Biḥār. Vol. 37. P. 41ff.; Vol. 38. P. 118ff. The entire chapter 87 of the *Biḥār* is devoted to the *walāya*/love for ‘Alī (“Love for him [i.e., ‘Alī] is *walāya* and faith, whereas hatred towards him is unfaithfulness and hypocrisy; for his *walāya* is *walāya* towards God and His messenger and hostility is towards one who is hostile towards God and His messenger”).

⁹⁹ See: *Amir-Moezzi*. Guide divin. Section III–2. P. 174–200.

¹⁰⁰ On this fundamental notion see: *Kohlberg E. Barā’a in Shi‘i Doctrine // Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 7, 1986. P. 139–75. Many other works of the same scholar provide invaluable information on the “dualist conception” that the Shi‘is have of history and spirituality. See e.g.: The Term “Rāfiḍa” in Imāmī Shi‘i Usage // *JAOS* 99, 1979. P. 677–79 (republished as chapter IV of “Belief and Law in Imāmī Shi‘ism”); Some Imāmī Shi‘i Views on the *Sahāba* // *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 5, 1984. P. 143–75 (republished as chapter IX of the same book); Non-Imāmī Muslims in Imāmī *fiqh* // *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 6, 1985. P. 99–105 (= chapter X of “Belief and Law”); In Praise of the Few (already cited); Evil // *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. Vol. 9. P. 182–85. See also: *Arazi A. Ilqām al-hajar li-man zakkā sābb Abū Bakr wa ‘Umar* d’al-Suyūfī ou Le témoignage de l’insulteur des Compagnons // *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 10, 1987. P. 211–87; for much later periods, see: *Calvard J. Les rituels shi‘ites et le pouvoir: l’imposition du Shi‘isme safavide, eulogies et malédictions canoniques // Calvard J (ed.). Etudes Safavides. Tehran: IFRI, 1993. P. 109–50.*

tred (*bughḍ*) for God’s adversaries, friendship (*tawallī*) of the friends of God and enmity (*tabarrī*) towards the enemies of God.”¹⁰¹

“...Friendship (*walāya*) with ‘Alī is a good deed (*ḥasana*) that cannot give rise to any misdeed (*sayyi’a*) ... and friendship with ‘Alī’s adversaries (*aḍḍād*) is a misdeed that no good deed may redeem.”¹⁰²

“...Love (*walāya*) of God is only won by love for His friends (*awliyā’*) and hostility (*mu’ādāt*) towards His enemies.”¹⁰³

According to many traditions that are traced back to the Prophet himself, love for the imams can only be accepted when accompanied by dissociation from their enemies:

“...‘Alī! *Walāya* towards you and the imams in your lineage is only accepted due to *barā’a* towards your enemies and those of the imams in your lineage. Angel Gabriel told me this in person.”¹⁰⁴

“...By He who chose me from all His creatures and sent me as a messenger, if one were to worship God for a thousand years, this would not be accepted by God were he not to profess your *walāya*, o ‘Alī, and that of the imams in your lineage; and your *walāya* is only accepted if it is accompanied by *barā’a* towards your enemies and those of the imams in your lineage.”¹⁰⁵

In spiritual life and sacred economy, *barā’a* is thus as fundamental as *walāya*; which is why we may translate these terms as sacred Hatred and sacred Love.¹⁰⁶ In some traditions, *barā’a* is considered — not unlike *walāya* — one of the Pillars of Islam.¹⁰⁷ According to a hadith going back to al-Bāqir: “God sent his prophets especially for sacred Love for us (the imams) and sacred Hatred towards our enemies.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰¹ *Ibn Bābūya*. Ma‘ānī l-akhbār. P. 398–99; *idem*. Al-Mawā‘iz. P. 25 (a tradition attributed to the prophet reported by Ja‘far through his father and his paternal ancestors). Also see: *al-Qundūzī*. Yanābī‘ al-mawadda. P. 121; *al-Daylamī*. Irshād al-qulūb. Qumm, n.d. Vol. 2. P. 209; *al-Irbilī*. Kashf al-ghumma. Vol. 1. P. 112; *al-Bahrānī*. Ghāyat al-marām. P. 293.

¹⁰² *al-Majlisī*. Biḥār. Vol. 8. P. 300, n° 55 and P. 352ff. (tradition going back to the Prophet).

¹⁰³ *al-Majlisī*. Biḥār. Vol. 24. P. 348, n° 60 (al-Bāqir). On the pair *muwālāt/mu’ādāt* see the extensive tradition going back to the 11th imam in: (*Pseudo?*) *al-imām al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī*. Tafṣīr. P. 76–79, n° 39. See also *al-Khwārazmī*. Al-Manāqīb. Qumm, 1411/1990. Chapter 6. P. 64–79; *Abū Ja‘far al-Ṭabarī*. Bishārat al-Muṣṭafā li-shī‘at al-Murtaḍā. P. 20ff.

¹⁰⁴ *al-Majlisī*. Biḥār. Vol. 27. P. 60, n° 16.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibn Shādhān*. Mi‘a manqaba. “Manqaba” 9. P. 51; *al-Karājakī*. Kanz al-fawā‘id. Beirut: n.d.; reprinted Qumm, 1369/1949–50. P. 185; *al-Majlisī*. Biḥār. Vol. 27. P. 199, n° 66. To be compared with *Ibn Ṭāwūs*. Al-Yaqīn fī imrat amīr al-mu‘minīn. Najaf, 1369/1950. P. 56–57.

¹⁰⁶ *Amīr-Moezzi*. Guide divin. Index s. vv. *walāya* and *barā’a*.

¹⁰⁷ *al-‘Ayyāshī*. Tafṣīr. Vol. 2. P. 117; *al-Majlisī*. Biḥār. Vol. 25/1. P. 214f.

¹⁰⁸ *al-‘Ayyāshī*. Tafṣīr. Vol. 2. P. 258; *al-Bahrānī*. Al-Burhān. Vol. 2. P. 368; *al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī*. Al-Ṣāfi. Vol. 1. P. 923.

A concise statement attributed to Ja'far al-Šādiq asks whether "...faith is anything other than love and hate?" (*hal al-īmān illā al-ḥubb wa al-buḡḡ*). If one accords these terms their technical meaning, we may read: is the esoteric teaching within a religion anything other than love for the imams, as well as for wise initiators of this faith, and hatred towards the adversaries of the latter?¹⁰⁹

The struggle between God and Evil, Knowledge and Ignorance, Light and Darkness is woven into the fabric of existence. According to cosmogonic traditions, what marks creation ever since its origin is the battle between the Armies of cosmic Intelligence, *al-'aql*, and those of cosmic Ignorance, *al-jahl*, respective symbols and archetypes of the Imam and his adepts on the one hand and Enemy of the Imam and his partisans on the other.¹¹⁰

This battle has repercussions in every period during all the cycles of History, opposing prophets and imams of each religion, People of the Right (*aṣḥāb al-yamīn*), against forces of ignorance, People of the Left (*aṣḥāb al-shimāl*). According to *Ithbāt al-waṣiyya*, ever since the creation of Adam, the world has known two kinds of "government" (*dawla*): that of God, in which the prophets and imams, the Guides of Light and Justice (*a'immat al-nūr*, *a'immat al-'adl*) are able to teach the religion of *walāya* openly, and that of Iblīs, in which this faith can only be practised secretly since the world is under the influence of the Guides of Darkness and Injustice (*a'immat al-zalām*, *a'immat al-zulm*).

As Iblīs had been Adam's adversary (*ḍidd*), the history of Adamic humanity is marked by adversity and violence on the part of demonic forces of ignorance that will always be predominant and in the majority during the current cycle; thus they will isolate and marginalise the persecuted initiates.¹¹¹

The adversaries of *walāya*, whom the faithful Shi'i is urged not to frequent, are not necessarily pagans and unbelievers. The Israelites, who betrayed Moses by pledging faith in the Golden Fleece, and Muḥammad's Companions, who rejected 'Alī, are not "non-Jews" and non-Muslims but those who reject the esoteric dimension of their respective religions, emptying the latter from what is

¹⁰⁹ For the hadith see: *Shaykh 'Abbās Qummī*. *Safīnat al-Bihār*. Tehran, 1370/1991. Vol. 1. P. 199 (s.v. *ḥubb*). For the technical meaning of *īmān*, see note 92 above.

¹¹⁰ *Amir-Moezzi M.A.* *Cosmogony and Cosmology (in Twelver Shi'ism) // Encyclopaedia Iranica*. V. 6. P. 317–22; *Kohlberg E.* *Evil (in Shiism) // ibid.* Vol. 9. P. 182–85. On the tradition regarding Armies of Intelligence and Ignorance see also: *Crow C.D.K.* *The Role of al-'Aql in Early Islamic Wisdom, with Reference to Imam Ja'far al-Šādiq (Doctorate Thesis, McGill University, 1996)*, chapter 13.

¹¹¹ (*Pseudo?*) *al-Mas'ūdī*. *Ithbāt al-waṣiyya*. P. 17ff.; on *dawlat Allāh* and *dawlat Iblīs* see also: *al-'Ayyāshī*. *Tafsīr*. Vol. 1. P. 199. Cf. the analysis in: *Molé M.* *Entre le Mazdéisme et l'Islam: La bonne et la mauvaise religion // Mélanges Henri Massé*. Tehran: IFRI, 1963. P. 303–16 and, in particular: *Kohlberg E.* *Some Shi'i Views on the Antediluvian World // Studia Islamica* (republished as chapter XVI of "Belief and Law in Imāmī Shi'ism"). P. 45ff. and note 3, P. 45, where other sources belonging to the Nuṣayriyya or the Ismā'īlis are cited. It is in reference to the power of the "Guides of Darkness" and their loyal "ignorant ones" that Shi'i *hadīths* employ expressions such as *walāyat al-ṭawāghīt* or *walāyat al-shayāfīn*.

most profound, thus becoming what the hadiths call, “the *Muslim* gone astray”, that is to say, those subject exclusively to the letter of Revelation and astray because they reject *walāya*.¹¹²

Barā'a, like its inseparable opposite *walāya*, is also as ancient as the world. This pair of opposing concepts is at the heart of the Shi'ī dualist vision of the world, a vision that may be illustrated by an entire series of opposite terms, typifying the dialectic of Good/Knowledge of Evil/Ignorance:

Good/Knowledge*Imām**a'immat al-Nūr/al-'Adl**'Aql**aṣḥāb al-yamīn**Walāya/tawallī/muwālāt*Evil/Ignorance*'aduww al-Imām**a'immat al-Ḍalām/al-Ḍulm**Jahl**aṣḥāb al-shimāl**Barā'a/tabarrī/mu'ādāt*

Brought into being ever since the Origin of the universe, sacred Love/sacred Hatred also determines eschatology:

“He who enters in *walāya* of Muḥammad’s descendants has entered into paradise; he who enters into *walāya* of their enemies has entered hell.”¹¹³

This tradition, variously formatted or expressed in approximately the same manner, is repeated literally hundreds of times in the Shi'ī *hadith* literature. Salvation due to love of the imams begins at the moment of death (*iḥtiqār*) and the interrogation of the tomb (*al-musā'ala fī l-qabr*), conducted by Nakīr and Munkar. In a very long hadith going back to the sixth imam it is explained how upon the deathbed of one who has loved ‘Alī, Muḥammad and angel Gabriel appear before the angel of death to request him to be loving and kind to the dying person and ease his death.¹¹⁴

“...Not a single death, from dawn to dusk, on land or sea, without Munkar and Nakīr questioning [a follower] regarding *walāya* of ‘Alī, his Lord, religion, prophet and imam...”¹¹⁵

We have already seen that reward (*thawāb*) in the hereafter is only obtained by the grace of *walāya*. The most radical versions implying as much were reported in a systematic manner perhaps for the first time by al-Barqī in his *Mahāsīn*:

“For one who loves us, [we] the Family of the Home and for whom this love is heartfelt (*ḥuqqiqa* (?) *ḥubbunā fī qalbiḥ*), for him the sources of wis-

¹¹² See notes 77 and 92 above, as well as the relevant texts.

¹¹³ *al-Majlisī*. Biḥār. Vol. 8. P. 347, n° 7 (Ja‘far).

¹¹⁴ *al-Majlisī*. Biḥār. Vol. 6. P. 197, n° 51.

¹¹⁵ *al-Majlisī*. Biḥār. Vol. 6. P. 316, n° 6 (the Prophet). On the interrogation of the tomb and love of the imams see also Vol. 6. P. 236ff.; Vol. 7. PP. 128, 186ff., 275ff., 331ff.; Vol. 8. P. 67ff.

dom will flow from his tongue and faith be strengthened in his heart. He will merit the reward of seventy prophets, seventy sincere believers, seventy martyrs and seventy worshippers having worshipped God for seventy years.”¹¹⁶

“Cherish love and affection (*mawadda*) for the Family of the Home for he who encounters God having loved us, will enter paradise by our intercession (*shafā’a*). By He who has my life in His hands, no action will benefit man if not taken by knowledge of our truth (*haqq*; as we have seen, one of the terms used to denote *walāya*).”¹¹⁷

“He who longs to see God unveiled and wishes God to look upon him unveiled, let him love the descendants of the Prophet and dissociate himself from their enemies; let him have as imam one among them (i.e. the imams), in order that on the Day of Resurrection God looks upon him unveiled and that he sees God unveiled.”¹¹⁸

At this level of meaning, *walāya* — synonymous with *maḥabba/hubb* (love), *mawadda* (affection) and *taslīm* (submission, undying loyalty, obedience)¹¹⁹ — is directed either towards the historic imam or through him towards the meta-physical Imam, the *Deus Revelatus*. The first form that is found especially in popular Shi‘ism is the foundation for the origin and development of the well-known devotion for the imams. The second is more often found among philosophers, theosophers and mystics.

Thus we may better appreciate how the Shi‘i religious consciousness, in its various components, perceives the many levels of meaning attached to the famous phrase that Muḥammad is said to have uttered during his speech at Ghadir

¹¹⁶ *Al-Barqī*. Kitāb al-maḥāsīn. Kitāb thawāb al-a‘māl. Chapter 80, n° 103. Vol. 1. P. 61 (Ja‘far); *al-Majlisī*. Biḥār. Vol. 27. P. 90.

¹¹⁷ *Al-Barqī*. Kitāb al-maḥāsīn. Chapter 81, n° 105. Vol. 1. P. 61 (the Prophet through al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī). On the notion of *shafā’a*, see: *Wensinck A.J.* A Muslim Creed, Its Genesis and Historical Development. Cambridge, 1932. P. 61–64, 180–83; *Huitema T.* De Voorsprak (*shafā’a*) in den Islam. Leiden: Brill, 1936. Concerning Shi‘ism now consult: *Bar-Asher*. Scripture and Exegesis. Chapter 4. Section 2.5. P. 180–89.

¹¹⁸ *Al-Barqī*. Kitāb al-maḥāsīn. Chapter 78, n° 101. Vol. 1. P. 60 (al-Riḍā); it is interesting to note that some decades later, Ibn Bābūya (d. 381/991) in his “Thawāb al-a‘māl” reports a much more toned down version regarding the reward linked to *walāya* and *barā’a* (*Ibn Bābūya*. Kitāb thawāb al-a‘māl wa ‘iqāb al-a‘māl. Ed. ‘A.A. Ghaffārī. Tehran, 1391/1971. P. 30, 204). On this evocation of the “rationalist” trend within early Imamism, see: *Amir-Moezzi*. Guide divin. P. 15–48.

¹¹⁹ On this important notion, signifying submission to the esoteric dimension of religion, as it differs from *islām* understood to mean submission to the exoteric religion, see, for example: *Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī*. Baṣā‘ir al-darajāt. Section 10. Chapter 20 (bāb fī l-taslīm li Āl Muḥammad). P. 520ff.; *Al-Kulaynī*. al-Uṣūl. Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb al-taslīm wa faḍl al-musallimīn. Vol. 2. P. 234ff.; the term is also defined as obedience to the imam’s directives, as an antidote to the polemics surrounding matters of faith. See: *Ibn Bābūya*. Al-Tawḥīd. Bāb al-nahy ‘ani l-kalām. P. 458f.; *idem*. Kamāl al-dīn. Chapter 31, n° 9 (*taslīm* as opposed to reasoning by analogy — *qiyās* — and personal opinion — *ra’y*).

Khumm and that the Imamis call the “hadith of *walāya*,” since, according to them, the Prophet there proclaimed the investiture of ‘Alī to both the temporal and spiritual caliphate:

“Let he who considers me to be his *mawlā*, take ‘Alī to be his *mawlā*. My God love one who loves him (i.e. ‘Alī) and be the enemy of whosoever is hostile towards him.”¹²⁰

Conclusion

Walāya in its technical Shi‘i sense thus has three principal meanings that are at once complementary and interdependent: imamate, love of the imam and theology of the metaphysical Imam.¹²¹ Complementary and interdependent meanings indeed.

Let us recall a self-evident matter: if the historic or metaphysical imamate or theology of the divine Face of the Imam and love for the imam/Imam are all denoted by one and the same term, *walāya*, it is so because, in the Shi‘i religious consciousness, there is an organic link between these three principal meanings: the historic imamate is fundamentally the religion of love for the Face of God, which is none other than the cosmic Imam.¹²²

¹²⁰ *Man kuntu mawlā-hu fa ‘Aliyyun mawlā-hu Allāhuma wāli man wālāhu wa ‘ādi man ‘ādāhu*. On this “*hadīth al-walāya*” and its countless transmitters and sources, see: Ṣaḥīfat al-imām al-Riḍā. Qumm, 1408/1987. n° 109. P. 172–224. See also *Amīnī ‘A.H.* Al-Ghadīr fī l’ki-tāb wa l-sunna wa l-adab. Tehran, 1372/1952 (repr. 1986), index of *hadīths*. Words belonging to the root WLY are pointed out in the text of the hadīth: *mawlā* is the patron, the protector, the *patronus*; it often has this meaning when describing God in the Qur’an. It obviously also denotes that which is the object of *walāya*, i.e. love, devotion and loyalty. In the Shi‘i context, the term *mawlā* is applied either to God or, more frequently, to Alī and the other imams; this, moreover, is symptomatic. Although truly a wealth of information, the article “Mawlā” by P. Crone in the *Encyclopedia of Islam* (Vol. 7. P. 865–74) does not sufficiently take into account matters relating to Shi‘ism.

¹²¹ It would be tempting to read into this the famous phrase pronounced by Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq: “Our matter (*amr*; a very commonly used term for *walāya*) contains an exoteric (*zāhir*), an esoteric [dimension] (*bāṭin*) and an esoteric of the esoteric (*bāṭin al-bāṭin*)” (*Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī*. Baṣā‘ir al-darajāt. Ms. Āstān-i Quds I, Akhbār 62/169, fol. 18r°; ms. Āstān-i Quds V/36, Akhbār 407/1933, fol. 20; ms. India Office 932, fol. 22 r°. The Kūčebāghī edition, used until now (section 1, chapter 12 n° 4. P. 29), drops the term *bāṭin* and contains just *zāhir* and *bāṭin al-bāṭin*, which is clearly a mistake. *al-Majlisī*. Biḥār. Vol. 2. P. 71, n° 33 gives: *zāhir*, *bāṭin al-zāhir* and *bāṭin al-bāṭin*. It seems to me that *bāṭin* and *bāṭin al-zāhir* are equivalent. A laconic statement by a Khāksārī master, Mudarris-i ‘Ālam (d. circa 1950?), appears to concur: *walāyat sirr-i islām ast wa maḥariyyat sirr-i walāyat (walāya is the secret of Islam and [the fact that imam is] the locus of manifestation for God is the secret of walāya)* (Tuḥfa-yi darwīsh. Tehran, 1337/1959. P. 40). Let us add that *walāya* in its most basic meaning of temporal authority does not connote any particularly Shi‘i notion; thus hadīths may speak of *walāyat al-ṭawāghīth al-thalātha* (the authority of the three rebels against God, i.e. the first three caliphs), *walāyat fulān wa fulān* (the authority of such and such [i.e., Abī Bakr and ‘Umar]), *walāyat Banī ‘Umayya*, *Banī l-‘Abbās*, etc.

¹²² *Ḥaydar Āmulī*. Jāmi‘ al-asrār wa manba‘ al-anwār. Ed. H. Corbin and O. Yahia. Tehran, 1969. Al-aṣl al-thālīth, al-qā‘ida al-thāniya, fī asrār al-nubuwwa wa l-risāla wa l-walāya.

It is especially interesting to re-read passages containing or concerning *walāya* in “the Qur’an of the imam,” the vulgate and in traditions on the Pillars of Islam in light of one or another or even all of these meanings.

According to the Shiite conception, the ultimate aim of knowing God and His Message, transmitted by revelations made to prophets, is knowledge of the imam and love for him. At this point, “the journey to return” begins: knowledge and love of the imam directs the faithful towards knowledge of the latter’s secret reality that is none other than the revealed Face of God. This twofold movement, descending and ascending, from God to one imam after another and from the imam to God — typifying the believer’s gnostic spirituality — can be illustrated by the following hadiths:

“My Lord, make yourself known to me, for if You do not make Yourself known to me, I will not come to know Your prophet. My Lord, make Your prophet known to me, for if You do not make Your prophet known to me, I will not come to know Your Proof (*hujja*, i.e. the imam). My Lord, make Your Proof known to me, for if You do not make Your Proof known to me, I shall be led astray far from my religion...”¹²³

“Imam al-Ḥusayn: God created all beings especially to know and worship Him...”

A disciple: What is the knowledge of God?

Imam: Knowledge during each period of the imam of this period.”¹²⁴

Which is why, in Shi‘ism, a faith is either based on *walāya* which is the esoteric dimension of every prophetic message, or it simply does not exist, that is to say, in this case it is but a “pseudo-faith.” Whether in this regard we have in mind the Pillars of Islam or the triple profession of the *shahāda* (the third of which concerns *walāya* of ‘Alī), the recitation of these formulaic declarations during the call to prayer (*adhān*) thus introduces *walāya* into the ritual.¹²⁵

To conclude, a word about the “organic” aspect of *walāya* bearing upon the subtle spiritual anatomy. *Walāya* operates the transmutation of faith into an in-

P. 379–94; *Sultān Muḥammad Gunābādī* (*Sultān ‘Alī Shāh*). *Walāyat Nāmeḥ*. Tehran, 1344/1966. Section 1, chapter 6. P. 20–21; section 2, chapters 1 to 3. P. 22–32; section 5, chapters 1 and 2. P. 61–71; section 9, chapter 1. P. 157–70 and chapter 8. P. 214–21; throughout section 10. P. 226–43. One must point out the problem faced when dealing with esoteric teachings, namely that the authors’ language is typically allusive.

¹²³ Tradition going back to Ja‘far, reported by: *Al-Kulaynī*. *al-Uṣūl*. Kitāb al-ḥujja, bāb. fī l-ghayba. n°s. 5 and 29. Vol. 2. P. 135 and 144. It constitutes the beginning of the prayer known as “the prayer of Deliverance” (*du‘ā’ al-faraj*), meant to be read during the Occultation to ease the pain while waiting for the *qā’im*. See: *Ibn Bābūya*. *Kamāl al-dīn*. Chapter 45, n° 43. Vol. 2. P. 512ff.

¹²⁴ *Ibn Bābūya*. ‘Ilal al-sharā’i’. Najaf, 1385/1966. Chapter 9, n° 1, 9.

¹²⁵ See: *Takim L.A.* From *Bid‘a to Sunna: the Wilāya of ‘Alī in the Shī‘ī Adhān* // *JAOS* 120, 2000. P. 166–177.

tensely felt religious and spiritual experience. First, for the common folk among Shi'is, obviously by means of the cult of the imams with all the naïveté, excesses and deviations that are well known among popular religions. Secondly, for the spiritual “elite” engaged in a quest for the realisation of the light of *walāya* (*nūr al-walāya*). Far from being an abstract notion, the latter seems to designate a spiritual faculty, an internal “organic” disposition, as it is also able to be transmitted physically and is called the single and double Light of Muḥammad and ‘Alī or, more commonly, Light of *walāya*.

As if to continue certain works by U. Rubin,¹²⁶ I have devoted extensive studies to different aspects of this issue that constitutes one of the main foundations for Imami spiritual practices.¹²⁷ Let us therefore confine ourselves to a very brief summary of matters: several thousand years before the creation of the world, luminous entities of the Impeccable Ones (Muḥammad, Fāṭima and the imams) are made to proceed by God from His own Light. He initiates them to the arcanum of the divine sciences. These archetypical Guides of Light, in turn, teach the sciences to pre-existing entities of initiates that have been created in their manner as particles. Upon the creation of the world and the first man, the initiative Light of *walāya* is deposited in Adam. Thus commences the long journey of Light through the long chain of divine initiates to reach the historic Muḥammad and ‘Alī. The transmission takes place by two means: by natural physical genealogy with the grace of “blessed and purified loins,” the seminal substance; and by initiatory spiritual genealogy, where prophets, imams and saints succeed each other. Having reached Muḥammad, Fāṭima, ‘Alī and the imams — earthly manifestations of these original Vehicles — the Light reaches its most intense level. It is transmitted by the latter to their physical descendants¹²⁸ and further on to the faithful initiates that perpetuate its transmission. Which is why, in Imami mysticism, one of the greatest spiritual aims is to realise in oneself — by diverse means, whether initiation, asceticism, rituals or practice — the Light of *walāya*

¹²⁶ Rubin U. Pre-existence and Light: Aspects of the Concept of *Nūr Muḥammad* // *Israel Oriental Studies* 5, 1975. P. 62–112; also: *idem*. Prophets and Progenitors in the Early Shi'a Tradition // *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 1, 1979. P. 41–65.

¹²⁷ *Amir-Moezzi*. Guide divin. Partie II. P. 73–154 (an abridged but updated version of the excursus on “vision by the heart” (P. 112–45) was published in a special issue of the *Connaissance des Religions* 57–59, entitled as “Lumières sur la Voie du Coeur,” 1999 (P. 146–69)); see also: *idem*. Cosmogony and Cosmology (in Twelver Shi'ism) // *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. 2nd edition.

¹²⁸ One reason why in Shi'i lands the real or supposed descendants of the imams (*sayyids*) are treated with great respect. The virtues flowing from the Light of *walāya* are found in them in a potential state. However, according to mystics, these virtues are prone to be realised more easily among the imams' spiritual descendants. Regarding *sayyids*, see the special issue of *Oriente Moderno* 18 (77/ 2 (1999): *Scarcia Amoretti B. and L. Bottini* (eds.). Il Ruolo dei *Sādāt/Ashrāf* nella Storia e Civiltà Islamiche. Unfortunately, the spiritual dimension of capital importance is largely missing from this collection of articles.

in the heart, whose essential “components” are the sacred knowledge and the ability to perform miracles.

One who reaches this level does not become an imam (who has his own theological and ontological status) but attains the rank of saint comparable to the imam; and linked to him becomes a *walī*, an Ally or Friend of God, a practical and living example of *walāya*. For Imami spirituality, such a *walī* then *ipso facto* belongs to the Holy Family of the Prophet; for example, Salmān the Persian, “the stranger” about whom Muḥammad is said to have declared: “Salmān is one of us, the Family of the Home”¹²⁹ and al-Fuḍayl b. Yasār al-Nahdī, a disciple about whom imam al-Bāqir reportedly said the same thing.¹³⁰

The Shi‘i faith in general and Imami in particular revolves around the double vision of the world that we evoked above: the dual conception of the world illustrated by the “complementary pairs” (manifest/hidden; exoteric/esoteric; prophet/imam; *nubuwwa/walāya*; letter/spirit of the Revelation, etc.) and the dualist conception illustrated by the “opposing pairs” (Good/Evil; imam/enemy of the imam; Knowledge/Ignorance; People of the Right/Left; *walāya/barā’a*, etc.).

The first may be symbolized by a “vertical axis,” since passing from manifest to hidden approaches the divine and the understanding of secrets of Being. This vertical axis of Initiation determines mankind’s spirituality. Similarly, to the second vision of the world, one may be able to apply the symbol of a “horizontal axis”, for this axis of the Battle determines the history of creation, a history traversed by the leitmotif of the perpetual struggle between the forces of knowledge and ignorance.¹³¹ With its various meanings *walāya* is the only notion that one may find on both axes. It holds an eminent place of fundamental importance both in its dual and dualist vision of the world. It thus constitutes the very substance of the Shi‘i religion of the faithful, both commoner and elite, called upon to constantly maintain himself where both “axes” intersect.

¹²⁹ For example: *Al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī*. Baṣā’ir al-darajāt. Section 1. Chapter 11, n° 21, 25.

¹³⁰ *Al-Kashshī*. Ikhtiyār ma’rifat al-rijāl. Mashhad, 1348/1969. P. 213.

¹³¹ *Amir-Moezzi*. Guide divin. P. 308–310.