

Unity in Diversity

Mysticism, Messianism and the Construction of Religious Authority in Islam

Edited by

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CONTENTS

List of Contributors	ix
Préface	xv
<i>Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi</i>	
Introduction: Conflicting Synergy of Patterns of Religious Authority in Islam	1
<i>Orkhan Mir-Kasimov</i>	

PART ONE

LANGUAGES, CONCEPTS AND SYMBOLS

La transgression des normes du discours religieux : Remarques sur les <i>shaṭaḥāt</i> de Abū Bakr al-Shiblī	23
<i>Pierre Lory</i>	
Religious Authority & Apocalypse: <i>Tafsīr</i> as Experience in an Early Work by the Bāb	39
<i>Todd Lawson</i>	
La transmigration des âmes. Une notion problématique dans l'ismaélisme d'époque fatimide	77
<i>Daniel De Smet</i>	
Promised One (<i>maw'ūd</i>) or Imaginary One (<i>mawhūm</i>)? Some Notes on Twelver Shī'ī Mahdī Doctrine and its Discussion in Writings of Bahā' Allāh	111
<i>Armin Eschraghi</i>	
To the Abode of the Hidden One: The Green Isle in Shī'ī, Early Shaykhī, and Bābī-Bahā'ī Sacred Topography	137
<i>Omid Ghaemmaghami</i>	

PART TWO

POST-MONGOL TENDENCIES:
MYSTICISM, MESSIANISM AND UNIVERSALISM

The Kūfan <i>Ghulāt</i> and Millenarian (Mahdist) Movements in Mongol-Türkmen Iran	177
<i>William F. Tucker</i>	
Intercessory Claims of Şūfi Communities during the 14th and 15th Centuries: 'Messianic' Legitimizing Strategies on the Spectrum of Normativity	197
<i>Devin DeWeese</i>	
<i>Ummīs</i> versus Imāms in the Ḥurūfī Prophetology: An Attempt at a Sunnī/Shī'ī Synthesis?	221
<i>Orkhan Mir-Kasimov</i>	
The Occult Challenge to Philosophy and Messianism in Early Timurid Iran: Ibn Turka's Lettrism as a New Metaphysics	247
<i>Matthew Melvin-Koushki</i>	
Timurid Experimentation with Eschatological Absolutism: Mīrzā Iskandar, Shāh Ni'matullāh Walī, and Sayyid Sharif Jurjānī in 815/1412	277
<i>İlker Evrim Binbaş</i>	

PART THREE

FROM MYSTICISM AND MESSIANISM TO CHARISMATIC KINGSHIP:
OTTOMANS, SAFAVIDS AND MUGHALS

L'idéologie d'État concurrencée par son interprétation : les Melāmī-Hamzevī dans l'empire ottoman	307
<i>Paul Ballanfat</i>	
Kaygusuz Abdal: A Medieval Turkish Saint and the Formation of Vernacular Islam in Anatolia	329
<i>Ahmet T. Karamustafa</i>	

The World as a Hat: Symbolism and Materiality in Safavid Iran	343
<i>Shahzad Bashir</i>	
Persian Nuḡṭawīs and the Shaping of the Doctrine of “Universal Conciliation” (<i>ṣulḥ-i kull</i>) in Mughal India	367
<i>Abbas Amanat</i>	
Messianism, Heresy and Historical Narrative in Mughal India	393
<i>A. Azfar Moin</i>	
Index	415

UMMĪS VERSUS IMĀMS IN ḤURŪFĪ PROPHETOLOGY:
AN ATTEMPT AT A SUNNĪ/SHĪ'Ī SYNTHESIS?

Orkhan Mir-Kasimov

1. INTRODUCTION: THE CONCEPTION OF "MOTHERLY" (*UMMĪ*)
KNOWLEDGE IN THE *JĀWIDĀN-NĀMA* OF FAḌL ALLĀH ASTARĀBĀDĪ
(D. 796/1394)

When he was close to the age of forty years, the secrets of the single letters at the beginning of the [Qur'ānic] suras [were revealed to him], [the letters] which [constitute] the heavenly book sent by God to Adam... He thus became a [spiritual] master and teacher. His doctrine (*i'tiqād*) was therefore based on divine revelation (*kashf-i ilāhī*)... This revelation [also] concerned the secrets, truths and degrees (*asrār wa ḥaqā'iq wa maqāmāt*) of Muḥammad... [He heard a voice] asking: who is this young man? Who is this moon of earth and heaven?—The answer was: He is the Master of Time, and the King of all prophets (*sayyid-i zamānast sultān-i hama payghambarānast*). Other people acquire their knowledge (*i'tiqād*) of the eminence of Muḥammad's degrees through blind imitation and through explanations provided by someone else (*ba-taqlīd wa bayān-i dīgarān*), but he received this knowledge through [direct] revelation and contemplation (*kashf wa 'iyān*).¹

In the year 775[1374]... the knowledge of the spiritual exegesis of the single letters of the Qur'ān (*'ilm-i ta'wīl-i muqatta'āt-i Qur'ān*), as well as the secrets of the religious law (*asrār-i dīn-i sharī'a*), such as prayer and fasting, were revealed (*kashf*) to him.²

This is how the disciples of FaḌl Allāh Astarābādī (d. 796/1394) describe the central experience, which determined both the doctrinal production of FaḌl Allāh and the socio-political orientation of the movement that he founded.

From the cited passages, it can be concluded that FaḌl Allāh claimed to have received a personal revelation that endowed him with a status close to the prophetic degree and disclosed to him the paths of spiritual

¹ Nafajī, *Khwāb-nāma* 66a, 68a–69b. For the German summary and partial translation of these passages see Ritter, Ḥurūfisekte 20. For an English translation slightly different from mine, see Bashir, *Fazlallah* 25–26.

² Sayyid Ishāq Astarābādī, *Khwāb-nāma* 19b.

exegesis leading to the innermost meaning of the Muḥammad's prophetic message. This revelation gave Faḍl Allāh a specific vantage point on the contemporary situation of Islamic religious dogma and on the direction of its further development. He exposed his views in several works, the most important of which is the *Jāwidān-nāma* (the "Book of Eternity").³ The *Jāwidān-nāma* is the foundational work of this movement, which came to be known, mainly through its descriptions in external sources, under the name of *Ḥurūfiyya*.⁴ Along with some other works of Faḍl Allāh, this work was considered by his followers to be divinely inspired (*Jāwidān-nāma-yi ilāhī*).

Conversely to what could be expected, the *Jāwidān-nāma* does not contain any systematic presentation of Faḍl Allāh's thought. It is rather a voluminous corpus of fragments, which follow each other without any thematic organization.⁵ The fragments cover nearly all the central topics of medieval religious thought, including cosmology, anthropology, prophetology and eschatology. One of the central characteristics of the *Jāwidān-nāma* is its free, creative, and in some cases surprisingly unusual interpretation of scriptural material, which includes not only the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*, but also Biblical texts and apocrypha.⁶ However, contrary to the opinions expressed in anti-Ḥurūfī polemics, sometimes uncritically adopted by modern scholars, the *Jāwidān-nāma* does not seem to contain any theory that is explicitly opposed to the majority dogma. On the contrary, the text arguably bears traces of an effort reconciling the competing currents of contemporary Islam, mainly focused on the Sunnī/Shī'ī rapprochement, characteristic of the post-Mongol Iranian context. As an

³ The *Jāwidān-nāma*, like most Ḥurūfī works, is still unpublished. An edition of a fair amount of selected fragments of this work, accompanied by a French translation and an attempt at a thematic analysis, can be found in Mir-Kasimov, *Étude*. A large selection of these fragments will be made available in English in my forthcoming book.

⁴ It does not seem that Faḍl Allāh and his followers used any special name to refer to themselves, most probably because they did not regard themselves as separate from the rest of the Muslim community. However, some names and expressions used in their works, often derived from the Qur'ān, such as "possessor of the knowledge of the Book" (*man 'indahu 'ilm al-kitāb*), "the midmost community" (*umma wasaṭ*), or others, such as "people of the Truth" (*ahl-i ḥaqq*), "people of the [divine] Bounty" (*ahl-i Faḍl*), may have a specific meaning of self-designation. See Kiyā, *Wāzha-nāma* 280. For a general introduction to Ḥurūfī history and thought, see Bashir, *Fazlallah*, which also contains the most important further references.

⁵ On the particular composition of the work, which very probably reflects an intention to hinder access to its contents, see Mir-Kasimov, *Jāwidān-nāma*.

⁶ Mir-Kasimov, *Étude*; *idem*, Moses.

example of this tendency, I would like to discuss, in the following pages, the *Jāwidān-nāma*'s theory of "motherly" (*ummī*) prophets.⁷

In the actual state of our knowledge of Ḥurūfī texts, the exact contents of Faḍl Allāh's claim seem difficult to reconstruct. There is no particular reason to doubt the accounts of his immediate disciples that I cited in beginning. They seem to be supported by what we know, from sources external to the movement, about the claims put forward by Faḍl Allāh, and later by his followers, in their attempts to introduce their doctrine to the rulers and political leaders of their time.⁸ Also, some of the non-doctrinal texts attributed to Faḍl Allāh himself, such as his dream diary, might corroborate the thesis that he claimed a high religious status for himself.⁹

However, most of our information on the revelation received by Faḍl Allāh and on his vision of his own place in the sacred and socio-political history of Islam (and of humankind) is provided by the works of his followers or by the external sources often hostile to Faḍl Allāh.¹⁰ The *Jāwidān-nāma* does not contain any positive information on these issues. The prophetology of the *Jāwidān-nāma* seems to be focused on the concept of *ta'wīl*, in the sense that this term acquired in the Shī'ī context. Let us recall that, according to Shī'ī beliefs, the *ta'wīl* is a special power given to holy Imāms, which enables them to reveal the esoteric (*bāṭin*) meanings of the prophetic revelation by bringing its exoteric (*ẓāhir*) expression back to its origin in the divine Word.¹¹ Applied either to the holy scriptures or to objects or beings of the empirical world, viewed as "words" in the great book of Creation, the *ta'wīl* brings them back to their ontological principle, to the existence-giving Word of the divine command. In this broad sense, *ta'wīl* can be translated as "spiritual" (or "ontological") exegesis.

One of Faḍl Allāh's disciples, Sayyid Iṣḥāq Astarābādī, describes the cycle of the prophetic revelation as consisting of three stages: prophecy (*nubuwwa*), sainthood (*walāya*), and the period of the direct manifestation

⁷ My account of Faḍl Allāh's doctrine is based on the ms. Oc. Or. 5957 of the British Library.

⁸ On the political activity of the Ḥurūfīs see, for example, Bashir, *Fazlallah*, in particular 12–18, 20–32, 97–107; for a more detailed account, see Azhand, *Ḥurūfīyya*.

⁹ See Mir-Kasimov, *Journal*, in particular 263–264.

¹⁰ For these sources see, for example, Kiyā, *Wāzha-nāma*; Ritter, *Ḥurūfisekte*.

¹¹ For the concept of *ta'wīl* in Shī'ī thought see, for example, Corbin, *En islam iranien*, index. This conception of the *ta'wīl* refers to the etymological meaning of the Arabic word, which implies "return to the beginning, to the origin" (*awwal*).

of divine truths (*ulūhiyya*).¹² The first stage was closed by Muḥammad; the second was accomplished by the holy Imāms, from ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib to Ḥasan al-‘Askarī. Faḍl Allāh’s vocation was supposedly to open the last period, that of the *ulūhiyya*.

However, this threefold scheme is absent from the *Jāwidān-nāma*, which also rarely mentions the names of the Shī‘ī Imāms other than ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.¹³ It seems that the traditional Shī‘ī concept of Imāms, following the Prophet and revealing the inner, esoteric aspect of the revelation that he brought, is replaced, or rather extended, in the *Jāwidān-nāma* by the concept of *Ummīs*, “motherly” prophets and saints.¹⁴ Like the Imāms in traditional Shī‘ī doctrine, the *Ummīs* are essentially in charge of the *ta’wīl*, of the revelation of the innermost, metaphysical meaning of the prophetic revelations. However, the aptitude to realize the *ta’wīl* proper to the *Ummīs* is based, according to the *Jāwidān-nāma*, on a specific, “motherly” knowledge that they possess. This concept of “motherly” knowledge might be specific to the *Jāwidān-nāma*.

The concept of “motherly” knowledge goes back to the *Jāwidān-nāma*’s epistemological interpretation of gender differences. It can be summarized as follows.¹⁵ According to the *Jāwidān-nāma*, the most complete knowledge of God available to any created being is contained in the divine Word, which is the first emanation of the unfathomable divine Essence. This Word has 28 and/or 32 aspects, named “words” (*kalima* pl. *kalimāt*).¹⁶

¹² Huart, *Textes* 21–22 of the Persian text. This division is also mentioned by Golpınarlı, *Katalog* 19.

¹³ The term *ulūhiyya* is only rarely used in the *Jāwidān-nāma*, and the context does not justify the attribution of any specific technical meaning to it. Other historical Shī‘ī Imāms mentioned in the *Jāwidān-nāma* are al-Ḥusayn, one of the sons of ‘Alī and the third Shī‘ī Imām (f. 42a, 194a and 220a), and al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī, the eleventh Imām (f. 246a). Shī‘ī sympathies transpire in the description of Mu‘āwiya (ibn Abī Sufyān) as someone who was unable to recognize the divine Word in the person of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (f. 314b–315a), and in the mention of the “fourteen immaculate ones” (*chahārdah ma’šūm*, f. 190b), but remain very occasional in the text.

¹⁴ I will use the English mark of the plural, *Ummīs*, and not the Arabic (*Ummiyyūn*), to match Imāms (and not *A‘imma*).

¹⁵ For a more detailed presentation of this aspect of the *Jāwidān-nāma*’s doctrine, see Mir-Kasimov, RḤM.

¹⁶ I will use *Word*, in the singular, capitalized and without quotation marks, with reference to the complete divine Word, the first emanation of the divine Essence according to the *Jāwidān-nāma*, and “words,” in the plural, uncapitalized and in quotations, with reference to the 28/32 simple entities which, according to the *Jāwidān-nāma*, constitute the eternal divine Word. The original term used in the *Jāwidān-nāma* is *kalima* pl. *kalimāt* (sometimes replaced by the Persian *sukhan*); and the distinction between different meanings this term assumes in the theoretical developments of the *Jāwidān-nāma* is only contextual. What are referred to as “words” could therefore, depending on the context, be

At a stage immediately preceding the creation of the visible universe, the Word undergoes differentiation, symbolized by the two letters of the command “Be!” (*Kʿn!*). As the result of this differentiation, the 28/32 “words,” hitherto unified within the single divine Word, appear as separate phonemes. Simultaneously, the black Point, the counterpart of the Word, produces 28/32 distinct forms, which are the loci of manifestation (*maẓhar* pl. *maẓāhir*) of these phonemes, or the original letters (*ḥarf* pl. *ḥurūf*). Various combinations of “words” or phonemes produce names, which are the principle of existence, ontological “ideas” or archetypes of any possible realization in the universe. The combinations of the corresponding letters are the principle of visible actualization of these ideas, the forms of the bodies. Since it is through the forms, or loci of manifestation, that ontological metaphysical truths can be perceived and known, the form of any object or being has, in the *Jāwidān-nāma*, the status of its “science” (*ilm*), potentially leading to the knowledge of the metaphysical truth that brought this particular object or being into existence.¹⁷ In this perspective, the universe is essentially writing, composed of the basic simple forms of the 28/32 original letters, and reflecting the metaphysical truths of the existence-giving divine Word.

The human bodily form occupies, according to the *Jāwidān-nāma*, a particular place in this diversity of forms generated by the combinations of letters. Unlike all other forms, it is generated not by a partial combination, but by the complete set of the 28/32 original letters. Therefore, the human form is the locus of manifestation not just of some “words,” but of the entire divine Word, of the supreme Name of God. In other words, like the universe in its entirety, the human form is the complete Book of God, which contains all that can be possibly revealed of divine reality, the complete “science” of God. However, the Book of the human form

translated as “aspects” of the one divine Word before the differentiation, which emerge as separate “phonemes” after the differentiation. However, in order to avoid the confusion, I maintain “words” as the translation of *kalimāt*, and will further specify the meaning when necessary. Some passages emphasize that any existing object or being is part of the divine Word. In this case, “word” can also be used in the singular, in order to distinguish the incomplete status of any created entity from the fullness of the original Word. The relationship between the series of 28 and 32 is very flexible in the *Jāwidān-nāma*, and cannot be briefly defined. I suggest that we accept the compound figure 28/32 as a symbolic representation of the inner structure of the Word; specific aspects of the relationship between the 28 and 32 relevant to our topic will be brought forth further in the text.

¹⁷ The link between the external form of any object and being and the corresponding invisible metaphysical truth is further developed in the *Jāwidān-nāma* with reference to such concepts as “divine convention” (*iṣṭilāḥ-i ilāhī*) and “line of balance” (*khaṭṭ-i istiḡwāʾ*).

contains two main aspects, corresponding to the division into two genders. Adam was created as the immediate counterpart of the complete divine Word, and his bodily form is therefore the most complete Book of God. But the *manifestation* of this Book was accomplished in the bodily form of Eve, who was created after Adam. Therefore, it is the form of Eve, that of the Mother, that represents most clearly the most fundamental elements of divine writing. It is the “Mother of the Book” (*umm al-kitāb*), without which the ontological writing of the complete Book of Adam’s form could never be deciphered.¹⁸

Another line of argumentation comes to reinforce in the *Jāwidān-nāma* the idea of the Mother as a principle of form and body: it is in the womb of Eve that the originally formless drop of sperm, issued from the loins of Adam, acquires human form. The form of the Mother is therefore the original form of any human, male or female.¹⁹ It is the ultimate form of divine manifestation; it is the form in which God appeared to the Prophet Muḥammad.²⁰

From what has been said, it can be understood that the knowledge of the innermost meaning of the form of the Mother, the aptitude to discern the fundamental lines of divine ontological writing in it, is regarded in the *Jāwidān-nāma* as the key to the spiritual exegesis of the complete Book of Adam’s bodily form and to the unveiling of the metaphysical truths of the divine Word. In other words, “motherly” (*ummi*) knowledge is the key to the universal *ta’wīl*, in the sense that I attempted to outline above.

God gave Adam the full knowledge of the divine Word after shaping his bodily form as the perfect locus of manifestation of this Word: such is the *Jāwidān-nāma*’s interpretation of the Q 2:31: “He taught Adam the names, all of them”.²¹ After Adam, this knowledge was transmitted in the line of

¹⁸ For a more detailed discussion of this idea, references and a translation of the relevant fragments of the *Jāwidān-nāma*, see Mir-Kasimov, RḤM.

¹⁹ The “form of the Mother” is symbolized, in the *Jāwidān-nāma*, by the number seven and its multiples (14, 21, 28); this number refers to the seven lines that are visible on the faces of women as well as on the faces of children and youths of both sexes: a line of hair on the head, two lines of eyebrows, and four lines of eyelashes. These are the most fundamental features of the human face. Additional features, such as beard and moustache lines, develop only on the faces of the adult men.

²⁰ In this regard, the *Jāwidān-nāma* generally refers to the well-known *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet describes his vision of God: “I saw my Lord in the most beautiful form, in the form of a beardless youth” (*ra’aytu rabbī fi aḥsan ṣūra fi sūrat amrad qaṭaṭ*). For the versions of this *ḥadīth* and further references see D. Gimaret, *Dieu* 154–164.

²¹ Here and below, I use Arberry’s translation of the Qur’ān, *The Koran Interpreted*.

the prophets.²² It seems that the *Jāwidān-nāma* ascribes some “motherly” part to all prophets.²³ However, the mission of the prophets preceding Jesus consisted essentially of the realization of the “descent” (*tanzīl*) of the divine Word, i.e. of the progressive revelation of the 28/32 “words” (or ontological phonemes) and corresponding letters. Since the “motherly” knowledge is linked to the “ascension,” to the “returning” phase of the prophetic cycle, it remained latent in their missions.

The transmission of prophetic knowledge underwent a dramatic modification with the coming of Jesus. Jesus was not just an ordinary prophet, born in accordance with the laws of human heredity. In his case, the Word of God spontaneously took the form of a human body, which is its most complete form of manifestation, in the womb of Mary.²⁴ Like Adam, Jesus thus represents the direct and immediate manifestation of the complete divine Word combined with the full knowledge of this Word. The fact that Mary gave birth to him without the participation of a father symbolizes, according to the *Jāwidān-nāma*, his particular link with “motherly” knowledge, in the sense that was outlined above. In the cycle of prophecy, Jesus inaugurates the period of the revelation of knowledge concerning the most fundamental elements of the divine Word, those manifested in the face of the Mother. He is therefore the first *ummī* prophet, preceding

²² The prophets are thus the “true descendents” of Adam: although any human being exteriorly inherits the human bodily form, only a few have the knowledge of its innermost meaning.

²³ Among the prophets of the Old Testament mentioned in the *Jāwidān-nāma*, Joseph has a particular relationship to the *taʿwīl* and to “motherly knowledge,” in line with the Qurʾānic verses that stress Joseph’s aptitude in *taʿwīl* (as, for example, Q 12:101, *taʿwīl al-aḥādīth*). For references and a translation of some relevant fragments, see Mir-Kasimov, *Paradise*.

²⁴ For the discussion of the conception of Jesus in Muslim exegetical literature see Arnaldez, *Jésus*. The special role of Jesus in Ḥurūfī prophethood is highlighted by Ritter, *Ḥurūfisekte* 4, and Bashir, *Fazlallah* 57–58. This particular interpretation of the conception of Jesus can also be inspired by the apocryphal Biblical text known as the Arabic Apocalypse of Peter. Indeed, several fragments of the *Jāwidān-nāma* contain either verbatim translations or very close paraphrases from this text, reproduced in facsimile and translated by Mingana in *Woodbrooke Studies* 93–208. My thanks to Jean-Daniel Dubois for bringing this text to my attention. The passage that mentions divine light fashioned into the human shape in the womb of Mary, not cited explicitly in the *Jāwidān-nāma*, is in the p. 111 of Mingana’s translation. For more details concerning the use of the Biblical material in the *Jāwidān-nāma*, see my forthcoming monograph. I am also preparing a separate critical edition of the “Christian” fragments of the *Jāwidān-nāma*. It is noteworthy that apparently the same Apocalypse of Peter has been used, several centuries earlier, by Ismāʿīlī philosopher Ḥamid al-Dīn al-Kirmānī, in his *Kitāb al-maṣābiḥ*. See De Smet and Van Reeth, *Les citations bibliques* 157–160 and al-Kirmānī, *Al-Maṣābiḥ* 24–26, 96–97. My thanks to Daniel De Smet and Paul Walker for drawing my attention to this fact.

Muḥammad.²⁵ We have seen that the revelation of “motherly” knowledge makes possible the spiritual exegesis of the complete Book of God, represented by the human bodily form and facial features. The “motherly” line of prophecy introduced by Jesus therefore prepares the humankind for the period of universal ontological exegesis, the *taʿwīl*, when all particles of the divine Word impregnating Creation will return to their origin within the unified divine essence.

Such seem to be the central features of Jesus’ historical mission, as they emerge from the relevant fragments of the *Jāwidān-nāma*. However, during his historical mission, Jesus cannot reveal the fullness of his knowledge and his ontological status as the direct manifestation of the divine Word. This full revelation is forwarded to the second coming of Jesus, at which time he will assume the role of the eschatological Savior.²⁶ This second coming of Jesus is described in the *Jāwidān-nāma* essentially with reference to the “Book of Peter” (*kitāb-i Fiṭrūs*, or *kitāb-i Shamʿūn*).²⁷ It is interesting that the citations from Bible are integrated into the text of the *Jāwidān-nāma* just like the material from the Islamic scriptural sources, the Qurʾān and the *ḥadīth* and, in this case, included in the paradigm of “motherly” knowledge. The central episode of the eschatological mission of Jesus in the *Jāwidān-nāma* is the opening of the Book of Life, apparently identified in the *Jāwidān-nāma* with the sealed book of the Revelation

²⁵ Muḥammad is called *ummī* in Q 7:157–158. On the interpretations of this title see, for example, Günther, Ummī. Another argument used in the *Jāwidān-nāma* to support the thesis of Jesus’ “motherly” status is the reference to the fact that Jesus is mentioned in the Qurʾān by the name of his mother: “the son of Mary”. On the expression “the son of Mary” in the Qurʾān see Robinson, Jesus. Cf. also this remark by Sijistāni, *Maqālīd* 306, in his interpretation of the letter *mīm* of the Qurʾānic combination of letters *ALM*, which comes closer to the specifically Ḥurūfī interpretation: *wa-l-mīm ʿalā ḥadd ʿIsā al-mansūb ilā ummih*.

²⁶ The utterance attributed to Jesus in the relevant fragments of the *Jāwidān-nāma* is most probably a close paraphrase of John 16:25.

²⁷ It is interesting that, though several fragments of the *Jāwidān-nāma* relevant to this topic look as close paraphrase of the canonical Revelation of John, they are attributed to the Book of Peter, along with other citations that are indeed found verbatim in the Mingana’s recension of the Apocalypse of Peter. The name of St. John is not mentioned in the *Jāwidān-nāma*. For example, I was unable to find passages describing the opening of the seven seals of the apocalyptic Book, and the sacrifice of the Lamb described in the canonical Revelation of John (chapter 5 ff.) in Mingana’s translation of the Apocalypse of Peter. It is possible that these passages were contained in the version of the Apocalypse of Peter available to Faḍl Allāh, or that Faḍl Allāh mistakenly attributed the citations from the Revelation of John to Peter. It is also possible that Mingana omitted them from his translation. In the following, I will therefore refer to the closest parallels from the canonical Revelation of John.

of John.²⁸ According to the *Jāwidān-nāma*, the seven seals of the Book of Life symbolize the seven fundamental features of the face of Mary. Opening the seals refers thus to the Jesus' revelation of the fundamental elements of divine ontological writing, which constitute the esoteric meaning of the form of the Mother. Through this revelation, the universal *ta'wīl* will be accomplished, and all humankind will be united within one community speaking the universal language of the divine Word represented by the human bodily form.²⁹ The second coming of Jesus will thus close both the period of "motherly" prophets and saints and the general cycle of revelation and return of the Word.

The mission of Muḥammad marks the end of the "descent" (*tanzīl*) of the Word. Simultaneously, the revelation of the fundamental elements of the "Mother of the Book" materializes in the text of the Qur'ān, where they appear explicitly, represented by the "Seven Twofold" (*al-sab' al-mathānī*) of the Opening Chapter (*Fātiḥa*) of the Qur'ān and the fourteen "isolated" letters (*al-ḥurūf al-muqaṭṭa'ā*), appearing in various combinations in the beginning of the 29 suras.³⁰ According to the *Jāwidān-nāma*, it is this explicit manifestation of the "Mother of the Book" that makes Muḥammad the second *ummī* Prophet after Jesus. The revelation of Muḥammad thus provides all necessary basis for the following period of the "return" (*ta'wīl*). What is more, this period had been anticipated by the heavenly ascension (*mi'rāj*) of Muḥammad, which is a powerful symbol of the *ta'wīl* in the sense of "return to the origin." Indeed, in the course of his ascension, Muḥammad met all the previous prophets, and attained the Lote-tree of the Boundary.³¹ According to the *Jāwidān-nāma*, the Lote-tree symbolizes the cosmic form of Adam, the most perfect of all existing forms and therefore their "boundary."³² From beyond this boundary, i.e. from the source of the pure divine Word, Muḥammad received the words of the prayer. The prayer therefore constitutes a token given to the Muslim community

²⁸ Cf. Revelation, Chapter 5 ff.

²⁹ Cf. Revelation 5:9: "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation" (the King James Bible; italics are mine).

³⁰ For "Seven Twofold" (or "Seven Oft-Repeated") and "Mother of the Book" as names given to the opening chapter of the Qur'ān see, for example, Graham, *Fātiḥa*, and Rubin, *Exegesis*.

³¹ For general information on Muḥammad's ascension see sections of the article *Mi'rāj* by Schrieke, Horovitz and Bencheikh in *ET*². The collective volume edited by Amir-Moezzi, *Le voyage initiatique*, contains excellent contributions on this topic.

³² Only Adam's form is the locus of manifestation of the complete Word; there could therefore be no more perfect form.

as the foretaste of the final *taʿwīl*, which will bring all prophetic revelations to their original source within the divine Word. The true meaning of the “Mother of the Book” was also revealed to Muḥammad when God appeared to him in the form of a beardless youth.³³ As we have seen, the form of youth, either male or female, represents in the *Jāwidān-nāma* the “motherly” form, in which the fundamental lines of the divine writing can be seen most clearly.

After Muḥammad, the line of the *Ummīs* continues in the ascending phase of the cycle of the Word, that is, in the phase of the *taʿwīl*. If anything can be said about the claim of Faḍl Allāh, mentioned above, on the basis of the textual evidence of the *Jāwidān-nāma* alone, it is the implicit suggestion that this work was supposed to inaugurate the last stage of the cycle of the Word, that of the pure *taʿwīl*. It is on this stage that I will focus in the second part of this paper.

2. UMMĪ IMĀMS? THE FIGURES OF ONTOLOGICAL EXEGESIS (TAʿWĪL) IN THE *JĀWIDĀN-NĀMA* AND THE TRADITIONAL SHĪʿĪ CONCEPT OF IMĀM

“It is He Who has raised up from among the *ummiyīn* a Messenger from among them”³⁴ (Q 62:2): it was necessary that they be *ummi*, and the last of them must be *ummi* (363b)

Thought it is possible that this short remark refers only to Jesus (both in his historical and eschatological missions) and Muḥammad who are, as we have seen above, explicitly qualified in the *Jāwidān-nāma* as the *ummi* prophets bringing the revelation of the “motherly” knowledge, some textual evidence suggests that the category of the *Ummīs* in the *Jāwidān-nāma* is much broader and includes all figures related to the progressive realization of the *taʿwīl* in the period between the mission of Muḥammad and the second coming of Jesus at the end of time.³⁵ However, these figures are not very clearly described in the *Jāwidān-nāma*, and the details concerning the period of the *taʿwīl* can only be obtained by the close examination and comparison of the often—and probably intentionally—allusive fragments.

³³ See n. 20 above.

³⁴ I have substituted the original *ummiyīn* for Arberry’s translation “common people”.

³⁵ It is possible that the phrase “the last of them will be *ummi*” in the fragment cited above refers to this second coming of Jesus, who is thus the first and the last *ummi* prophet.

Since “motherly” knowledge is associated in the *Jāwidān-nāma* with the power of the *taʿwīl*, it would be natural to expect that the conception of the *Ummīs* will be similar to the traditional Shīʿī interpretation of the Imāmate. Indeed, like the *Ummīs* of the *Jāwidān-nāma*, the Shīʿī Imāms are essentially in charge of the *taʿwīl*, the revelation of the esoteric meaning of Muḥammad’s message, leading to the original metaphysical dimension of the divine Word manifested in the Qurʾān and in all previous prophetic messages.³⁶ The concept of *taʿwīl* in the *Jāwidān-nāma* is, without doubt, identical to the Shīʿī understanding of this term. In several fragments, the *Jāwidān-nāma* develops doctrinal positions similar to those associated in Shīʿism with the functions of the holy Imāms but, interestingly, without any direct reference to specifically Shīʿī materials or terminology. In these fragments, apparently Shīʿī inspired conceptions are presented as commentary on the Qurʾānic verses. For example, the fragment in f. 269b suggests that the “motherly” prophets and saints are the original loci of manifestation of the fundamental ontological writing of God; they are the “well-preserved Tablet” of God in which the original nature of any possible object or being is “written.” The “motherly” knowledge conveyed by these prophets and saints thus enables the receiver of this knowledge to read the divine ontological writing in everything. In other words, this knowledge is the knowledge of the universal *taʿwīl*:

From the original nature (*khilqa*) of the “motherly” (*ummī*) ones, like Jesus son of Mary, pass [to the contemplation] of all objects [and beings], apparent and hidden (*ẓāhir wa bāṭin*), [including the] mental and imaginary [objects], and see [them all] as the divine [ontological] writing and the “word” (*kitābat wa kalima-yi khudā*) . . . The [bodily] shape [of the “motherly” ones] is the royal book and the well-preserved Tablet of God (*kitāb-i kiyā wa lawḥ-i maḥfūz-i ilāhī*), where the being (*hastī*) of all things should be sought. In them can be read the [ontological] writing of anything . . . The [ontological] exegesis (*taʿwīl*) of any possible [object or being] and [of any image] seen in the dreams is [contained] in humans (*insān*). (269b)

Though applied to the *Ummīs* and not to Imāms, this position is identical to the general Shīʿī doctrine of the Imām as the locus of manifestation of the divine Word and the well-preserved Tablet, a status which founds the universal ontological *taʿwīl* as the prerogative of the Imām. It is interesting that, without making any explicit reference to the Shīʿī concepts, several

³⁶ The term *walāya* is mentioned in the *Jāwidān-nāma* only very allusively, and in most fragments it is difficult to say if the author attributes any specific technical meaning to it. However, transparent allusions to the Shīʿī concept of *walāya* can be found in a few fragments of the work.

passages of the *Jāwidān-nāma* highlight the link between the words *ummī* and *imām*, derived from the same Arabic root 'mm. In these passages, *imām* is described as the plural of *umm* "mother," and thus associated with the conception of "mother" and "motherly knowledge" specific to the *Jāwidān-nāma*:

"On the day when We shall call all men with their Imāms (*bi-imāmihim*)"³⁷ (Q 17:71) ... [that is to say], "with their mothers," because *imām* is the plural of *umm* ["mother"], which means that they will be called to the original nature (*khilqa*) of Eve, from which it is possible to reach the original nature of Adam. (439b)

The fundamental Shī'ī doctrine of the Imām as the manifestation of the divine Word and spiritual Guide, the means by which the divine attributes can be known, could be alluded to in passages such as the following:

O humans ... you recognize your true guide (*murshid*) either in a Messenger (*rasūl*) or in an Imām ... The Word (*kalīma*) constitutes the inner truth (*ḥaqīqa*) of your Guide, who is [otherwise] a sensible being (*maḥsūs*) ... And if you do not recognize either God, or a Messenger or Imām ... as your true guide ... there is no doubt that such persons will not attain the divine secrets ... and do not deserve to be followed. (383a)

The conception of the Imām as the manifestation of the divine Word is also developed in other fragments of the *Jāwidān-nāma*, still without any explicitly Shī'ī reference. The Imām is assimilated to the Qur'ān and to Jesus, because all three are the direct manifestations of the divine Word: "Everything We have numbered in a clear register (*imām*)" (Q 36:12). The Qur'ān is the Word (*kalīma*), the Word is Imām, and Jesus is the Word" (177a).

The *Jāwidān-nāma* develops its interpretation of the Imām as holy book revealed to the prophets along the same lines. Though the Shī'ī influence is strongly suggested, it remains implicit in the relevant fragments, which refer essentially to the Qur'ānic passages where the word *imām* is used with the meaning "book, register," given to the prophets as guide. It is possible that the purpose of these fragments is not only to conceal the Shī'ī inspiration of the work, but also to integrate specifically Shī'ī doctrines into the broader Islamic context.³⁸ The following passage is an example of such an interpretation:

³⁷ I have replaced Arberry's "record" by the original *Imām*.

³⁸ I will discuss in the Conclusion how the effort to reconcile the Sunnī/Shī'ī doctrinal frictions could be part of the general messianic project of the *Jāwidān-nāma*.

The Messenger said: “Whoever has died without having known the Imām of his time has died the death of the ignorant”³⁹. . . From this *ḥadīth*, it can be concluded that there is no age without an Imām, and the Imām of every age is the holy book of this age, for [it is said]: “Yet before it was the Book of Moses for a model (*imām*) and a mercy” (Q 46:12), and “Everything We have numbered in a clear register (*imām*)” (Q 36:12). Therefore, this “Imām” refers to the Qurʾān and to all [other] holy books. It is thus necessary to know the Imām, which is the holy book. And the Qurʾān is the Imām, because it explains the essence (*dhāt*), the attributes (*ṣifāt*) [of God], the origin and the return (*mabdāʾ wa maʿād*), the science of the without-beginning and without-end (*ʿilm-i azal wa abad*), the past and the future (*mā kāna wa mā yakūn*). (430a–b)

The same ambiguity, bridging the gaps between specifically Shīʿī doctrines and views generally admitted in the Muslim community, can be seen in passages which, starting from the most neutral description of the Imām as the person who leads the prayer, evolve towards the Shīʿī doctrine of the Imām as the visible Face of God. The argumentation of the *Jāwidān-nāma* underlying this interpretation of the figure of the Imām can be summarized as follows. An Imām who leads the prayer performs his prayer in the *miḥrāb*, with his face turned towards Mecca and Kaʿba. The mosque symbolizes the human body, where the *miḥrāb* corresponds to the face. In accordance with the well-known *ḥadīth*, God created Adam’s head from the earth collected at the location of the Kaʿba.⁴⁰ Therefore, like the *miḥrāb*, the Kaʿba symbolizes the human face, the locus of manifestation of the complete divine ontological writing and, more particularly, the locus of manifestation of the most fundamental, “motherly” lines of this writing. This is why the Kaʿba is surnamed “the Mother of the cities” (*umm al-qurā*).⁴¹ This last point also supports the thesis of the “motherly,” *ummī* quality of the Imām, which is alluded to in the passages cited above (f. 439b). Thus, during the prayer, the truth of the divine Word and the fundamental “motherly” knowledge of the ontological writing manifests itself on the face of the Imām, and this is the essential reason for which, during the ritual prayer, the Imām faces the Kaʿba, the source of “motherly” knowledge, and for which the believers prostrate themselves *behind* the Imām.

³⁹ *Man māta wa lam yaʿrif imām zamānih fa-qad māta mayta jāhiliyya.*

⁴⁰ For this *ḥadīth*, see Kister, Adam 133–134.

⁴¹ On this expression, see Bosworth, Umm al-Ḳurā. For the Nuṣayrī identification of *Umm al-qurā* with Fāṭima see Friedman, Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs 137–8.

Concerning the Imāmate. The mosque is a representation of the human form (*mithāl-i šurat-i insān*), and the *mihrāb* is the representation of the face. There is the place of the *imām*. In accordance with the religious law (*sharīʿa*), nobody can stand either before the *imām*, or at his right or left. The true *imām* (*imām-i haqīqī*), of whom the visible *imām* (*imām-i zahīrī*) is locum tenens (*qāʾim-maqām*), faces his own representation, which is the Kaʿba.⁴² Nobody stands *next* to the *imām*; all the attendance performs the prostrations *behind* him. In a sense, they perform their prostrations before the *imām*, while he [the *imām*] prostrates himself before his own representation: not before his own representation as such, but before this divine truth (*haqīqat-i khudāʾī*) which is manifested (*tajallī*) in him. The *mihrāb* is thus established as [representing] the form of the original nature (*šurat-i khilqa*), the location of the unique person (*shakhs*) who is the *imām*. (150a)

The Shīʿī inspiration behind doctrinal views in several other fragments is still more explicit, because they are developed with reference to ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, the first Shīʿī Imām. The choice of ʿAlī, with almost no mention of any other historical Imām, is understandable if, as is confirmed by other evidence in the *Jāwidān-nāma*, Faḍl Allāh wanted to avoid any straightforward manifestation of his Shīʿī sympathies.⁴³ ʿAlī, the cousin and the son-in-law of the Prophet and the fourth caliph of the Muslim community, is also a much respected figure in Sunnī Islam. However, the doctrines related in the *Jāwidān-nāma* to the figure of ʿAlī are unmistakably of Shīʿī origin.

In the cosmological scheme of the differentiation and descent of the divine Word that I have briefly outlined in the first part of this paper, ʿAlī personifies the black Point, the first visible expression of the Word and the original science (*ʿilm*) of the Word. We have also seen that the concept of science seems identical in the *Jāwidān-nāma* to that of “locus of manifestation” (*maḥzar*). The Word can only be known through its visible manifestations, and the origin of all visible manifestations, including writing, is the original Point: this Point is ʿAlī. Some fragments of the *Jāwidān-nāma* establish a link between ʿAlī and the Imāmate: “[ʿAlī] said: ‘I am the point under *bāʾ*.’ Whoever knows the point knows ʿAlī, and whoever knows the Qurʾān and the Point knows the Imām of his time” (232b). Since the Point is the origin of divine ontological writing, ʿAlī symbolizes the source of any prophetic book; any revealed Book will eventually return to the

⁴² This passage from the “visible” to the “true” Imām marks the beginning of the *Jāwidān-nāma*’s interpretation of the exoteric figure of the Imām outlined in the beginning of this fragment.

⁴³ Cf. n. 13 above.

truth represented by ‘Alī through the operation of the ontological *taʿwīl*. In other words, he is the living “science of the Word,” which constitutes the innermost, esoteric meaning of the prophetic books. In the relevant fragments, the *Jāwidān-nāma* explicitly uses utterances attributed to ‘Alī and *ḥadīth* materials particularly popular in Shīʿī circles:

‘Alī said: “I am the speaking Book (*kitāb-i nāṭiq*), and this [the Qurʾān] is the silent book (*kitāb-i ṣāmit*);” “and with Us is a Book speaking truth” (Q 23:62) ... [‘Alī] is thus the true speaking Word (*kalām-i nāṭiq bi-ḥaqīqa*), while the soot and the blackness [of the ink] constitute the metaphorical, silent Word (*kalām-i ṣāmit bi-majāz*) ... And the Messenger said: “I fought for the descent (*tanẓīl*) [of the Word], while ‘Alī will fight for its return (*taʿwīl*),” and he also said: “I and ‘Alī, we are the same light”.⁴⁴ (184a)

The theme of ‘Alī as the speaking Word of God is further developed in other fragments, for example:

‘Alī is “touched in the essence of God” (*mamsūs fi dhāt Allāh*), for he said: “I am the Word of God” (*anā kalām Allāh*), and Word is an attribute of the essence (*ṣifat-i dhātī*) of the speaker; it cannot be separated from the speaker. God has an essence, and the Word is its inseparable attribute, and ‘Alī said: “I am the speaking Word of God” (*anā kalām Allāh al-nāṭiq*). (383b–384a)

What is more, even if the names of historical Imāms other than ‘Alī occur very rarely in the *Jāwidān-nāma*, as I mentioned above, some fragments state that knowledge of the *taʿwīl* will be transmitted in the line of the descendants of ‘Alī: “The day its [Book’s] interpretation (*taʿwīl*) comes’ (Qur. 7:53), and [Muḥammad] said that ‘Alī will fight for the *taʿwīl*: this means that [the knowledge] of the *taʿwīl* was given to ‘Alī, i.e. to his descendants.” (206a–b)

Some of the interpretations of the word *imām* that were mentioned in the previous citations without any specifically Shīʿī reference, such as the identification of the Imām with the prophetic books in general and with the Qurʾān in particular, with the divine Word and with Jesus (cf. fragments 177a and 430a–b above), are also developed, in other fragments, with direct references or very transparent allusions to ‘Alī. The following fragment states almost explicitly that ‘Alī is Imām. Although, significantly, the name ‘Alī is not mentioned in this fragment, he is referred to by a well-known utterance attributed to him. If we recall that, according to the

⁴⁴ It is remarkable that, in this fragment, the words of ‘Alī and Muḥammad are cited in the Astarābādī dialect, instead of the original Arabic, which could indicate a concern with *taqīyya*.

Jāwidān-nāma, Jesus is the first *ummī* prophet, the implicit identification ‘Alī = Jesus = Imām gives us another example of the close link between the concepts *ummī* and *imām*:

“The Qur’ān is my *imām*” (*al-Qur’ān imāmī*): [the Qur’ān] is the soot and blackness [of the ink, the support of the visible writing, which constitutes] the science [of the divine Word]. [During prayer], it is convenient to turn the face in this direction, because the soot and blackness [of the writing] lead to the Word (*kalīma*). The Imām is the person [referred to by the expressions]: “I am the speaking Word of God” (*anā kalām Allāh al-nāṭiq*) and “His Word that He committed to Mary” (Q 4:171). Therefore, the Word is Imām, and . . . “whoever is dead without having known the Imām of his time died the death of the ignorant.”⁴⁵ This means that whoever does not know the Word of his time is an unbeliever (*kāfir*). “I am the speaking Word of God,” “everything We have numbered in a clear register (*fi imām mubīn*)” (Q 36:12), i.e. “in the clear Word” (*ay fi kalīma mubīn*). (189a–b)

Another essential aspect of the Shī‘ī doctrine of the Imāmate, namely the Imāmate as the completion or fulfillment of the prophetic mission, is also developed in the *Jāwidān-nāma* with a cautious reference to ‘Alī.⁴⁶ The central scriptural reference used in the *Jāwidān-nāma* in order to emphasize the link between the idea of the fulfillment of the divine Word and the status of Imām is the Qur’ānic passage 2:124: “And when his Lord tested Abraham with certain words, and he fulfilled them. He said, ‘Behold, I make you a leader (*imām*) for the people.’” From this citation, the *Jāwidān-nāma* concludes that “the Imāmate and the fulfillment of the [divine] words (*kalīmāt*) . . . are interrelated” (10a). However, the role of “fulfilling” Muḥammad’s mission is ascribed in the *Jāwidān-nāma* to ‘Alī. More precisely, ‘Alī symbolizes four primordial “words” that, added to the 28 “words” represented by the 28 letters of the Arabic alphabet, revealed in the Qur’ān, will complete the revelation of the 32 aspects of the divine Word.⁴⁷ “‘Alī . . . is the locum tenens (*qā’im-maqām*) of these

⁴⁵ The paraphrase in the Astarābādī dialect precedes in this passage the citation of the Arabic text of the tradition, which we have already seen in fragment 430a–b above.

⁴⁶ This aspect of the Imāmate is particularly stressed in the Ismā‘īlism. See, for example, Halm, *Kosmologie* 25.

⁴⁷ For the 28/32 “words” cf. n. 16 above. The four additional “words” which, added to the 28 “words” symbolized by the 28 letters of the Arabic alphabet composing the Qur’ān, fulfil the revelation of the 32 “words” of the complete Word, are often referred to, in the *Jāwidān-nāma*, by the names of four letters added to the Arabic alphabet in order to express sounds specific to Persian (*chūm*, *pā*, *zhā* and *gāf*). This is certainly an argument in favour of the thesis that Faḍl Allāh would have advocated the sacredness of the Persian language. However, this thesis is not formulated explicitly in the *Jāwidān-nāma*.

four [primordial] ‘words.’ The manifestation of these four ‘words’ will realize [the condition] of universal unification” (377b).

Another concept which describes in the *Jāwidān-nāma* the category of people responsible for realizing and revealing the knowledge of the complete Word in the period following Muḥammad’s mission is that of Witness (*shahīd* pl. *shuhadāʾ*). Unlike *imām*, the word *shahīd* is not derived from the Arabic root *ʾmm*, and thus cannot be directly associated with the “motherly” ones, the *Ummīs*. However, such an association is suggested in several fragments of the *Jāwidān-nāma*, by the intermediary of another term formed from the root *ʾmm*, namely *umma*. The general meaning of this term is “people, nation, religious community.”⁴⁸ However, in the Qur. 16:120 this term is applied to a single person, Abraham, most probably with the meaning “model.”⁴⁹ The *Jāwidān-nāma* highlights the link between the act of witnessing and *umma*, established in the Qurʾān with reference to the community of Muḥammad, and suggests that *umma* can also mean the quality of an individual witness, just as this term is used to describe Abraham:

“Thus We appointed you a midmost nation [that you might be witnesses to the people]” (Q 2:143) . . . A Witness (*shahīd*) of this [Muḥammad’s] nation (*umma*) is a person to who belongs the “science of the Book” (*ʾilm-i kitāb ba-ū ʾāʾid bāshad*). If someone says that [the Qurʾānic verse] mentions a nation (*umma*) [of witnesses, and not a single person], the answer is: “Surely, Abraham was a nation (*umma*) obedient unto God, a man of pure faith and no idolater” (Q 16:120) (77a–b).

We have already seen an example of the *Jāwidān-nāma*’s interpretation of the Qurʾānic verse where Abraham is qualified as *imām*.⁵⁰ This could suggest a link between the concepts of witness and *imām*. However, the essential comparison between “witnesses” and *imāms* is based not on etymological developments, but on the similarity of their respective functions in the period of the *taʾwīl*. The Qurʾānic description of the witnesses as belonging to the “midmost nation” is used in the *Jāwidān-nāma* as a reference to one of the central conceptions of this work, that of “Balance” (*istiwāʾ*). The principle of Balance, which I briefly mentioned at

⁴⁸ For the meanings of this term in the Qurʾān, see Denny, *Community and Society, idem*, Ummah.

⁴⁹ On the interpretations of the term *umma* in this verse, see Singh and Agwan, *Encyclopaedia* 1535.

⁵⁰ Cf. the fragment from f. 10a above.

the beginning of this paper,⁵¹ governs in the *Jāwidān-nāma* the paradoxical correspondence between the divine and the human, the metaphysical truth of the Word and the visible form, the hidden meaning and its external manifestation. Balance is associated with the divine attributes of Equity (*qisṭ*) and Justice (*ʿadl*). The line of Balance (*khatt-i istiwāʿ*) of any visible form reveals the divine ontological writing in it and makes it possible to discern, or “read,” the “words” of the divine ontological language which constitute the innermost meaning of this form. In other words, Balance is the ultimate key to the *taʿwīl*.⁵² It is the discovery of this line of Balance, omnipresent in the universe, that enables a human being to witness the unity of God and thus join the “midmost nation”:

“God bears witness that there is no god but He” (Q 3:18). O seeker, [in this verse] God bears witness to Himself that there is no god but He. As far as you have not realized that [Adam, Power without beginning and the Word] mentioned above are one and the same, how can you know how He bore this witness? In as much as you stay in this condition, you are certainly not He, and therefore, you cannot know Him as He is, and cannot bear witness to His oneness based on your personal realization (*taḥqīq*). In as much as you did not experience the being of all existing beings (*wujūd-i jamīʿ-yi mawjūdāt*), and became identical to all [kinds] of beings (*ʿayn-i wujūd-i hama*), [in as much as] you did not draw the line of balance (*khatt-i istiwāʿ*) of all beings and become identical to this line of balance, how can you contemplate [Him] “upholding justice (*qāʿiman bi-l-qisṭ*)” (Q 3:18)? How can you become “endowed with the knowledge” (*ūlū al-ʿilm*), and bear witness on the basis of your personal spiritual realization (*taḥqīq*) in accordance with what God said [in the verse]: “God bears witness that there is no god but He—and the angels, and men possessed of knowledge—upholding justice” (Q 3:18). But when you attain the abovementioned knowledge, you become “possessed of knowledge,” and join the midmost nation, and can therefore bear witness on the basis of your personal realization. And the Messenger . . . can then bear witness to your truthfulness (*ṣidq*), without any doubt or hesitation.⁵³ You must hear permanently, with hearing free of doubt (*bi-samʿi yaqīn*), the call: “Am I not your Lord?” (Q 7:172), coming from the Lord (*rabb*), or from the Father (*ab*), or from Adam, or from the Back (*ẓahr*), or from the Power (*quwwa*), which are all one and the same thing, and you must hear and contemplate, with hearing and knowledge free of doubt (*bi-samʿ wa ʿilm-i yaqīn*), the answer “Yes!” coming not only from the

⁵¹ Cf. n. 17.

⁵² A detailed presentation of the *Jāwidān-nāma*'s description of the principle of Balance and its various manifestations would exceed the limits of this paper. See Mir-Kasimov, *Étude* 90–121, *The Language of Birds*, Glossary and Index, “Balance”.

⁵³ This is an allusion to Q 2:143, cited at the end of this fragment.

spirits of Adam's descendents, but from [every] atom of existing [beings and objects] (*az dharrāt-i mawjūdāt*), from the apparent and the hidden (*ẓāhir wa bāṭin*), from [anything] actual and potential (*bi-l-fi'l wa bi-l-quwwa*), from the living and the dead, in dream, when awake, and in imagination, from the speaking and the silent (*nāṭiq wa ṣāmit*), from mineral, plant and animal. Then, you can also bear witness on the part of all of them, that all existing [objects and beings] answer "Yes!" [when questioned by God]: "Am I not your Lord?" and that they all recognize [God as their Lord]. In as much as you did not realize the abovementioned condition, how can you bear witness to the delivery (*tablīgh*) of the prophetic messages? How will you join the midmost nation? And how can the Messenger bear witness to your truthfulness, as it is said: "[Thus We appointed you a midmost nation (*ummatan wasaṭan*) that you might be witnesses to the people,] and that the Messenger might be a witness to you" (Q 2:143)? (473b–474a)

Since, as I mentioned in the first part of this paper, the human form is the most perfect manifestation of the divine ontological writing, the aptitude to witness, in the sense specified above, is closely linked in the *Jāwidān-nāma* to self-knowledge.⁵⁴ Let us recall that, according to the *Jāwidān-nāma*, the knowledge of the innermost meaning of the human form is based on "motherly" knowledge. We could, therefore, expect a link between the aptitude to witness and "motherly" knowledge. It seems that such a link is, indeed, suggested by some fragments of the *Jāwidān-nāma*, in particular with reference to the symbolic meaning of the Ka'ba and the Black Stone, which was already mentioned in the discussion of the term *imām* above. This symbol also points to an interesting aspect of possible relationship between witness and *imām*. Fragment 473b–474a refers to the witnessing described in the Qur'ānic verse 7:172, usually interpreted as an allusion to the primordial Covenant (*mīthāq*).⁵⁵ According to the *Jāwidān-nāma*, the prototypes of humans extracted from the loins of Adam were able to bear witness both on their own selves and on their Lord because, in this particular circumstance, they contemplated the form of Adam as the locus of manifestation of the 32 ontological "words" of the divine Word, and thus realized their own original nature as a copy of the Word:

"[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?' (Q 7:172). Of course, they answered: "Yes, we testify," because they saw that

⁵⁴ As it could be expected, the well-known *ḥadīth* "he who knows his own self, knows his Lord" (*man 'arafa nafsah faqad 'arafa rabbah*) is frequently cited in the fragments of the *Jāwidān-nāma* related to this topic.

⁵⁵ Cf. Böwering, Covenant.

Adam had been created in accordance with the number of the 32 divine “words” (280b).

The Covenant therefore represents the archetype of witnessing, which founds the *Jāwidān-nāma*'s concept of witness. In several other fragments, the *Jāwidān-nāma* refers to the beliefs according to which the Covenant was enclosed in the Black Stone, from which it will reappear in the end of time.⁵⁶ The Black Stone, preserved inside the Ka'ba, is therefore a token and a reminder of the Covenant and of the original Witness. The following fragment ascribes this belief to 'Alī, and at the same time develops the idea of a link between the Ka'ba, the Imām and “motherly” knowledge with regard to the Covenant:

'Alī said, with regard to the Black Stone, that the Covenant of the descendants of Adam was enclosed in this stone, [and] will appear from it [in the end of time]. And the Imām will appear from the Ka'ba,⁵⁷ which is the “Mother of the cities” (*umm al-qurā*) and the mother of the earth in its entirety (*umm-i hama arḍ ast*). [Indeed], the Imām must come forth from the origin (*aṣl*) . . . : “those who follow the Messenger, the *ummī* Prophet”⁵⁸ (Q 7:157). (245a–b)

The witness of the “midmost nation” will also be based on the knowledge of the secret of the Ka'ba, which is the secret of the divine ontological writing in the universe:

The nation of Muḥammad, peace be upon him, is [according to Q 2:143] the “midmost nation.” . . . because this nation is the most truthful (*khayr-i ḥaqīqa*), and the most truthful nation is that which will reach the centre of all heavens, of the earth, of the Ka'ba and of the lines [of ontological writing] of things. The Ka'ba is the centre of the earth, and his nation will reach the secret of the Ka'ba. (459b)

These fragments suggest, albeit indirectly, a fundamental link between Witnesses, Imāms and “motherly” knowledge of the basic lines of the divine writing leading to the knowledge of the complete Word. The link with the “motherly” aspect of the knowledge of the Word is further developed in the fragments concerning the “witnesses” from the community of Muḥammad. Indeed, since the aptitude to witness is related in the *Jāwidān-nāma* essentially to self-knowledge, it can potentially be attained through a personal realization at any moment in history. However, such

⁵⁶ Cf. Kister, Adam 159–161.

⁵⁷ For beliefs concerning the appearance of the Imām/Mahdī/Qā'im in Mecca, near Ka'ba, see Cook, *Studies* 203, Sachedina *Messianism* 74–77.

⁵⁸ “*Ummī* Prophet” replaces here Arberry's “Prophet of the common folk”.

a realization becomes a hallmark of the period of *taʿwīl* following the explicit revelation of the “Mother of the Book,” of the foundations of the divine Word in the mission of Muḥammad. From this point on, the “midmost community” refers specifically to the true believers belonging to the community founded by Muḥammad, to the extent that they realize the “motherly” knowledge of the foundations of the Word included in his prophetic message. This realization makes them witnesses for all humankind:

This science of the creation of things (*‘ilm-i khūlqat-i ašyāʾ*) [by the means of the 28 and 32 letters produced by the command “Be!” (*kun!*)] had to appear in the religion [established] by the *ummī* Prophet [i.e. Muḥammad, allusion to Q 7:157 and 158], in the midmost [position]: “Thus We appointed you a midmost nation that you might be witnesses to the people” (Q 2:143). (75a–b)

The eschatological functions ascribed in the *Jāwidān-nāma* to the “witnesses” echo Shīʿī beliefs concerning the Qāʾim, the last Imām expected at the end of time. The “witnesses” will explain the true, esoteric meaning of the “clear” (*muḥkam*) and “ambiguous” (*mutashābih*) verses of the Qurʾān, of the Muslim ritual, of the images of Muḥammad’s heavenly ascension. They will disclose the secrets of the Resurrection and prepare the second coming of Jesus (87a–b). They will explicitly reveal all that was mentioned in the Qurʾān in indirect and allusive language, and the people will recognize that their knowledge comes directly from an authentic source, not from “blind imitation” (*taqlīd*) (277a–b). Like the Imāms, the Witnesses will be initiated into the innermost truth of Muḥammad’s revelation and, with reference to a well-known *ḥadīth*, lead the only group destined for salvation from the 73 groups resulting from the division of the Muslim community.⁵⁹

[The Prophet] said: “my witness (*shahīd*), who will [bear witness] to my message, will be a person referred to, in the divine speech, as ‘possessor of the science of the Book’ (*wa man ʿindah ʿilm al-kitāb*). This witness will testify my truthfulness [or ‘the [esoteric] truth [of my message]’ (*ḥaqīqat-i man*). God will show him my knowledge and [inner] truths (*ʿilm wa ḥaqāʾiq*), so that [all] creatures (*khalāʾiq*) and the descendents of Adam will clearly see that this person comes from God. He will be the path to the divine knowledge (*ʿilm-i khudā*), and he will know the group destined for salvation (*firqa nājiya*).” (457b)

⁵⁹ On this *ḥadīth* and its interpretations in different currents of Islam, see van Ess, *Beobachtungen* 7 ff.

The Shī'ī distinction between the terms *ṣāhib al-tanzīl*, referring to the prophets responsible for the “descent” (*tanzīl*) of the divine Word in their respective revelations, and *ṣāhib al-ta'wīl*, referring to the Imāms responsible for the Return to the origin (*ta'wīl*) of the Word can also be found in the *Jāwidān-nāma*.⁶⁰ Just as we have seen in the case of the term *imām*, the term *ṣāhib al-ta'wīl* is used in the *Jāwidān-nāma* without any explicitly Shī'ī reference, and integrated into the doctrine of the cycle of the Word determined by its 28 and 32 aspects or “words” specific to this work. Some passages of the *Jāwidān-nāma* suggest that the *ṣāhib al-ta'wīl* will reveal 32 primordial “words.” Added to the 28 “words” revealed by Muḥammad who, in his quality as the “seal of the prophets” closes the “descent” of the Word, the “words” of the *ṣāhib al-ta'wīl* will reach the number 60, representing the cosmic body of Adam and the complete Book of God.⁶¹ The following two passages describe the role of the *ṣāhib al-ta'wīl*:

“Sixty poor persons,” “two successive months” (Q 58:4): sixty days [of the two months] refer to the sixty cubits of the height of Adam.⁶² 28 [primordial] “words” were revealed in the language of the master of the “descent” (*ṣāhib-i tanzīl*), and 32 in the language of the master of the “return” (*ṣāhib-i ta'wīl*). Whoever has such a height, matches the height of Adam and will enter paradise. (189b)

The single elements of the divine “words” (*mufradāt-i kalimāt-i ilāhī*) were manifested (*tajallī*) for the first time in the person of Adam, because “He taught Adam the names, all of them” (Q 2:31). Adam was the father of humankind, and angels bowed down before him. After [Adam], the same single elements were manifested in the bodily form of the Seal (*dar wujūd-i khātim*). [This last manifestation] sealed the source (*mabdā'*) [from which the revelation “descended,” and initiated] the return (*ma'ād*). The same [single elements] come and manifest themselves in the locus of manifestation of the master of the return (*dar maẓhar-i ṣāhib-i ta'wīl*), which accomplishes the task. As far as God exists, humans and the human form (*insān wa ṣūrat-i insān*) will exist. Adam was in the beginning, and in the end there

⁶⁰ Faḍl Allāh is often mentioned in the works of his disciples with the title *ṣāhib al-ta'wīl*. In the case of Faḍl Allāh, this title refers to his specific spiritual experience, when the innermost meaning of the letters of the alphabet as the starting point of the universal *ta'wīl* was disclosed to him. It is interesting that, notwithstanding this evidence from the later Ḥurūfī works, Faḍl Allāh did not explicitly apply the title *ṣāhib al-ta'wīl* to himself in the *Jāwidān-nāma*.

⁶¹ This “complementary” perspective on the relationship between the 28 “words” of the *tanzīl* and the 32 “words” of the *ta'wīl* coexists in the *Jāwidān-nāma* with the “inclusive” one, according to which the 28 “words” will be completed by the four additional “words” up to the number 32. The similar interpretation was mentioned above with reference to ‘Alī.

⁶² For this *ḥadīth*, see Kister, Adam 139.

are the Seal and the master of the return. All three are one and the same person . . . The ultimate goal of the revolution of the heavenly sphere around the earth is to realize the manifestation of Adam. (236b in margin)

The passages cited above do not contain any reference to the identity of the *ṣāhib-i ta'wīl*. We have already seen that several passages indicate 'Alī as the person charged with the *ta'wīl* after the completion of Muḥammad's mission. However, the central figure in the eschatology of the *Jāwidān-nāma* is Jesus in his second coming.⁶³ Jesus will teach the *ta'wīl* and show that the forms of all existent objects and beings are the loci of manifestation of the ontological "words":

Jesus said . . . [that he will come] in order to lead people to perfection (*kamāl*), to teach the *ta'wīl* (*ta'līm-i ta'wīl*), and to teach that all existing objects and beings (*mawjūdāt*) were brought into existence by the Word (*kalām wa sukhan*), and that they are all loci of manifestation (*maḥṣar*) of the divine Word. (426a)

3. CONCLUSION

The *Jāwidān-nāma* of Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī contains an original conception of "motherly" (*ummī*) prophecy and sainthood, which is very probably an extension of the traditional Shī'ī doctrine of the Imāmate.⁶⁴ The specific features which distinguish *ummīs* from *imāms*, such as the starting point (Jesus for the *ummīs* and 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib for the *imāms*), and the reference to "motherly" knowledge, in the sense discussed above, rely implicitly, as does the *Jāwidān-nāma* in general, on the personal revelation claimed by Faḍl Allāh. In other words, personal revelation is expected to provide Faḍl Allāh with the authority necessary to undertake his modification of the traditional Shī'ī doctrine.

Was this modification purely doctrinal or did it also have a socio-political dimension? From what we know about Faḍl Allāh's biography, it appears that political ambitions were not foreign to him. This is also confirmed by

⁶³ It is impossible to discuss the *Jāwidān-nāma's* eschatology in any detail within the limits of this article. For the eschatological role of Jesus in the *Jāwidān-nāma*, see Mir-Kasimov, *Étude* 356–394.

⁶⁴ Some fragments of the *Jāwidān-nāma* concerning the relationships between the prophethood (*nubuwwa*) and sainthood (*walāya*) seem to contain traces of Ibn al-'Arabī's terminology. However, immediate Shī'ī inspiration seems predominant in the *Jāwidān-nāma*. The issue of various Ṣūfī and Shī'ī influences that could have affected the *Jāwidān-nāma's* doctrinal developments is addressed in my forthcoming monograph.

the history of the Ḥurūfī movement after his death. Arguably, the persecutions and accusations of heresy leveled against the Ḥurūfīs reflected an “orthodox” response to their political activities, not to their elaborate and little known doctrines. This active political involvement is a natural consequence of their messianic orientation, in the sense that any messianic leader believes that his or her doctrine will usher in a new period in the history of his community, or even of all humankind, and therefore has the vocation of being generally accepted, as the only true religion.

As a messianic leader, Faḍl Allāh was not an exception to this rule, and the *Jāwidān-nāma* contains many traces of an effort to present Islam as a universal religion, which in its final phase will overcome all inner divisions and even encompass other religious traditions, in particular Judaism and Christianity. This ecumenical intention of the *Jāwidān-nāma* seems discernible behind extensive commentaries on Biblical texts and Christian (and Jewish?) apocrypha, side by side with the Qurʾān and *ḥadīth*. The belief that the Savior will establish a universal religion is part of Muslim messianic expectations, both Sunnī and Shīʿī.

The modification of the traditional Shīʿī doctrine of the Imāmate, one of the most important points of discord between the Shīʿīs and the Sunnīs, could be a step along the same universalist lines, aiming at the unification of the Muslim community. The *Jāwidān-nāma*'s conception of *ummī* prophets and saints indeed preserves the idea of *taʿwīl*, in the sense of ontological exegesis operating the return of the prophetic revelation to its origin in the divine Word. This idea is fundamental to the Shīʿī doctrine of the Imāmate. But, instead of attributing the function of the *taʿwīl* directly to the Imāms, the *Jāwidān-nāma* makes it unfold in the line of the *Ummīs*, which begins and finishes with Jesus. The specifically Shīʿī coloration of this doctrine is further attenuated by linking the *taʿwīl* to “motherly” knowledge, with particular reference to the generally admitted interpretation of the “mother of the book” (*umm al-kitāb*) as the prototype, summary or foundation of the Qurʾān.⁶⁵ The same holds true with regard to the *Jāwidān-nāma*'s presentation of the figure of the Imām: while the specifically Shīʿī doctrine of the Imām as the locus of manifestation of the divine attributes, the visible Face of God, is preserved, it is attenuated by the reference to the general, neutral meaning of this word as “leader of prayer” or “prophetic book.” The eschatological role of the last Imām, the Qāʾim, while it is alluded to in some passages related to ‘Alī, is expressed

⁶⁵ For the meaning of the expression *umm al-kitāb* see, for example, Madigan, Book.

more explicitly with reference to the figure of the Witness from the nation of Muḥammad, and, essentially, with reference to Jesus, in accordance with Sunnī beliefs concerning the second coming of Jesus.⁶⁶

The *Jāwidān-nāma*'s conception of the *Ummīs* could therefore represent an example of the modification of the Shī'ī norm, preserving and developing all the essential points of esoteric Shī'ism as the basis of a doctrine aiming at the unification of the Muslim community, in a messianic perspective addressing non-Muslim religious traditions as well. The doctrine of the *Jāwidān-nāma* could thus be regarded as one of the early post-Mongol intellectual and theological developments providing a frame for the messianic and universalist tendency, which was a hallmark of this period and which, as it will be shown in more detail in the following chapters, played a central role in the emergence and consolidation of the Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal Empires.

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⁶⁶ For the Sunnī emphasis on Jesus as the eschatological Savior, as opposed to the Shī'ī insistence on the idea that the Savior will come from the Family of the Prophet, see Reynolds, Jesus.

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