

# History of Islamic Philosophy

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The present publication falls into the category 5 listed above.

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## Transcription

All Arabic words and proper names have been transcribed with diacritical marks according to the Library of Congress system. The Arabic definite article *al-* has generally been omitted, following the Persian convention, when the writer in question wrote chiefly or exclusively in Persian. The Persian *v* is used in the dynasty Safavid and in place names such as Qazvin and Suhravard.

As in the French original, dates are first given according to the Islamic calendar, followed by the corresponding year of the Christian era.

## Foreword

In undertaking the present study I had no predecessor, and a few lines are therefore needed in explanation of its title and structure.

1. First and foremost, we speak of 'Islamic philosophy'—not, as has been customary ever since the Middle Ages, of 'Arab philosophy'. To be sure, the prophet of Islam was an Arab from Arabia; written Arabic is the language of the Quranic Revelation, the liturgical language of Prayer, the language and the conceptual tool employed by Arabs and non-Arabs alike in the construction of one of the most extensive literatures in the world: the literature expressing the culture of Islam. Nevertheless, the meaning of an ethnic designation evolves with the centuries. Today, the term 'Arab', both in common parlance and in official usage, has reference to a specific ethnic, national and political concept, which coincides neither with the religious concept of 'Islam' nor with the boundaries of its universe. The Arab or Arabicized peoples are in fact no more than a tiny fraction of the Islamic world in its entirety. The ecumenism of 'Islam' as a religious concept can be neither transferred to, nor confined within, the limits of a secular ethnic or national concept. This is self-evident to anyone who has lived in a non-Arab Muslim country.

It has been and could be maintained, of course, that the term 'Arab philosophy' is to be understood simply as referring to a philosophy written in the Arabic language, that is to say, in the written Arabic which even in our own day is still the liturgical bond both between the non-Arab members of the Islamic community, and between the different parts of the Arab world, each of which is characterized by its particular Arabic dialect. Unfortunately, this 'linguistic' definition is both inadequate and wide of the mark. In accepting it, we would no longer know where to class Iranian thinkers such as the Ismaili philosopher Nasir-i Khusraw (eleventh century) or Afdal al-Din Kashani (thirteenth century), a pupil of Nasir al-Din Tusi, whose works

are all written in Persian—not to speak of all those who, from Avicenna and al-Suhrawardi down to Mir Damad (seventeenth century), Hadi Sabzavari (nineteenth century) and our contemporaries, write sometimes in Persian and sometimes in Arabic. The Persian language itself has never ceased to play a role as the language of culture (even as a 'liturgical' language among the Ismailis of Pamir, for example). Descartes, Spinoza, Kant and Hegel wrote some of their treatises in Latin, but are not therefore classed as 'Latin' or 'Roman' authors.

In order, therefore, to give a name to the world of thought that forms the subject of this book, we must find a designation which is both broad enough to preserve the spiritual ecumenism of the concept of 'Islam', and at the same time maintains the concept 'Arabic' at the level of prophetic inspiration at which it made its appearance in history with the Quranic Revelation. Without prejudging the opinions or the 'orthodoxy' that call into question the 'Muslim' quality of one or other of our philosophers, we will be speaking of 'Islamic philosophy' as of a philosophy whose development, and whose modalities, are essentially linked to the religious and spiritual fact of Islam: a philosophy whose existence is proof that, contrary to what has been unjustly claimed, canon law (*fiqh*) alone is neither an adequate nor a decisive expression of Islam.

2. It follows that the concept of Islamic philosophy cannot be confined within the schema—long traditional in our handbooks of the history of philosophy—which preserves only the names of the few great thinkers of Islam who were known to medieval scholasticism in Latin translation. Certainly the translation of Arabic works into Latin, at Toledo and in Sicily, was a cultural development of prime importance; but one which is radically incapable of denoting the general orientation which allows one to grasp the meaning and development of philosophical meditation in Islam. It is profoundly untrue to say that this meditation came to an end with the death of Averroes in 1198. Below, at the end of the first chapter of this study, we will attempt to explain what it was that actually came to an end at the time of his death. The work of the philosopher of Córdoba, translated into Latin, gave Averroism to the West, and this swamped what has been called 'Latin Avicennism'. In the East, and particularly in Iran, Averroism passed unnoticed, and al-Ghazali's critique of philosophy was never regarded as having put an end to the tradition inaugurated by Avicenna.

3. The significance and continuance of philosophical meditation in Islam can be truly grasped only so long as we do not attempt to see it, at any price, as the exact equivalent of what we in the West have for our part called 'philosophy' over the last few centuries. Even the terms *falsafah* and *faýlasuf*, which derive from the transcription of the Greek terms and go back to the Peripatetics and neo-Platonists of the first centuries of Islam, are not the exact equivalents of our own concepts of 'philosophy' and 'philosopher'. The clear-cut distinction which exists in the West between 'philosophy' and 'theology' goes back to medieval scholasticism, and it presupposes a process of 'secularization' the idea of which could not exist in Islam, primarily because Islam has never experienced the phenomenon of the Church, with all its implications and consequences.

As the ensuing pages will make clear, the term *hikmah* is the equivalent of the Greek *sophia*, and the term *hikmat ilahyah* is the literal equivalent of the Greek *theosophia*. Metaphysics is generally defined as being concerned with the *ilahiyyat*, the *Divinalia*. The term *'ilm ilahi* (*scientia divina*) cannot and should not be translated by the word *theodicy*. Muslim historians, from al-Shahrastani in the twelfth century to Qutb-al-Din Ashkivari in the seventeenth, take the view that the wisdom of the 'Greek sages' was itself also derived from the 'Cave of the lights of prophecy'. Hence if we merely transpose to Islam the question of the relationship between philosophy and religion as this has been traditionally established in the West, our enquiry is lopsided, because then we take into account only one aspect of the situation. To be sure, philosophy in Islam has confronted more than one difficult situation, but the difficulties were not the same as those confronted in the Christian world. Philosophical enquiry (*tahqiq*) in Islam was most 'at home' where the object of meditation was the fundamental fact of prophecy and of the prophetic Revelation, with the *hermeneutical* problems and situation that this fact implies. Thus philosophy assumes the form of 'prophetic philosophy'. This is why, in the present study, pride of place is given to the two main aspects of Shiite prophetic philosophy: Twelver Imamism, and Ismailism. Recent research concerning both of these has not yet been condensed into a study of this type. Our information has been obtained not from the 'heresiographers', but directly from the sources.

Correspondingly, it is not possible to speak of *hikmah* in Islam

without speaking of mysticism—without speaking, that is to say, of Sufism both from the point of view of its spiritual experience and from that of its speculative theosophy, which has its roots in Shiite esotericism. As we shall see, al-Suhrawardi and, after him, the whole school of *ishraqiyun* directed their efforts to uniting philosophical enquiry with personal spiritual realization. In Islam above all, the history of philosophy and the history of spirituality are inseparable.

4. As regards the present study, we have been constrained to keep within narrow limits. It has proved impossible to devote to the explanation of certain problems, encountered among certain thinkers, all the consideration which they demand. Nevertheless, as we are dealing mainly with doctrines that are very little known, if not entirely unknown, and as the following pages are addressed not just to the Orientalist but to the philosopher in general, we could not merely allude to things or confine ourselves to dictionary references. We trust that the necessary minimum has been said.

Needless to say, the epochs in the history of Islamic philosophy cannot, save by a verbal artifice, be subjected to our usual system of dividing the history of philosophy—and history in general—into three periods which we call Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and modern times. It would be equally inappropriate to say that the Middle Ages have continued down to our day, for the very notion of the Middle Ages presupposes a vision of history thematized according to a particular perspective. There are ways more serious and lasting whereby to define a 'type of thinking' than mere chronological references, and in Islam certain distinct types of thought have persisted from the beginning down to our time. Furthermore, among our Islamic thinkers the question of division into periods has been concretized in a form that corresponds to their own particular perspective—a form not unrelated to their representation of the cycles of prophecy. Qutb al-Din Ashkivari, for example, divides his history of thinkers and spiritual men into three great cycles: the thinkers prior to Islam, the thinkers of Sunni Islam, and the thinkers of Shiite Islam. And we in our turn cannot impose upon them a chronological schema imported from a foreign world. We have consequently distinguished between the following three periods:

(a) The first period takes us from the beginning up to the death of Averroes (595/1198). In some respects, this period has remained to

date the least insufficiently known. When we reach its term we will explain what has determined the choice of such a demarcation. With Averroes, something came to an end in Western Islam. At the same time, with al-Suhrawardi and Ibn al-'Arabi, something began which was to continue in the East down to the present day.

Even with regard to this period we have had to focus attention on many features which have come to light only during the last twenty years of research. But the limits imposed upon us, and the consequent need to find the minimum framework within which a philosophical exposition could still be coherent, forced us to stay within the bounds of this first period, which forms the first part of the present study.

(b) The second period extends over the three centuries preceding the Safavid Renaissance in Islam. It is characterized mainly by what it is convenient to call the 'Sufi metaphysic': the growth of the school of Ibn al-'Arabi and of the school deriving from Najm al-Din al-Kubra, the merging—after the Mongol destruction of Alamut in 1256—of Sufism with Twelver Shiism on the one hand and with reformed Ismailism on the other.

(c) This brings us to the third period. Whereas, in the rest of Islam, philosophical enquiry from the time of Averroes is reduced to silence (a fact which motivates the summary judgement we repudiated above), the Safavid Renaissance in the sixteenth century produced an extraordinary flowering of thought and thinkers in Iran, the effects of which were to extend throughout the Qajar period up to our own time. We will have occasion to analyse the reasons why this phenomenon should have made its appearance in Iran in particular, and in a Shiite milieu. These reasons, and the more recent appearance of other schools elsewhere in Islam, will enable us to look ahead into the near future.

Inevitably, the first part of this study contains references to several thinkers of the second and third periods. How, for example, can one determine the essence of Shiite thought, as set forth by the teachings of the Shiite Imams during the first three centuries of the Hijrah, without reference to the philosophers who were later the commentators on these teachings? A detailed study of these thinkers of the second and third periods will be undertaken in the second and third parts of this work.

Two dear friends, one of them an Iranian Shiite and the other a Sunni



Arab from Syria, have helped me to complete the first part of the study by supplying me with invaluable material for several of the paragraphs of the eight chapters—material which has been jointly inserted here. They are Mr Seyyed Hossein Nasr, professor in the Faculte des Lettres at Tehran University, and Mr Osman Yahya, research lecturer at the C.N.R.S. The three of us share a deep affinity of view with regard to what constitutes the essence of spiritual Islam. The following pages, I believe, bear witness to this.

Tehran,  
November 1962

# I From the Beginning Down to the Death of Averroes (595/1198)

## I. The Sources of Philosophical Meditation in Islam

### 1. SPIRITUAL EXEGESIS OF THE QURAN

1. It is commonly said in the West that the Quran contains nothing of a mystical or philosophical nature, and that philosophers and mystics are not indebted to it in any way. Our concern here is not to argue about what Westerners find or fail to find in the Quran, but to know what it is that Muslims themselves have actually discovered in it.

Islamic philosophy may be seen, first and foremost, as the work of thinkers belonging to a religious community characterized by the Quranic expression *ahl al-kitab*: a people in possession of a sacred Book, a people whose religion is founded on a Book that 'came down from Heaven', is revealed to a prophet and is taught to the people by that prophet. Properly speaking, the 'peoples of the Book' are the Jews, the Christians and the Muslims. The Zoroastrians, thanks to the Avesta, have partially benefited from this privilege, while the so-called Sabians of Harran have been less fortunate.

All these communities are faced with the problem of the basic religious phenomenon which is common to them all: the phenomenon of the Sacred Book, the law of life within this world and guide beyond it. The first and last task is to understand the *true meaning of this Book*. But the mode of understanding is conditioned by the mode of being of him who understands; correspondingly, the believer's whole inner ethos derives from his mode of understanding. The lived situation is essentially *hermeneutical*, a situation, that is to say, in which the *true meaning* dawns on the believer and confers reality upon his existence. This true meaning, correlative to true being—truth which is real and reality which is true—is what is expressed in one of the key terms in the vocabulary of philosophy: the word *haqiqah*.

The term designates, among many other things, the *true meaning* of the divine Revelations: a meaning which, because it is the *truth* of these Revelations, is also their *essence*, and therefore their *spiritual meaning*. One could thus say that the phenomenon of the 'revealed sacred Book' entails a particular anthropology, even a certain definite spiritual culture, and that it postulates, at the same time as it stimulates and orientates, a certain type of philosophy. Both Christianity and Islam are faced with somewhat similar problems when searching for the *true meaning*, the *spiritual meaning*, in, respectively, the hermeneutic of the Bible and the hermeneutic of the Quran. There are also, however, profound differences between them. The analogies and the differences will be analysed and expressed here in terms of structure.

To say that the goal to be attained is the spiritual meaning implies that there is a meaning which is not the spiritual meaning, and that between the two there may be a whole scale of levels, and that consequently there may even be a plurality of spiritual meanings. Everything depends therefore on the initial act of consciousness which establishes a perspective, together with the laws that will henceforth govern it. The act whereby consciousness reveals to itself this hermeneutical perspective, at the same time reveals to it the world that it will have to organize and structure on a hierarchic basis. From this point of view, the phenomenon of the sacred Book has given rise to corresponding structures in the Christian and Islamic worlds. On the other hand, to the extent that the mode of approach to the *true meaning* differs in the two worlds, so they have been faced with differing situations and difficulties.

2. The first thing to note is the absence in Islam of the phenomenon of the Church. Just as Islam has no clergy which is in possession of the 'means of grace', so it has no dogmatic magisterium, no pontifical authority, no Council which is responsible for defining dogma. In Christianity, from the second century onwards, prophetic inspiration and, in a more general way, the freedom of a spiritual hermeneutic, were replaced by the dogmatic magisterium of the Church. Furthermore, the birth and spread of the Christian consciousness essentially signalled the awakening and growth of a *historical consciousness*. Christian thought is centred on the event which occurred in year one of the Christian era: the divine Incarnation marks the entry of God into history. As a result, the religious consciousness is focused with

ever-increasing attention on the *historical* meaning, which it identifies with the literal meaning, the true meaning of the Scriptures.

The famous theory of the *four levels of meaning* was of course to be developed. The classic formula of this theory is as follows: *littera (sensus historicus) gesta docet; quid credas, allegoria; moralis, quid agas; quid speras, anagogia*. However, it requires a great deal of courage today to invalidate, in the name of a spiritual interpretation, conclusions drawn from archaeological and historical evidence. The question is a very complex one, and we barely touch on it here. Yet we should ask ourselves to what extent the phenomenon of the Church, in its official forms at any rate, can ally itself with the predominance of the literal and historical meaning. Moreover, hand in hand with this predominance goes a decadence which results in confusing symbol with allegory. As a consequence, the search for spiritual meaning is regarded as a matter of allegorization, whereas it is a matter of something quite different. Allegory is harmless, but spiritual meaning can be revolutionary. Thus spiritual hermeneutics has been perpetuated and renewed by spiritual groups which have formed on the fringes of the Churches. There is similarity in the way in which a Boehme or a Swedenborg understands Genesis, Exodus or Revelation, and the way in which the Shiites, Ismaili as well as Twelver, or else the Sufi theosophers of the school of Ibn al-'Arabi, understand the Quran and the *corpus* of the traditions explaining it. This similarity is a perspective in which the universe is seen as possessing several levels, as consisting of a plurality of worlds that all *symbolize* with each other.

The religious consciousness of Islam is centred not on a historical fact, but on a fact which is *meta-historical*. not post-historical, but trans-historical. This primordial fact, anterior to our empirical history, is expressed in the divine question which the human Spirits were required to answer before they were placed in the terrestrial world: 'Am I not your Lord?' (Quran 7:172). The shout of joy which greeted this question concluded an eternal pact of fidelity; and from epoch to epoch, all the prophets whose succession forms the 'cycle of prophecy' have come to remind men of their fidelity to this pact. From the pronouncements of the prophets comes the letter of the positive religions: the divine Law or *shari'ah*. The question then is: are we to remain at this literal level of things? If we are, philosophers have no further part to play. Or should we try to grasp the *true meaning*, the

spiritual meaning, the *haqiqah*?

The famous philosopher Nasir-i Khusraw (fifth/eleventh century), one of the great figures of Iranian Ismailism, explains the situation succinctly: 'Positive religion (*shari'ah*) is the exoteric aspect of the Idea (*haqiqah*), and the Idea is the esoteric aspect of positive religion... Positive religion is the symbol (*mithal*); the Idea is that which is symbolized (*mamthul*). The exoteric aspect is in perpetual flux with the cycles and epochs of the world; the esoteric aspect is a divine Energy which is not subject to becoming.'

3. The *haqiqah*, as such, cannot be defined in the way that dogmas are defined by a Magisterium. But Guides and Initiators are needed in order to lead one towards it. Prophecy itself has come to an end: there will be no other prophet. The question that arises is then: how does the religious history of humanity continue *after* the 'Seal of the prophets'? This question, and the answer to it, are essentially what constitutes the religious phenomenon of *Shiite* Islam, which is founded on a prophetology amplifying into an Imamology. This is why we begin this study by stressing the 'prophetic philosophy' of *Shiism*. One of its premisses is the polarity between *shari'ah* and *haqiqah*; its mission is the continuation and protection of the spiritual meaning of the divine Revelations, that is to say, their hidden, esoteric meaning. The existence of a spiritual Islam depends on this protection. Without it, Islam will succumb, in its own manner, to the process which in Christianity has secularized theological systems into political and social ideologies—has secularized theological messianism, for example, into social messianism.

It is true that in Islam the threat is present under different conditions. So far, no philosopher has analysed these conditions in any depth. The Shiite factor has been almost entirely neglected, even though the fate of philosophy in Islam and, as a consequence, the significance of Sufism, cannot be studied independently of the significance of Shiism. Where Ismaili Shiism is concerned, Islamic gnosis, with its great themes and its vocabulary, was already in existence before the philosopher Avicenna was even born.

Because it has not had to confront the problems raised by what we call the 'historical consciousness', philosophical thought in Islam moves in two counter yet complementary directions: issuing from the Origin (*mabda'*), and returning [*ma'ad*] to the Origin, issue and return

both taking place in a *vertical* dimension. Forms are thought of as being in space rather than in time. Our thinkers perceive the world not as 'evolving' in a horizontal and rectilinear direction, but as ascending: the past is not behind us but 'beneath our feet'. From this axis stem the *meanings* of the divine Revelations, each of these meanings corresponding to a spiritual hierarchy, to a level of the universe that issues from the threshold of metahistory. Thought can move freely, unhindered by the prohibitions of a dogmatic authority. On the other hand, it must confront the *shari'ah*, should the *shari'ah* at any time repudiate the *haqiqah*. The repudiation of these ascending perspectives is characteristic of the literalists of legalistic religion, the doctors of the Law.

Yet it was not the philosophers who were initially responsible for the drama. The drama began on the very day following the Prophet's death. All the teachings of the Shiite Imams, which have come down to us in a massive *corpus*, enable us to trace this drama, and to understand how and why it was that in sixteenth-century Safavid Iran philosophy underwent a magnificent renaissance in a Shiite environment.

Throughout the centuries, too, the guiding ideas of Shiite prophetology are always present. They give rise to many themes: the affirmation of the identity of the Angel of Knowledge (*'aql fa'al*, the active Intelligence) with the Angel of Revelation (*ruh al-quds*, the Holy Spirit or Angel Gabriel); the theme of prophetic knowledge in the gnosiology of al-Farabi and Avicenna; the idea that the wisdom of the Greek sages also derives from the 'Cave of the lights of prophecy'; even the idea of the *hikmat ilahyah* which, etymologically speaking, is equivalent to *theosophia*, not to theology or to philosophy in the sense we assign to these words. Indeed, the separation of philosophy from theology, which goes back in the West to Latin scholasticism, is the first sign of the 'metaphysical secularization' that results in a split between belief and knowledge and culminates in the idea of the 'double truth' professed, if not by Averroes, then at least by a kind of Averroism. Yet this Averroism cut itself off from the prophetic philosophy of Islam. That is why it exhausted itself. It is also why it was so long thought to be the last word in Islamic philosophy, when it was merely a dead end, an episode ignored by the thinkers of Eastern Islam.

4. We will confine ourselves here to a few texts in which the teaching of the Shiite Imams allows us to perceive how Quranic hermeneutic

and philosophical meditation were called upon to 'substantiate' each other. There is, for example, a statement made by the sixth Imam, Ja'far al-Sadiq (d. 148/765): 'The Book of God comprises four things: the statement set down (*'ibarah*), the implied purport (*isharah*), the hidden meanings, relating to the supra-sensible world (*lata'if*), and the exalted spiritual doctrines (*haqa'iq*). The literal statement is for the ordinary believers {*'awamm*). The implied purport is the concern of the elite (*khawass*). The hidden meanings pertain to the Friends of God (*awliya'*; see below). The exalted spiritual doctrines are the province of the prophets (*anbiya'*, plural of *nabi*).' Or, as another explanation has it: the literal statement is addressed to the hearing, the allusion to the spiritual understanding, the hidden meanings are directed to the contemplative vision, and the exalted doctrines concern the realization of an integral spiritual Islam.

These remarks echo the statement of the first Imam, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (d. 40/661): 'There is no Quranic verse which does not possess four types of meaning: exoteric (*zahir*), esoteric (*batin*), limit (*hadd*), divine plan (*muttala'*). The exoteric is for oral recitation; the esoteric is for the inner understanding; the limit consists of the statements laying down what things are permissible and what forbidden; the divine plan is that which God intends to realize within man by means of each verse.'

These four types of meaning are equal in number to the levels of meaning defined by the Latin formula quoted above. Nevertheless, something else can already be sensed: the types of meaning are differentiated in accordance with a spiritual hierarchy among men, the gradations of which are determined by their inner capacities. The Imam Ja'far also refers to seven modalities of the 'descent' (the revelation) of the Quran, and goes on to define nine possible ways in which Quranic text may be read and understood. This esotericism is not, therefore, a later construct, since it is essential to the teaching of the Imams and indeed stems from it.

Consonant with the first Imam, and with reference to a Quranic verse 65:12, which concerns the creation of the Seven Heavens and the Seven Earths, 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbas, one of the Prophet's most famous companions, cried out one day in the midst of a large number of people gathered on Mount Arafat (twelve miles away from Mecca): 'O men! if I were to comment upon this verse in your presence as I heard the Prophet himself comment upon it, you would stone me.' This observa-

tion perfectly describes the position of esoteric Islam *vis-a-vis* legalistic, literalist Islam, and will help us to understand the account given below of Shiite prophetology.

For the *hadith*, or tradition, which is as it were the charter of all esotericists, goes back to the Prophet himself: "The Quran possesses an external appearance and a hidden depth, an exoteric meaning and an esoteric meaning. This esoteric meaning in turn conceals an esoteric meaning (this depth possesses a depth, after the image of the celestial Spheres which are enclosed within each other). So it goes on for seven esoteric meanings (seven depths of hidden depth).' This *hadith* is fundamental to Shiism, as it was later to be fundamental to Sufism, and to try and explain it involves the whole doctrine of Shiism. The *ta'lim*—the initiatic function with which the Imam is invested—is not to be compared to the magisterium of ecclesiastic authority in Christianity. The Imam, as a 'man of God', is inspired; the *ta'lim* relates essentially to the *haqa'iq* (plural of *haqiqah*), that is to say to the esoteric aspect (*batin*). Finally, the coming of twelfth Imam (the Mahdi, the hidden, awaited Imam), at the end of our Aion, will bring with it the full revelation of the esoteric aspect of all the divine Revelations.

5. The idea of an esoteric aspect which is at the root of Shiism, and an inherent part of it, is seminal outside spheres that are properly speaking Shiite (a fact which, as we will see, gives rise to more than one problem). It is seminal among the mystics—the Sufis—and among the philosophers. Mystical interiorization, by means of Quranic recitation, conduces to the renewal of the mystery of its original Enunciation. But this is certainly not a Sufi innovation. The Imam Ja'far, on the occasion when his disciples had respected the long ecstatic silence which prolonged the canonical prayer (*salah*), explained: 'I did not stop repeating that verse until I heard it spoken by him (the Angel) who uttered it for the Prophet.'

It must be said, then, that the most ancient spiritual commentary on the Quran consists of the teachings which the Shiite Imams propounded in the course of their conversations with their disciples. It was the principles of their spiritual hermeneutics that were subsequently to be brought together by the Sufis. The texts, cited above, of the first and sixth Imams figure prominently in the preface to the great mystical commentary by Ruzbihan al-Baqli of Shiraz (d. 606/1209), in which he assembles, apart from the testimony of his

own personal meditations, that of his predecessors al-Junayd, al-Sulami, and so on. In the sixth/twelfth century Rashid al-Din al-Maybudi (d. 520/1126) composed a monumental commentary in Persian which includes the *tafsir* and the mystical *ta'wil*. These, together with the commentary (the *Ta'wilat*) composed by 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Kashani, a distinguished representative of the school of Ibn al-'Arabi, are three of the most famous 'irfani commentaries—commentaries, that is, which explain the *mystical gnosis* of the Quran.

A whole work, unfortunately anonymous (dating from 731/1331), is devoted to the *hadith* of the 'seven esoteric meanings'; and it shows that these meanings correspond to the gradations according to which the devout are differentiated, because each of these levels of significance corresponds to a mode of being, to an inner state. It is in conformity with these seven meanings which correspond to seven spiritual levels that al-Simnani (d. 736/1336) organized his own commentary.

Furthermore, many philosophers and mystics, without commenting on the entire Quran, have meditated on the *haqiqah* of one Surah or even of one favourite verse (the verse of the Light, the verse of the Throne, and so on). Their meditations constitute a considerable body of literature. In this manner Avicenna wrote a *tafsir* of several verses. By way of example, we will cite the opening of his commentary on Surah 113 (the penultimate Surah of the Quran): 'I seek refuge in the Lord of Day break (verse 1). This means: I seek refuge with him who shatters the darkness of non-being with the light of being, and who is the primordial Principle, the Being who is necessary of himself. And this (burst of light), as inhering in his absolute goodness, resides as primal intention in his very ipseity. The first of the beings who emanate from him—the first Intelligence—is its Emanation. Evil does not exist in it, other than that which is occulted beneath the outspreading light of the First Being—the opacity, that is to say, inherent in the quiddity which proceeds from its essence.' These few lines suffice to show how and why spiritual exegesis of the Quran must be included among the sources of philosophical meditation in Islam.

We can only cite a few more typical examples here (an inventory of the philosophical and mystical *tafsir* has yet to be taken). The monumental work of Mulla Sadra of Shiraz (d. 1050/1640) includes a *tafsir* of Shiite gnosis which, notwithstanding the fact that it is concerned with only a few Surahs of the Quran, takes up no less than

seven hundred folio pages. Sayyid Ahmad al-'Alawi, one of his contemporaries and, like him, a pupil of Mir Damad, wrote a philosophical *tafsir* in Persian, which is still in manuscript form. Abu al-Hasan' Amili al-Isfahani (d. 1138/1726) compiled a summa of *ta'wil* (*Mir'at al-Anwar*, the Mirror of Lights) which are veritable prolegomena to any hermeneutic of the Quran according to Shiite gnosis. The Shaykhi school has likewise produced a good number of 'irfani commentaries on isolated Surahs and verses. One should also note the great commentary written in our time, in Iran, by Shaykh Muhammad Husayn al-Tabataba'i.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century Ja'far al-Kashfi, another Shiite theosopher, undertook to define the task and function of the spiritual hermeneutic. He shows that the typical hermeneutic comprises three stages: the *tafsir*, the *ta'wil* and the *tafhim*. The *tafsir*, strictly speaking, is the literal exegesis of the letter; its pivot is the canonical Islamic sciences. The *ta'wil* (etymologically speaking, this means to 'lead back' or to 'bring back' something to its origin, to its *asl* or archetype) is a science whose pivot is a spiritual direction and a divine inspiration. This is the stage reached by moderately advanced philosophers. Finally, the *tafhim* (literally, to 'enable to understand', the highest hermeneutic of all) is a science whose pivot is an act of Understanding on the part of God, an inspiration (*ilham*) of which God is simultaneously the subject, the object and the end, or the source, the organ and the goal. This is the highest stage of philosophy. Our author—and it is this which is of interest—establishes a hierarchy of the philosophical schools in conformity with these stages of Understanding, which themselves are determined by the spiritual hermeneutic of the Quran that each stage represents. The science of *tafsir* does not comprise a philosophy: in relation to the *haqiqah* it corresponds to the philosophy of the Peripatetics. The science of *ta'wil* is the philosophy of the Stoics (*hikmat al-Riwaq*) because it is a science of what is behind the Veil (*hijab*, *rawaq*; the Islamic conception of Stoic philosophy is a theme that has yet to be investigated). The science of *tafhim*, or transcendental hermeneutics, is the 'oriental science' (*hikmat al-ishraq* or *hikmah mashriqiyah*), that is to say, the science of al-Suhrawardi and of Mulla Sadra al-Shirazi.

6. The anonymous work cited above (sect. 5) helps us to grasp the actual working of this hermeneutic, whose laws were formulated by

the Shiite Imams from the beginning. The questions it sets out to answer are these: what is represented by the text, revealed in a particular language at a particular moment, in relation to the eternal truth which it sets forth? And how is one to picture to oneself the process of this Revelation?

The context within which the mystical theosopher—the *'irfani* philosopher—ponders these questions enables us to understand how he must have viewed the fierce controversy, aroused by the doctrine of the Mu'tazilites, which embroiled the Islamic community in the third/ninth century: is the Quran created or uncreated? For the Mu'tazilite theologians, the Quran is created (see below, ch. III, 2, B), and this doctrine was imposed in 833 CE, by the caliph al-Ma'mun. There followed a period during which the 'orthodox' were distressingly harassed until, some fifteen years later, the caliph al-Mutawakkil reversed the situation in their favour. For the mystical theosopher, the question is an artificial one, or one that is wrongly framed. The two terms of the alternative—created or uncreated—do not correspond to the same level of reality, and everything depends on the ability to perceive the true relationship between them: the Word of God, and the human word. Unfortunately, neither the official authority in favouring one meaning over another, nor the dialectical theologians involved, had sufficient philosophical reserves at their disposal to overcome the problem. All the labours of the great theologian Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari culminate in a recourse to faith 'without asking how'.

Uneasy as the *'irfani* philosopher may be in the company of the theologians of the *kalam* (see below, ch. III), he is no less so in the company of the Western philosopher or critic. When the latter tries to persuade him to give up the spiritual *hermeneutic* in favour of historical *critique*, he is actually attempting to draw him into a territory which is alien to him, to impose upon him a perspective derived from premisses which, while they are certainly those of modern Western philosophy, are entirely foreign to his own. Typical of this perspective is the attempt to understand the Prophet through his circumstances, education and type of genius; or the attempt to subjugate philosophy to history by asking: how is truth historical, and how is history truth?

To the first of these attempts the *'irfani* philosopher opposes what is in essence the gnosiology of his prophetology, for by means of this gnosiology he can understand how the divine Word passes into its

human expression. The *'irfani* hermeneutic seeks to comprehend the position of the prophets—and of the Prophet of Islam in particular—by meditating on the modality of his relationship not with 'his own time', but with the eternal source from which his message emanates, the Revelation whose text he utters. To the attempt to subjugate philosophy to history—the dilemma in which historicism is trapped—*'irfani* philosophy opposes the understanding that the eternal essence or *haqiqah* of the Quran is the Logos, the divine Word (*kalam al-haqq*), that endures forever with and through the divine Ipseity and is indivisible from it, with neither beginning nor end in eternity.

It will doubtless be objected that if this is the case, all events are eternal. But if so, what becomes of the concept of event? How, without lapsing into absurdity, are we to understand, for instance, the doings and sayings related of Abraham and Moses before Abraham and Moses have come into existence? Our author replies that this type of objection is based on a mode of representation which is totally illusory. Similarly, his contemporary al-Simnani makes a technical distinction, basing himself on the Quranic verse 41:53, between the *zaman afaqi*, which is the time of the objective world, the quantitative, homogeneous and continuous time of external history, and the *zaman anfunsi*, the inner time of the soul, qualitative and pure. The *before* and the *after* possess an altogether different significance according to whether they are applied to one or other of these times: there are events which are perfectly *real* without having the reality of events in empirical history. Again, Sayyid Ahmad al-'Alawi (eleventh/seventeenth century), to whom we have already referred, confronts the same problem, and attains the perception of an eternal structure in which the order of the succession of forms is replaced by the order to their simultaneity. Time becomes space. Our thinkers prefer to perceive forms in space rather than in time.

7. These considerations throw light on the technique of *Understanding* which is postulated by the exegesis of the *spiritual meaning*, a technique designated *par excellence* by the term *ta'wil*. The Shiites in general, and the Ismailis in particular, were destined to be the great masters of *ta'wil* from the beginning. The more we admit that the processes of *ta'wil* are foreign to our current habits of thought, the more it deserves our attention. There is nothing artificial about it when it is envisaged at part and parcel of its own world-scheme.

The word *ta'wil*, together with the word *tanzil*, constitute a pair of terms and concepts which are complementary and contrasting. Properly speaking, *tanzil* designates positive religion, the letter of the Revelation dictated by the Angel to the Prophet. It means *to cause this Revelation to descend from the higher world*. Conversely, *ta'wil* means *to cause to return*, to lead back to the origin, and thus to return to the true and original meaning of a written text. 'It is to *cause something to arrive* at its origin. He who practises *ta'wil*, therefore, is someone who diverts what is proclaimed from its external appearance (its exoteric aspect or *zahir*), and makes it revert to its truth, its *haqiqah*' (cf. *Kalam-i Pir*). This is *ta'wil* as an inner spiritual exegesis, an exegesis which is symbolic, esoteric and so on. Underlying the idea of exegesis is the idea of the Guide (the *exegete*, the Imam of Shiism), and in the idea of *exegesis* we may perceive the idea of an *exodus*, of a 'flight out of Egypt': an exodus out of metaphor and enslavement to the letter, out of *exile and the Occident* of the exoteric appearance, towards the *Orient* of the original, hidden idea.

In Ismaili gnosis, fulfilment of the *ta'wil* is inseparable from a spiritual rebirth (*wiladah ruhaniyah*). Exegesis of a text goes hand in hand with *exegesis* of the soul, a practice known in Ismaili gnosis as the science of the Balance (*mizan*). Viewed from this standpoint, the alchemical method of Jabir ibn Hayyan is simply one case of the application of the *ta'wil*, of occulting the manifest and manifesting the occulted (cf. ch. IV, 2). Other pairs of terms make up the key words of this vocabulary. *Majaz* is the figure of metaphor, while *haqiqah* is the truth that is real, the reality that is true. Thus, it is not the spiritual meaning to be extracted that constitutes the metaphor; it is the *letter* itself which is the metaphor of Idea. *Zahir* is the exoteric aspect, the visible, the literal fact, the Law, the material text of the Quran. *Batin* is the hidden, the esoteric aspect. This polarity is beautifully expressed in Nasir-i Khusraw's text, cited above.

In short, in the following three pairs of terms (which it is best to set down in Arabic, since they have several English equivalents), *shari'ah* is to *haqiqah*, *zahir* to *batin*, and *tanzil* to *ta'wil*, in the same relationship as the symbol is to that which is symbolized. This strict correspondence should guard against the unfortunate confusion of symbol with allegory which we have already decried above. Allegory is a more or less artificial representation of generalities and abstractions

which can be perfectly well grasped and expressed in other ways. Symbol is the only possible expression of that which is symbolized, that is to say of the thing signified *with which* it symbolizes. It can never be deciphered once for all. Symbolic perception effects a transmutation of the immediate data (the sensible and literal data), and renders them transparent. In the absence of the transparency brought about in this manner, it is impossible to pass from one level to another. Equally, without a plurality of universes rising above each other in an ascending perspective, symbolic exegesis perishes for lack of function and meaning. That this is so has already been indicated. Such an exegesis therefore presupposes a theosophy in which the worlds symbolize with each other: the supra-sensible and spiritual universes, the macrocosm or *Homo maximus (insan kabir)* and the microcosm. This philosophy of 'symbolic forms' has been impressively developed not only by Ismaili theosophy but also by Mulla Sadra and his school.

It must be added that the way of thought to which *ta'wil* gives rise, and the mode of perception that it presupposes, correspond to a general type of philosophy and spiritual culture. *Ta'wil* activates the imaginative awareness, the exalted function and noetic value of which are forcefully demonstrated, as we shall see, by the *ishraqiyun* philosophers and by Mulla Sadra in particular. It is not the Quran alone, and, in another context, the Bible, which confront us with the irrefutable fact that for so many readers who study their pages the text possesses meanings other than the sense apparent in the written word. These other meanings are not something artificially 'read into' the text by the spirit, but correspond to an initial perception as irrefutable as the perception of a sound or a colour. The same is true of a great deal of Persian literature, both mystical epics and lyric poetry, starting with the symbolic recitals of al-Suhrawardi, who himself developed the example given by Avicenna. The 'Jasmine of the Devotees of Love' by Ruzbihan of Shiraz testifies from beginning to end to a perception of the prophetic meaning of the beauty of beings, because it spontaneously executes a fundamental and continuous *ta'wil* of sensible forms. Someone who has understood Ruzbihan, and who has understood that allegory is not symbol, will no longer be surprised that so many Iranian readers, for example, see a mystical meaning in the poems of his great compatriot, Hafiz of Shiraz.

These considerations, brief as they are, define the level on which the Quranic text is to be understood, and thereby enable us to see the way in which the Quran contributes to philosophical meditation in Islam. If, in short, Quranic verses have a part to play in philosophical demonstration, this is because gnosiology itself goes hand in hand with prophetology (see below, ch. II), and because the 'metaphysical secularization' which, rooted in Latin scholasticism, took place in the West, did not take place in Islam.

If the 'prophetic' quality of this philosophy is nourished from the Quranic source, its structure derives from a whole past to which it gives new life and direction, and whose essential works were transmitted to it through the labour of several generations of translators.

## 2. THE TRANSLATIONS

We are dealing here with a cultural phenomenon of major importance. It may be defined as the assimilation by Islam—the new centre of humanity's spiritual life—of all the contributions made by the cultures which preceded it in both the East and the West. A grand arc can be drawn: Islam receives the Greek heritage, comprising both authentic and pseudepigraphic works, and transmits it to the West in the twelfth century, through the labours of the school of translators at Toledo. The scope and consequences of these translations from Greek into Syriac, from Syriac into Arabic, and from Arabic into Latin, may be compared to the scope and consequences of the translations of the Mahayana Buddhist canon from Sanskrit into Chinese, or of the translations from Sanskrit into Persian undertaken in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as a consequence of the generous reforms of Shah Akbar.

This task of assimilation was performed on two fronts. First, there was the work of the Syrians themselves, that is to say, the work undertaken by the Aramaean populations in the west and south of the Iranian Sasanid empire. Philosophy and medicine were the chief concerns; but the views of the Nestorians both with regard to Christology and to exegesis (the influence exercised by Origen on the school of Edessa) cannot be ignored when, for instance, one is giving an account of the problems of Shiite Imamology. Second, we have what might be called the Graeco-Oriental tradition in the north and east of the Sasanid empire. Here the focus was mainly on alchemy, astron-

omy, philosophy and the sciences of Nature, including the 'secret sciences' which were part and parcel of this *Weltanschauung*.

1. In order to understand the part played by the Syrians in initiating Muslim philosophers into Greek philosophy, we must glance at least briefly at the history and vicissitudes of the culture whose language was Syriac.

The famous 'school of the Persians' at Edessa was founded at the time when the emperor Jovian ceded to the Persians the town of Nisibis (where, with the name of Probus, the first translator of Greek philosophical works into Syriac made his appearance). In 489, the Byzantine emperor Zeno closed the school because of its Nestorian tendencies. Those masters and students who remained faithful to Nestorianism took refuge in Nisibis, where they founded a new school which was chiefly a centre for philosophy and theology. In the south of the Iranian empire, moreover, the Sasanid sovereign Khusraw Anushirvan (521-79) founded a school at Jundi-Shapur, the teachers of which were for the most part Syrians. It was from Jundi-Shapur that the caliph Mansur later summoned the physician Jurjis (George) ibn-Bakhtishu'. If we remember that in 529 Justinian closed the school of philosophy at Athens, and that seven of the last neo-Platonic philosophers took refuge in Iran, we are already in a position to grasp some of the elements of the philosophical and theological situation in which the Oriental world found itself on the eve of the Hijrah (622).

The name which above all others dominates this period is that of Sergius of Ra's 'Aynah, who died at Constantinople in 536, and who was enormously active during his lifetime. Apart from a number of personal works, this Nestorian priest translated into Syriac a good many of Galen's writings as well as Aristotle's writings on logic. Among the Syrian Monophysite (Jacobite) writers of this period, the memorable names are those of Budh, who translated 'Kalllah and Dimnah' into Syriac; Ahudamah (d. 575); Severus Sibukht (d. 667); Jacob of Edessa (ca. 633-708); and George, 'bishop of the Arabs' (d. 724). Apart from Logic (Paul the Persian dedicated a treatise on Logic to the Sasanid sovereign Khusraw Anushirvan), the Syrian writers and translators were chiefly interested in the collections of aphorisms, arranged along the lines of a history of philosophy. Preoccupied as they were with the Platonic doctrine of the soul, they confused the Greek sages, most notably **Plato**, with the **figures of Eastern monks**. This confusion was



surely not without influence on the Islamic notion of the 'Greek prophets' (see above, I, 1, sect. 3)—the notion, that is, that the Greek sages also drew their inspiration from the 'Cave of the lights of prophecy'.

In the light of these Graeco-Syriac translations, the great work of translation undertaken from the beginning of the third century of the Hijrah appears less as an innovation and more as a broader and more methodical development of a task that had previously been pursued with the same preoccupations in mind. Moreover, even before Islam the Arabian peninsula contained a great many Nestorian doctors, almost all of them from Jundi-Shapur.

Baghdad had been founded in 148/765. In 217/832, caliph al-Ma'mun founded the 'House of wisdom' (*Bayt al-hikmat*) and appointed Yuhanna ibn Masawayh (d. 243/857) as its director. The latter was succeeded by one of his students, the famous and prolific Hunayn ibn Ishaq (194/809-260/873), who was born at al-Hirah into a family belonging to the Christian Arab tribe of the 'Ibad. Hunayn is certainly the most famous translator of Greek works into -Syriac and Arabic, though mention should also be made of his son, Ishaq ibn Hunayn (d. 910 CE), and his nephew, Hubaysh ibn al-Hasan. There was a centre of translation, with a team translating or adapting mainly from Syriac into Arabic or, much more rarely, from Greek directly into Arabic. All the technical vocabulary of philosophy and theology in the Arabic language was fashioned in this way during the course of the third/ninth century. However, it must not be forgotten that from this point onwards words and concepts possess a life of their own in Arabic. To resort to the Greek dictionary in order to translate the vocabulary used by later thinkers, who themselves were ignorant of Greek, can give rise to misunderstandings.

Other translators of note are Yahya ibn al-Bitriq (beginning of the ninth century); 'Abd al-Masih ibn 'Abd Allah ibn Na'imah al-Himsi (that is to say from Emesa, during the first half of the ninth century), who collaborated with the philosopher al-Kindi (see below-, V, 1) and translated Aristotle's *Sophistic Elenchi* and *Physics*, as well as the famous 'Theology' attributed to the same author; and the great Qusta ibn Luqa (born ca. 820, died at an advanced age ca. 912), a native of Baalbek, the Greek Heliopolis in Syria, of Greek and Melchite Christian descent. Philosopher, doctor, physician and mathematician,

Qusta translated, among other things, the commentaries of Alexander of Aphrodisias and John Philoponus on Aristotle's *Physics*; partially translated the commentaries on the treatise *Degeneratione et corruptione*; and the treatise by pseudo-Plutarch entitled *De placitis philosophorum*. Particularly well-known among his own personal writings is his treatise on the 'Difference between the Soul and the Spirit', as well as some treatises on the occult sciences, in which his explanations are curiously similar to those of the psychotherapists of today.

Distinguished translators in the tenth century include Abu Bishr Matta al-Qunna'i (d. 940), the Christian philosopher Yahya ibn 'Adi (d. 974), and his pupil, Abu al-Khayr ibn al-Khammar (b. 942). But of particular importance is the school of the 'Sabians of Harran', established in the neighbourhood of Edessa. The pseudo-Majriti contains much valuable information about their astral religion. They traced their spiritual line of descent back to Hermes and Agathodaimon, as al-Suhrawardi did later. Their doctrines bring together the ancient astral religion of the Chaldeans, studies in mathematics and astronomy, and neo-Pythagorean and neo-Platonic spirituality. From the eighth to the tenth centuries they produced a number of very active translators, of whom the most famous was Thabit ibn Qurrah (ca. 826-901), a great adherent of the astral religion and an outstanding author of mathematical and astronomical works.

We cannot enter here into the details of these translations. There are some of which only the titles remain, such as those mentioned in Ibn al-Nadim's great bibliography of the tenth century; some are still in manuscript form, while others have been edited. Generally speaking, the work of the translators took in the entire Aristotelian *corpus*, including certain commentaries by Alexander of Aphrodisias and Themistius (the opposition between these two commentators was well known to Islamic philosophers, and is emphasized by Mulla Sadra. Likewise, book *lambda* of the *Metaphysics* was all-important for the theory of the plurality of the celestial Movers). We cannot discuss here the question of what was really known of the authentic Plato, but we may mention the fact that the philosopher al-Farabi (see below, V, 2) gives a remarkable exposition of Plato's philosophy, distinguishing the features of each dialogue successively (see bibliography). He expounds the philosophy of Aristotle in a similar fashion.

What should be stressed is the considerable influence exerted by certain pseudepigraphic works. In the first place there is the famous 'Theology' attributed to Aristotle. This, as we know, is a paraphrase of the last three *Enneads* of Plotinus, possibly based on a Syriac version dating from the sixth century, an epoch during which neo-Platonism flourished both among the Nestorians and at the Sasanid court. (To this epoch, too, belongs the body of writings attributed to Dionysius the Areopagite.) The 'Theology' lies at the basis of neo-Platonism in Islam, and it is this which explains the wish on the part of so many philosophers to demonstrate the agreement between Aristotle and Plato. Nevertheless, doubts about this attribution were expressed in several quarters, beginning with Avicenna (see below, V, 4), in those of his 'Notes' which have survived, and in which he also gives precise indications about what was to have been his 'oriental philosophy' (*Notes*, edited by A. Badawi, with some commentaries and treatises by Alexander of Aphrodisias and Themistius, Cairo, 1947). In the famous passage of *Ennead IV*, 8, 1 ('Often, awakening to myself...'), the mystical philosophers found both the exemplar of the Prophet's celestial assumption (*mi'raj*), which is reproduced in its turn in the Sufi experience, and the exemplar of the vision which crowns the efforts of the divine Sage, the Stranger, the Solitary. Al-Suhrawardi ascribes the 'ecstatic confession' of the *Enneads* to Plato himself, and its influence can be sensed in Mir Damad (d. 1041/1631). In Iran in the seventeenth century, Qadi Sa'id Qummi devoted yet another commentary to the 'Theology of Aristotle' (see part 3).

The *Liber de Pomo*, in which the dying Aristotle, in the presence of his followers, adopts the teaching of Socrates in the *Phaedo*, had an equally significant destiny [*cf.* the Persian version by Afdal al-Din al-Kashani, a pupil of Nasir al-Din Tusi in the thirteenth century; see part 2). Finally, mention should be made of a book which was also attributed to Aristotle, the 'Book on the pure Good' (translated into Latin in the twelfth century by Gerard of Cremona, with the title *Liber de causis* or *Liber de Aristotelis de expositione bonitatis purae*). This is in fact an extract from the *Elementatio theologica* by the neo-Platonist Proclus. (It has been edited, again by A. Badawi, along with other texts: *De aeternitate mundi*, *Quaestiones naturales*, the *Liber Quartorum* or Book of Tetralogies, an alchemical work attributed to Plato, Cairo, 1955.)

It is impossible to refer here to the pseudo-Platos, pseudo-Plutarchs, pseudo-Ptolemys, pseudo-Pythagorases, who produced a vast body of literature about alchemy, astronomy and the natural properties. In order to acquire an idea of them, one should consult the works of Julius Ruska and Paul Kraus (see below, chapter IV).

2. In fact, it is to Julius Ruska that we owe the refutation of the unilateral concept of things that prevailed for so long. For although the Syrians were the principal transmitters of philosophy and medicine, they were not alone, and there was not just one current flowing from Mesopotamia towards Persia. The influence of the Persian (Iranian) scholars before them at the 'Abbasid court should not be forgotten, most notably in the fields of astronomy and astrology. Similarly, the existence in Persian of a large number of technical terms (for example *naushadar*, meaning ammoniac) suggests that the intermediaries between Greek alchemy and the alchemy of Jabir ibn Hayyan should most probably be sought in the centres of Graeco-Oriental tradition in Iran.

Together with Ibn Masawayh, al-Nawbakhti the Iranian and Masha 'Allah the Jew assumed the initial responsibilities for the school of Baghdad. Abu Sahl al-Nawbakhti was director of the library of Baghdad under Harun al-Rashid, and the translator of astrological works from Pahlavi into Arabic. These translations from Pahlavi (or Middle Iranian) into Arabic are of capital importance. (The astrological works of the Babylonian Teukros and the Roman Vettius Valens had been translated into Pahlavi.) One of the most famous of the translators in this field was Ibn al-Muqaffa', an Iranian who had converted from Zoroastrianism to Islam. Also of note are a large number of scholars originating from Tabaristan and Khurasan—in short from north-eastern Iran and from what is called 'outer tan' in central Asia: 'Umar ibn Farrukhan al-Tabari, a friend of the Barmecide Yahya; Fadl ibn Sahl al-Sarakhsi, south of Merv; Muhammad ibn Musa al-KhWarizmi, father of the so-called 'Arabic' algebra—whose treatise on algebra dates from around 820—but who is as far from being an Arab as Khiva is from Mecca; Khalid al-MarWarrudhi; Habash al-Marwazi (that is to say, from Merv); Ahmad al-Farghani (the Alfraganus of the Latins during the Middle Ages), who came from Farghana (High Yaxarta); and Abu Ma'shar al-Balkhi (the Albumaser of the Latins), who was from Bactria.

The mention of Bactria and the Bactrians, in fact, brings to mind the act of the Barmecides which was responsible for the rise of Iranianism at the 'Abbasid court, and for the leading position which the Iranian family of that name attained in the affairs of the Caliphate (752-804). The name of their ancestor, the *Barmak*, designated the hereditary dignity of the office of high priest in the Buddhist temple of Nawbihar (Sanskrit *nava vihara*, 'nine monasteries') at Balkh, described by later legend as a Temple of Fire. Everything that Balkh, 'mother of cities', had absorbed over the centuries from the various cultures—Greek, Buddhist, Zoroastrian, Manichaean, Nestorian Christian—lived on in it; it was destroyed, but rebuilt in 726 by the Barmak. In short, mathematics and astronomy, astrology and alchemy, medicine and mineralogy, and, together with these sciences, an entire pseudographic literature, were centred in the towns which lined the great road to the East, the road taken of old by Alexander.

As we intimated above, the presence of many Iranian technical terms constrains one to seek their origins in the Iranian territories of the north-east, before these were penetrated by Islam. From the middle of the eighth century, astronomers and astrologers, doctors and alchemists, set out from these towns towards the new seat of spiritual life created by Islam. There is an explanation for this phenomenon. All these sciences—alchemy, astrology—were part and parcel of a *Weltanschauung* that the orthodox Christianity of the Great Church sought out only in order to destroy. Conditions in the East differed from those in the Roman Empire, Eastern or Western. As one approached the East, the influence of the Great Church grew progressively less (whence the reception accorded to the Nestorians). What was then at stake was the fate of an entire culture, designated by Spengler as a 'magical culture', to which he added the unfortunate qualification of 'Arab', a definition that is totally inadequate for the matter in hand. Sadly, as Ruska deplored, the horizons of our classical philology halted at a linguistic frontier, without perceiving what both sides of it had in common.

This leads us to observe that although mention has been made of the Syrian translations of the Greek philosophers, and although the scientific contributions of the Iranians in the north-east have been noted, something is still missing. What needs to be added is the phenomenon indicated by the name of *Gnosis*. There is an element

common to Christian gnosis expressed in the Greek language, Jewish gnosis, Islamic gnosis, and Shiite and Ismaili gnosis. What is more, we now have precise information about the presence in Islamic gnosis of traces of Christian and Manichaean gnosis. Finally, we must take into account the persistence of the theosophical doctrines of ancient Zoroastrian Persia, which the genius of al-Suhrawardi (see below, ch. VII) integrated to the structure of *ishraqi* philosophy, and which continue to exist today.

All this throws new light on the situation of Islamic philosophy. In fact, were Islam nothing but the pure legalistic religion of the *shari'ah*, the philosophers would have no role to play and would be irrelevant. This is something they have not failed to recognize over the centuries in the difficulties with the doctors of the Law. If, on the other hand, Islam in the full sense is not merely the legalistic, exoteric religion, but the unveiling, the penetration and the realization of a hidden, esoteric reality (*batin*), then the position of philosophy and of the philosopher acquires an altogether different meaning. We have as yet scarcely even considered this aspect of things. Nevertheless, it is the Ismaili version of Shiism, which is the original gnosis *par excellence* of Islam, that provides us with an adequate definition of the role of philosophy in this situation in an exegesis of the famous '*hadith* of the tomb': philosophy is the tomb in which theology must perish in order to rise again as a *theosophia*, divine wisdom (*hikmat ilahyah*) or gnosis (*'irfan*).

In order to grasp the conditions which made it possible for such a gnosis to survive in Islam, we must go back to what was said in the preceding paragraph about the absence in Islam of the phenomenon of the Church and of an institution like that of the Councils. What the 'gnostics' in Islam acknowledge is fidelity to the 'men of God', to the Imams (the 'Guides'). This fact calls for the inclusion of something unprecedented perhaps in the schema of a history of Islamic philosophy, namely, an account of 'prophetic philosophy' which is both the wholly original form and the spontaneous product of the Islamic consciousness.

An account such as this cannot be segmented. What we give here, therefore, is a sketch of the two principal forms taken by Shiism. And since we can do no better than to ask Shiite thinkers (Haydar Amuli, Mir Damad, Mulla Sadra etc.) to throw light on the doctrinal perspective

of the holy Imams, our account must of necessity incorporate elements from the first to the eleventh century of the Hijrah. But this recourse to such a historical span merely deepens the problem posed in principle from the start.

## II. Shiism and Prophetic Philosophy

### PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

The observations that we have already made concerning the *ta'wil* of the Quran as the fount of philosophical meditation have already indicated that it would be constricting to reduce the schema of speculative and spiritual life in Islam to the Hellenizing philosophers (*falasi-fah*), to the theologians of the Sunni *kalam*, or to the Sufis. It is astonishing that in the general accounts of Islamic philosophy, no consideration, one might say, has been given to the role and decisive importance of Shiite thinking in the development of Islamic philosophical thought. There have even existed certain reservations or prejudices on the part of orientalists which border on hostility, and which moreover accord perfectly with the ignorance evinced in Sunni Islam concerning the real problems of Shiism. It is no longer possible to invoke the difficulty of gaining access to the texts, since it is already thirty years since some of the great Ismaili texts began to be published. For their part, the Iranian publishers have increased the number of their printings of the great Twelver Shiite texts. The situation calls for some preliminary remarks.

1. Instead of embarking on the study of Shiite theology and philosophy through the great texts, which extend from the traditions of the Imams down to the commentaries written on them over the centuries, scholars have been content to find political and social explanations which relate only to external history, and which aim at deriving and deducing the cause of the Shiite religious phenomenon from something else—in other words, which aim at reducing it to something other than what it is. For no matter how many external circumstances are collated, the sum of them, or their product, will never give the initial religious phenomenon (the *Urphaenomen*), which is as irreducible as the perception of a sound or a colour. Shiism is explained first and last by the Shiite consciousness itself, by the Shiite sense and perception of the world.

The texts going back to the Imams themselves show that what constitutes this consciousness is essentially the desire to attain the *true meaning* of the divine Revelations, because, in the final analysis, the truth of human existence, the meaning of its original and of its future destiny, depend on this *true meaning*. If the question of such a comprehension has been affirmed ever since Islam began, this is precisely because it constitutes the spiritual fact of Shiism. What we must do, therefore, is to single out the great themes of philosophical meditation which Shiite religious consciousness has brought into being.

2. Islam is a prophetic religion. In the preceding pages we have recalled that the distinguishing feature of a 'community of the Book' (*ahl al-kitab*) is the phenomenon of the sacred Book. Essentially, thought is concentrated first and foremost on the God who is revealed in this Book through the message dictated by the Angel to the prophet who receives it. It is concentrated on the unity and the transcendence of this God (*tawhid*). All, whether philosophers or mystics, have fastened onto this theme almost to the point of giddiness. Secondly, thought is concentrated on the person who receives and transmits this message, on the conditions, in short, presupposed by his being in receipt of it. Meditation on these facts leads to a theology and a prophetology, an anthropology and a gnosiology which have no equivalent elsewhere. It is true that the conceptual tools provided by the translations of the Greek philosophers into Arabic {see above, I, 2) influenced the form taken by this meditation. This influence, however, is only partial: the resources of the Arabic language gave rise to problems which were unforeseen in the Greek texts. It must not be forgotten that some great Ismaili works, such as that by Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani, were written well before the time of Avicenna. All the dialectic of the *tawhid* (the double negativity), as well as the problems concerning prophetology, arose from specific data, and were not modelled on the Greek. As a corollary to this, it should be borne in mind that prophetology and the prophetic 'theory of knowledge' are at the summit of the gnosiology of the greatest of the so-called Hellenizing philosophers, the *falasifah* such as al-Farabi and Avicenna.

3. From the very beginning, in fact, Shiite thinking has given sustenance to a prophetic type of philosophy which corresponds to a prophetic religion. A prophetic philosophy presupposes a type of thought which does not allow itself to be bound either by the historical

past, or by the letter of the dogmatic form in which the teachings of this past are consolidated, or by the limits imposed by the resources and laws of rational Logic. Shiite thinking is orientated by its expectation not of the revelation of a new *shari'ah*, but of the plenary Manifestation of all the hidden or spiritual meanings of the divine Revelations. The expectation of this Manifestation is typified in the expectation of the coming of the 'hidden Imam' (the 'Imam of that time', who according to Twelver Shiism is at present hidden). The cycle of prophecy which has been concluded is succeeded by a new cycle, the cycle of the *walayah*, which will end with the coming of the Imam. Prophetic philosophy is essentially eschatological.

The main thrust of Shiite thinking may be designated as, first, the *batin* or esoteric aspect, and, second, the *walayah*, the meaning of which will become clear.

4. We must be aware of all the consequences of the original decisive choice, specified above (I,1), which we have to make when confronted by the following dilemma: is Islamic religion limited to its legalistic and juridical interpretation, to the religion of the law, to the exoteric aspect (*zahir*)? If the answer is in the affirmative, it is pointless even to speak of philosophy. Alternatively, does not this *zahir* or exoteric aspect, which, it is claimed, is sufficient for the regulation of one's behaviour in everyday life, envelop something which is the *batin*, the inner, esoteric aspect? If the answer is yes, the entire meaning of one's everyday behaviour undergoes a modification, because the letter of positive religion, the *shari'ah*, will then possess a meaning only within the *haqiqah*, the spiritual reality, which is the esoteric meaning of the divine Revelations. This esoteric meaning is not something one can construct with the support of Logic or a battery of syllogisms. Neither is it a defensive dialectic such as that found in the *kalam*, for one does not refute symbols. The hidden meaning can be transmitted only by way of a knowledge which is a spiritual heritage (*'ilm irthi*); and this spiritual heritage is represented by the vast *corpus* containing the traditional teachings of the Shiite Imams, the 'heirs' of the prophets. (Al-Majlisi's edition runs to 26 books in 14 volumes in-folio.) When the Shiites, like the Sunnis, use the word *sunnah* (tradition), it is understood that for them this *sunnah* encompasses everything that was taught by the Imams.

Each of the Imams in turn was the 'Keeper of the Book' (*qayyim*

*al-Qur'an*), explaining and transmitting to his followers the hidden meaning of the Revelations. This instruction is at the heart of Islamic esotericism, and it is paradoxical that Western scholars have studied this esotericism without taking Shiism into account. It is a paradox that has its counterpart in Islam. This is certainly the case in Sunni Islam; but perhaps the initial responsibility for it lies with those who, within the Shiite minority itself, have presumed to ignore or neglect the esoteric teaching of the Imams, to the point of mutilating Shiism itself and of justifying the attempts to see it merely as a fifth ritual form alongside the four great juridical ritual forms of Sunni Islam. All through the centuries, one of the most moving aspects of Shiism has been the struggle of those who, along with the teaching of the Imams, have accepted Shiism in its totality. Such are Haydar Amuli, Mulla Sadra Shirazi, the entire Shaykhi school, and many eminent shaykhs of our day. (*Cf.* in particular part 3 of the present study.)

5. The cycle of prophecy has been concluded: Muhammad was the 'Seal of the prophets' (*khatim al-anbiya'*), the last of those who, prior to him, had given a new *shari'ah* to humanity: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus. For Shiism, however, the final phase of prophecy (*nubuwah*) was the initial phase of a new cycle, the cycle of the *walayah* or Imamate. In other words, the necessary complement of prophetology is Imamology, and the most direct expression of Imamology is the *walayah*. It is difficult to find anyone word which will convey all that this term connotes. From the very beginning, it figures largely in the teaching of the Imams themselves. Our texts repeat over and over that 'the *walayah* is the esoteric aspect of prophecy (*batin al-nubuwah*)'. The word actually means *friendship, protection*. The *awliya' Allah* (*dustan-iKhuda* in Persian) are the 'Friends of God' {and the 'Beloved of God'}; strictly speaking, they are the prophets and the Imams, the elite of humanity to whom the divine secrets are revealed through divine inspiration. The 'friendship' with which they are favoured by God makes them the spiritual *Guides* of humanity. It is by responding to them with his own devotion, as a friend, that each of their initiates, under their guidance, arrives at knowledge of himself and shares in their *walayah*. Thus the idea of the *walayah* is, essentially, suggestive of the initiatic and supervisory function of the Imam, initiating his disciples into the mysteries of the doctrine; it embraces, in an inclusive sense, both the idea of knowledge (*ma'rifah*) and the idea of love

(*mahabbah*)—a knowledge which is by its nature a salvatory knowledge. In this respect, Shiism is truly the *gnosis* of Islam.

The cycle of the *walayah* (henceforth we will use this complex term without translating it) is thus the cycle of the Imam succeeding the Prophet; that is to say, of the *batin* succeeding the *zahir*, the *haqiqah* succeeding the *shari'ah*. There is no question here of dogmatic magisterium. (For Twelver Shiism, the Imam is at present invisible.) In fact, it would be more appropriate to speak of the simultaneity of *shari'ah* and *haqiqah* rather than of their succession, thereby adding the latter to the former. For it is at this point that Shiism divides into two branches. If equilibrium is maintained between *shari'ah* and *haqiqah*, prophecy and the Imamate, and the *batin* is not dissociated from the *zahir*, what emerges is the form of Twelver Shiism, which to a certain extent is also that of Fatimid Ismailism. If the *batin* is carried to the point where it obliterates the *zahir*, and as a result the Imamate takes precedence over prophecy, we get the reformed Ismailism of Alamut. But if the *batin* without the *zahir*, with all the consequences that this entails, is the form taken by ultra-Shiism, the *zahir* without the *batin* is a mutilation of the integrity of Islam, because it involves a literalism which rejects the heritage transmitted by the Prophet to the Imams and which is the *batin*.

So the *batin* or esoteric aspect, as the content of knowledge, and the *walayah*, which configures the type of spirituality postulated by this knowledge, come together and show Shiism to be the *gnosis* of Islam, called *'irfan-i shi'i* in Persian: Shiite *gnosis* or theosophy. Analogous relationships come to mind: the *zahir* is to the *batin* what literal religion (*shari'ah*) is to spiritual religion (*haqiqah*), what prophecy (*nubuwah*) is to the *walayah*. The word *walayah* has often been translated as 'sanctity', and the word *wallas* 'saint'. These terms are used in the West with a precise canonical sense: there is nothing to be gained by creating confusion and disguising what is original on both sides. It would be better, as we have just suggested, to speak of the cycle of the *walayah* as the cycle of spiritual Initiation, and of the *awliya' Allah* as the 'Friends of God' or 'men of God'. From now on, no history of Islamic philosophy will be able to pass over these questions in silence. They are questions that did not receive treatment in the Sunni *kalam* {see below, ch. III} at its inception, because they transcended its limitations. They do not derive from the study of Greek philosophy.

On the other hand, many of the texts going back to the Imams reveal affinities and convergences with the gnosis of antiquity. If one traces the development of the themes of prophetology and Imamology from their origins, it comes as no surprise to find them in the writings of the *falasifah*; above all, one has no right to divorce them from their philosophical thinking on the grounds that they play no part in our own.

6. Developments in the field of Ismaili studies, and the recent research done on Haydar Amuli, a Shiite Sufi theologian who lived in the eighth/fourteenth century, lead us to formulate anew the question of the relationship between Shiism and Sufism—a question of importance, since it dominates the entire perspective of Islamic spirituality. Sufism is, *par excellence*, an attempt to interiorize the Quranic Revelation, a breaking away from purely legalistic religion, with the intention of relieving the intimate experience undergone by the Prophet on the night of the *Mi'raj*. In short, it is the experience of the condition of the *tawhid*, resulting in the awareness that only God himself can express, through the mouths of those who believe in him, the mystery of his unity. In that they both go beyond the purely juridical interpretation of the *shari'ah*, and both assume the *batin*, Shiism and Sufism would appear to be merely two ways of saying the same thing. In fact, there have been Shiite Sufis from the very beginning: the Kufah group, in which a Shiite by the name of 'Abdak was actually the first to be called a Sufi. In addition, we know that the Sufis were severely rebuked by some of the Imams.

We may well ask ourselves what happened. It would be utterly pointless to oppose, on the grounds that it was purely theoretical, Shiite 'gnosis' to the mystical experience of the Sufis. The concept of the *walayah*, which was formulated by the Imams themselves, would invalidate such an opposition. Yet people have achieved the feat of using the name and the thing without reference to their origins. Furthermore, Islamic esotericism possibly does not contain a single theme which was not mentioned or initiated by the Shiite Imams, in conversations, lessons, sermons, and so on. In this respect, many pages of Ibn al-'Arabi can be read as the work of a Shiite author, although it still remains true that while the concept of the *walayahis* represented in his writings with perfect correctness, the *walayah* itself is cut off from its origins and supports. Haydar Amuli (eighth/fourteenth

century), one of Ibn al-'Arabi's best-known Shiite followers, went into this question in depth.

Since so many texts have been lost, it may long remain a problem to say 'what happened'. Tor Andreae had already realized that, in the theosophy of Sufism, prophetology appeared to involve attributing themes which were properly those of Imamology to the sole person of the Prophet, and that Imamology itself had been eliminated along with everything else that might offend Sunni sentiment (see below, A, 3 and 4, for the *status quaestionis*). That the Sufi notion of the person who is the Pole (*qutb*) and the Pole of Poles, as well as the notion of the *walayah*, have a Shiite origin is something that cannot be denied. Likewise, the readiness with which, after the fall of Alamut, Ismailism assumed (as the Ismailis of Syria had done previously) the 'cloak' of Sufism cannot be explained without reference to a common origin.

If we acknowledge that Sunni Sufism eliminated original Shiism, we have not far to seek for the reasons for the rebuke administered to Sufism by the Imams. On the other hand, in actual fact all traces of Shiite Sufism were not lost: there is even a Sufism, existing in Iran from the time of Sa'd al-Din Hamuyah in the thirteenth century to the present day, which is conscious of being true Shiism. At the same time we also witness the emergence and formulation of aspects of a Shiite gnosis (*'Man*) which employs the technical vocabulary of Sufism; yet its exponents do not belong to a *tariqah* or Sufi congregation. These latter include such figures as Haydar Amuli, Mir Damad, Mulla Sadra al-Shirazi, and many others, as well as the entire Shaykhi school. This type of spirituality develops from al-Suhrawardi's *ishraq*, and combines an inner spiritual asceticism with a rigorous philosophical education.

The reproaches levelled by Shiism at Sufism concern sometimes the organization of the *tariqah* and the fact that the shaikh's role usurps that of the invisible Imam, sometimes the existence of a pious agnosticism conducive both to slothful ignorance and to moral licentiousness. In their turn, these spiritual masters, the guardians of Shiite gnosis (*irfan-i shi'i*), are themselves the objects of attack by the doctors of the Law, who wish to reduce theology to questions of jurisprudence. The complexity of the situation is manifest, and we should take note of it, for we will come back to it in Part Three of this study. The spiritual struggle for a spiritual Islam conducted by the Shiite minority and, with it—albeit in a more sporadic fashion—by the *falasifah* and the

Sufis, against the literalist religion of the Law, is a constant which dominates the entire history of Islamic philosophy. At stake is the protection of what is spiritual from all the perils of socialization.

7. At this point, we must say something about the phases and the exegesis of this struggle, although we will have to restrict ourselves to a few pages. Let us recall that the word *Shiism* (from the Arabic *shi'ah*, meaning a group of initiates) denotes all those who subscribe to the idea of the Imamate, personified by 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law by his daughter Fatimah, and by his successors, in their role as inaugurators of the cycle of the *walayah* which comes after the cycle of prophecy (Shiism having been the official religion of Iran for five centuries). The word *Imam* (not to be confused with the word *iman*, meaning faith) denotes the one who stands or walks in front. He is the *guide*. It is commonly used to mean the person who 'guides' the course of prayer in the mosque; in many cases it means the head of a school. (Plato, for example, is the 'Imam of philosophers'.) From the Shiite point of view, however, this is merely a metaphorical usage of the word. Properly and strictly speaking, the term is applicable only to those members of the House of the Prophet (*ahl al-bayt*) designated as the 'flawless'. In Twelver Shiism, these are the 'Fourteen Most Pure Ones' (*ma'sum*), consisting of the Prophet, his daughter Fatimah, and the Twelve Imams (see below, A, 4).

We can refer here only to the doctrines of the two main branches of Shiism: Twelver Shiism, or simply 'Imamism', and Sevener Shiism or Ismailism. In both cases, the number expresses a conscious symbolism. While Twelver Imamology symbolizes with the Heaven of the *twelve* zodiacal constellations (as with the *twelve* springs which gushed from the rock struck by Moses' rod), the Sevener Imamology of Ismailism symbolizes with the seven planetary Heavens and their wandering stars. A constant rhythm is thereby expressed: each of the six great prophets had his *twelve* Imams, who were homologous with each other (see below, A, 5). In Ismaili gnosis, the number twelve is transferred to the *hujjah* of the Imam. For Twelver Imamism, the 'pleroma of the Twelve' has been achieved. The last of them was and remains the twelfth Imam, the Imam of this time (*sahib al-zaman*), the Imam who is 'hidden from the senses, but present to the heart', present both in the past and in the future. We shall see how the idea of the 'hidden Imam' is *par excellence* expressive of the religion of

the personal, invisible guide.

Up to the time of the sixth Imam, Ja'far al-Sadiq (d. 148/765), Twelver and Ismaili Shiites both venerated the same Imamic line. Now, apart from the teachings of the first Imam that have come down to us, the great themes of Shiite gnosis have mainly been constructed around the teachings of the fourth, fifth and sixth Imams, 'Ali Zayn al-'Abidin (d. 95/714), Muhammad al-Baqir (d. 115/733), and Ja'far al-Sadiq (d. 148/765). Any study of the origins of Shiism cannot therefore dissociate one branch from the other. The immediate cause of their separation was the untimely death of the young Imam Isma'il, whom his father Ja'far al-Sadiq had already invested. The eager initiates who clustered round Isma'il, and who tended to accentuate what has been called ultra-Shiism, allied themselves with his young son, Muhammad ibn Isma'il, and were called Ismailis (from the name of their Imam). Others, however, allied themselves with the new Imam invested by the Imam Ja'far; this was Musa al-Kazim, brother of Isma'il, and the seventh Imam. They transferred their loyalty from Imam to Imam, down to the twelfth Imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi, son of the Imam Hasan al-'Askari. He disappeared mysteriously on the very day that his young father died (see below, A, 7). These are the Twelver Shiites.

#### A. TWELVER SHIISM

##### 1. Periods and sources

There can be no question, here, of establishing a synchronicity between the works which illustrate the developing thought of the two main branches of Shiism, Twelver Shiism and Sevener Shiism. Given the state of research, the time for such an undertaking has not yet arrived. From the beginning of the fourth/tenth century, under 'Ubayd Allah al-Mahdi (296-322/909-33), founder of the Fatimid dynasty in Egypt, Ismailism achieved one of those triumphs of a temporal order whose consequences can prove fatal for a spiritual doctrine. On the other hand, up until the advent of the Safavids in Iran in the sixteenth century, Twelver Shiism, from century to century, underwent the trials, vicissitudes and persecutions meted out to a religious minority. Yet this minority survived, thanks to the irremissible awareness it possessed of bearing witness to the true Islam, of being faithful to the teachings



of the holy Imams, the 'repositories of the secret of God's Messenger'. The complete teachings of the Imams form a massive *corpus*, a summa on which Shiite thinking has drawn from century to century. This thinking arises from the prophetic religion itself, and is not the product of something brought in from outside. This is why it should be accorded a special place in the body of what we call 'Islamic philosophy'. We can, moreover, understand why several generations of Shiite theologians devoted themselves to gathering together most of the traditions of the Imams, building them up into a *corpus*, and determining the rules whereby the validity of the 'chains of transmission' (*isnad*) could be guaranteed.

We can distinguish four great periods:

1. The first is the period of the holy Imams and of their followers and friends, several of whom, such as Hisham ibn al-Hakam, a passionate young follower of the sixth Imam, had already made collections of their teachings, apart from writing their own personal works. This period lasted until the date which marks the 'great Occultation' (*al-ghaybah al-kubra*) of the twelfth Imam: 329/940. It is also the date of the death of the last *na'ib* or representative, 'Ali al-Samarri, who, on the orders of the Imam himself, did not appoint anyone to succeed him. The same year saw the death of the great theologian Muhammad ibn Ya'qub al-Kulayni, who had moved from Rayy (Raghes), near Tehran, to Baghdad, where he spent twenty years collecting from their original sources the thousands of traditions (*hadith* and *akhbar*) which constitute the oldest organized body of Shiite tradition (ed. Tehran, 1955, in 8 vols., large in-8°). Several other names deserve mention, among them that of Abu Ja'far al-Qummi {d. 290/903}, a friend of the eleventh Imam, Hasan al-'Askari.

2. The second period extends from the 'great Occultation' of the twelfth Imam down to Nasir al-Din Tusi (d. 672/1273), a Shiite philosopher and theologian, mathematician and astronomer, and contemporary with the first Mongol invasion. It is mainly distinguished by the elaboration of the great summations of Twelver Shiite traditions which were the work of Ibn Babuyah of Qumm, known as al-Shaykh al-Saduq, who died in 381/991, one of the greatest Shiite theologians of the time and author of some three hundred works; of al-Shaykh al-Mufid {d. 413/1022}, likewise a very prolific author; of Muhammad

ibn al-Hasan Tusi (d. 460/1067); and of Qutb al-Din Sa'id al-Rawandi {d. 573/1177}. This was also the period of the two brothers Sayyid al-Sharif al-Ral (d. 406/1015) and Sayyid al-Murtada 'Alam al-Huda (d. 436/1044), descendants of the seventh Imam, and both of them authors of numerous Imamite treatises. The former is famous mainly for his compilation *Nahj al-balaghah* (see below). It is the time, too, of Fadi al-Tabarsi {d. 548/1153 or 552/1157}, author of a famous and monumental Shiite *tafsir* (Quranic commentary); of Ibn Shah-rashub (d. 588/1192); of Yahya ibn al-Bitriq {d. 600/1204}; and of Sayyid Radi al-Din 'Ail ibn al-Ta'us {d. 664/1266}, all of them the authors of important works of Imamology. Many other names belong to this period, which moreover witnessed the elaboration of the great Ismaili systematic treatises (see below, B) as well as those of the so-called Hellenizing philosophers, from al-Kindi to al-Suhrawardi (d. 587/1191). The work of Nasir al-Din Tusi completes the formation of Shiite philosophy, the first systematic sketch of which had been undertaken by Abu Ishaq al-Nawbakhti (d.ca. 350/961), in a book on which Al-'Allamah al-Hilli (d. 726/1326), a pupil of Nasir al-Din Tusi, was later to write a detailed commentary. These dates are already later than the limit we assigned to the first part of this study, which was the death of Averroes in 1198 CE. Nevertheless, the following observations are necessary in order to complete the picture, which cannot be segmented.

3. The third period extends from Nasir al-Din Tusi up to the Safavid Renaissance in Iran, which saw the rise of the school of Isfahan under Mir Damad (d. 1041/1631) and his students. A remarkably productive period prepared the way for this Renaissance. On the one hand, there was the continuation of the school of Nasir al-Din Tusi, with the addition of great names such as al-'Allamah al-Hilli and Afdal al-Din Kashani. On the other hand, an extraordinary convergence took place. Ibn al-'Arabi (d. 638/1240) emigrated from Andalusia to the East, while from central Asia the followers of Najm al-Din al-Kubra poured back into Iran and Anatolia before the Mongol invasion. The encounter between these two schools was responsible for a great upsurge in *Sufi metaphysics*. The outstanding figure of Twelver Shiite Sufism at the time was Sa'd al-Din Hamuyah or Hamuyi (d. 650/1252), a follower of Najm al-Din al-Kubra and a correspondent of Ibn al-'Arabi, whose works were circulated by his follower, 'Aziz al-Din **al-'Nasafi**. 'Ala

al-Dawlah al-Simnani (d. 736/1336) was destined to be one of the great masters of 'interiorizing' exegesis, while the influence of Ibn al-'Arabi and that of Nasir al-Din Tusi came together in the person of Sadr al-Din al-Qunyawi. The problem of the *walayah* (see below, A, 3ff.) was the subject of exhaustive discussion; it led back to the sources of Shiite gnosis, as these were brought to light by Haydar Amuli, a Shiite thinker of the first order in the eighth/fourteenth century. Indeed, another remarkable convergence takes place: on the Ismaili side, the fall of Alamut is responsible for a 'return' of Ismailism to Sufism, while on the Twelver Shiite side during this period there is a tendency in the same direction. Haydar Amuli made a great effort to bring Shiism and Sufism together: in the name of mystical theosophy he drafted a critical history of Islamic philosophy and theology. He was a follower of Ibn al-'Arabi, whom he admired and commentated, but he differs from him in one essential respect (*cf.* below). He was contemporary with Rajab ibn Muhammad al-Bursi, whose crucial work on Shiite gnosis was written in 774/1372. In the same context we may mention the names of the great Sufi shaykh and prolific author, Shah Ni'mat Allah al-wali (d. 834/1431), two Shiite followers of Ibn al-'Arabi, Sa'in al-Din Turkah al-Isfahani (d. 830/1427) and Muhammad ibn Abi Jumhur al-Ahsa'i (d. 901/1495) and Shams al-Din Muhammad al-Lahiji (d. 918/1512), commentator on the famous mystic of Azerbaijan, Mahmud Shabistari, who died in 720/1320 at the age of thirty-three.

4. The fourth period, noted above as being the period of the Safavid Renaissance and of the school of Isfahan with Mir Damad {d. 1041/1631), Mulla Sadra Shirazi. 1050/1640), their pupils and their pupils' pupils (Ahmad al-'Alawi, Muhsin Fayd, 'Abd al-Razzaq Lahiji, Qadi Sa'id Qummi, etc.) is a phenomenon which has no parallel elsewhere in Islam, where it is thought that philosophy came to an end with Averroes. These great thinkers of the period consider the excellency of the Shiite perspective to reside in the indissoluble unity of *pistis* and *gnosis*, of prophetic revelation and the philosophical intelligence which deepens the esoteric meaning of such a revelation. The monumental work of Mulla Sadra includes an invaluable commentary on the *corpus* of the Shiite traditions of al-Kulayni. He had several imitators, one of whom was the great theologian al-Majlisi, compiler of the vast *Bihar al-anwar* (Oceans of Lights) mentioned above,

unsympathetic towards the philosophers but frequently a philosopher in spite of himself. These works and their authors will be discussed in the third part of this study. They bring us to the Qajar period, which saw the formation of the important Shaykhi school after Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i (d. 1241/1826), and finally to our own day, when a renaissance of traditional philosophy finds its focus in the work of Mulla Sadra.

We mentioned earlier a compilation made by Sharif al-Radi (d. 406/1015), a work entitled *Nahj al-balaghah* (commonly translated as the 'way of eloquence', but which comprehends the idea of efficaciousness and maturity). This is a large collection of the *Logia* of the First Imam, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (sermons, conversations, letters and so on). After the Quran and the *hadith* of the Prophet, it is the most important work not just for the religious life of Shiism in general, but for its philosophical thought. Indeed, the *Nahj al-balaghah* may be regarded as one of the most important sources of the doctrines professed by Shiite thinkers, especially those of the fourth period. Its influence can be sensed in the logical co-ordination of terms, the deduction of correct conclusions, and the creation of certain technical terms in Arabic which possess both richness and beauty, and which in this way entered the literary and philosophical language independently of the translation into Arabic of Greek texts. Some of the basic philosophical problems posed by the *Logia* of the Imam 'AH are fully developed by Mulla Sadra and his school. If one reads one of the conversations of the Imam 'All with his follower Kumayy ibn Ziyad—for example that in which he replies to the question 'What is truth?' (*haqiqah*), or that in which he describes the esoteric succession of the Sages in this world—one will find a type of thinking very characteristic of this whole tradition.

From this context arise features peculiar to Shiite philosophy, for the thinkers with whom we are concerned considered that the *Logia* of the Imam formed a complete philosophical cycle, and derived thence an entire metaphysical system. Certain doubts have been expressed about the authenticity of parts of the compilation; but the work as a whole belongs in any case to an early period. In order to understand what it contains, it is best to take it phenomenologically, that is to say, according to its explicit intention: whoever holds the pen, it is the Imam who speaks. It is to this that it owes its influence.

It is to be regretted that in the West no philosophical study has so far been made of this book. For if one studies it carefully, in the light of the successive amplifications written by its many commentators, both Shiite and Sunni (such as Maytham ibn'Ali al-Bahrani, Ibn al-Hadid, al-Khu'yi, and so on), and by its Persian translators, and if one combines it with the *Logia* of all the other Imams, it becomes clear why the expansion and the new developments of philosophical thought should have taken place in the Shiite world at a time when there had long ceased to be a living school of philosophy in Sunni Islam.

The conclusion to be drawn from this very general survey is that the starting point of Shiite philosophical meditation is, apart from the Quran, the entire body of the Imamic traditions. All attempts to explain the prophetic philosophy arising from this meditation must start from the same beginnings. There are two normative principles: (1) It would be useless to start from the outside and proceed to a historical critique of the 'chains of transmission', for too often such a critique loses its way among them. The only productive course is to proceed phenomenologically, taking these traditions, which have existed for centuries, as constituting in their totality the mirror in which the Shiite consciousness has revealed to itself its own aspirations. (2) The best way to systematize the themes, few in number, which are explored here in order to elicit the nature of prophetic philosophy, is by following the Shiite writers who have themselves commented on these same themes. In this way we will obtain a succinct overall view of things, free from vain historicism (the very idea of which was not even suspected by our thinkers). The principal commentaries that we will be studying are by Mulla Sadra al-Shirazi, Mir Damad, and the dense pages of Haydar Amuli. The Imamic texts that these commentaries elucidate will enable us to perceive the essence of *Shiism*, which is precisely the problem confronting us.

## 2. Esotericism

1. The conclusion to be drawn from the texts themselves, and above all from the teaching of the Imams, is that Shiism is, in essence, the esotericism of Islam. Take for example the meaning assigned to the Quranic verse 33:72: 'We offered to entrust our secrets (*al-amanah*) to the heavens and the earth and the hills, but they all refused to accept them, they all trembled to receive them. But man agreed to

take them upon himself; he is violent and ignorant.' The meaning of this impressive verse, which is the basis in Islamic thinking with respect to the *De dignitate hominis* theme, is not in doubt for Shiite commentators. The verse refers to the 'divine secrets', to the esoteric aspect of prophecy that the holy Imams passed on to their initiates. This interpretation can find justification in a statement actually made by the sixth Imam, in which he declares that the meaning of the verse in question is the *walayah* whose source is the Imam. Likewise, the Shiite exegetes, from Haydar Amuli to Mulla Fath Allah in the last century, have been concerned to demonstrate how man's violence and ignorance in this case are no reproach to him, but a cause for praise, for an act of sublime folly was needed to accept the divine trust. As long as man, symbolized by Adam, remains unaware of the fact that there is something *other* than God, he has the strength to bear such a formidable burden. As soon as he yields to the awareness that there is something overman God, he betrays the trust, either by rejecting it and handing it over to people who are unworthy of it, or quite simply by denying its existence. In the latter case, he reduces everything to the visible letter. In the first case, he infringes the 'discipline of the arcane' (*taqiyah, kitman*) prescribed by the Imams in conformity with the injunction, 'God commands you to make deposits to those entitled to them' (4:55). This means: God orders you not to pass on the divine trust of gnosis except to him who is worthy of it, who is an 'heir'. The whole notion of a knowledge which is a spiritual inheritance (*'irthi irthi*; see below, A, 4) is implicit in this injunction.

This is why the fifth Imam, Muhammad al-Baqir, as every Imam after him, has declared, 'Our cause is difficult; it requires great effort; it can be espoused only by an Angel of the highest rank, a prophet who is sent (*nabi mursal*), or a faithful initiate whose heart God has tested for its faith.' The sixth Imam, Ja'far al-Sadiq, specified further: 'Our cause is a secret (*sirr*) within a secret, a secret of something which remains hidden, a secret which may only be disclosed by another secret; a secret upon a secret which is supported by a secret.' And again: 'Our cause is the truth and the truth of truth (*haqq al-haqq*); it is the exoteric aspect, and the esoteric aspect of the exoteric aspect, and the esoteric aspect of the esoteric aspect. It is the secret, and the secret of something which remains hidden, a secret which is supported by a secret.' The significance of these remarks was already observed in

a poem written by the fourth Imam, 'Ali Zayn al-'Abidin (d. 95/714): 'I conceal the jewels of my Knowledge—For fear that some ignorant man, on seeing the truth, should crush us\_O Lord! if I were to reveal one pearl of my gnosis—They would say to me: are you then a worshipper of idols?—And there would be Muslims who would see justice in the shedding of my blood!—They find abominable the most beautiful thing they are offered.'

2. One could make many citations of a similar import. They testify most admirably to the *ethos* of Shiism, to the awareness it possesses of being the esotericism of Islam; and it is impossible, historically speaking, to go back further than the teachings of the Imams in seeking for the sources of Islamic esotericism. It is on this account that Shiites, in the true sense, are those who accept the secrets of the Imams. Conversely, all those who have sought or who seek to confine the teaching of the Imams to the exoteric aspect—to questions of law and of ritual—mutilate the essence of Shiism. Affirmation of the esoteric aspect does not mean that the *shari'ah*—the letter and the exoteric aspect (*zahir*)—are simply abolished. It means that positive religion, deprived of spiritual reality (*haqiqah*) and of the esoteric aspect (*batin*), becomes opaque and a form of slavery: it is no more than a catalogue or a catechism, no longer remaining open to the disclosure of meanings which are new and unforeseen.

Thus, as the first Imam observes, mankind is divided into three groups. (1) There is the '*alim rabbani*, the *theosophospos excellence*, represented by the Prophet and the holy Imams. (2) There are those who are receptive to the doctrine of salvation (*tariqat al-najah*) taught by the *theosophoi*, and who try to make others receptive to it. In every generation, such men have always been a minority. (3) There is the mass of those who remain impervious to this teaching. 'We {the Imams} are the Sages who instruct; our Shiites are those who are taught by us. The rest, alas, are the foam rolled along on the flood.' Esotericism revolves around the two centres of *shari'ah* and *haqiqah*, one the religion of the Law or social religion, the other mystical religion, based on the spiritual meaning of the Quranic Revelation, and thereby implying in essence a prophetology and an Imamology.

### 3. Prophetology

1. The oldest data we have for establishing Islamic prophetology are contained in the teaching of the Imams. Given what it is motivated by, it could be said that the Shiite milieu was indeed propitious for the rise, study and development of prophetology. More than any other form of Islamic thought, it is 'prophetic philosophy' that corresponds in essence to the consciousness of prophetic religion, because the 'divine science' is incommunicable; it is not a science in the ordinary sense of the word, and only a prophet can communicate it. The circumstances of this communication—those in which its content fructifies after the prophecy itself is concluded—constitute the real object of prophetic philosophy. This idea is part and parcel of the idea itself of Shiism, and is the reason why Shiism can never be absent from a history of Islamic philosophy.

The first thing to be noted is the remarkable similarity between the doctrine of the '*aql* (the intellect, the intelligence, the Nous) among the Avicennan philosophers, and the doctrine of the Spirit (*ruh*) in the Shiite texts which derive from the Imams. It follows that the first stage of a prophetic philosophy, whose theme is the necessity of prophets, develops in the case of both doctrines from converging considerations. We learn from a *hadith* of the sixth Imam, recorded by Ibn Babuyan, that man is constituted of five Spirits, or rather five degrees or states of Spirit. At the summit are to be found the Spirit of faith (*iman*) and the Holy Spirit. All five Spirits are fully actualized only by the prophets, the Messengers and the Imams; true believers possess four, and other men have three.

In a similar fashion, the philosophers, from Avicenna to Mulla Sadra, when considering the five states of the intellect, from the 'material' or potential intellect to the *intellectus sanctus*, admit that in the case of the majority of men the intellect only exists in a potential state, and that the conditions which would enable it to become active are present in a small number of men only. This being so, how could a large number of men, in the sway of their baser impulses, be in a position to form themselves into a single community observing the same law? For al-Biruni, the natural law is the law of the jungle; the antagonism between human beings can be overcome only through a divine Law, made known by a prophet or divine Messenger. **These** pessimistic considerations, voiced by al-Biruni and Avicenna, **reproduce almost**

literally the teaching of the Imams, as we know it from the opening of al-Kulayni's *Kitab al-Hujjah*.

2. However, Shiite prophetology certainly does not derive from mere positive sociology. What is at issue is man's spiritual destiny. The Shiite view which, in opposition to the Karramians and the Ash'arites, denies the possibility of *seeing* God in this world and the world beyond, is of a piece with the Imams' elaboration of a science of the heart, of knowledge through the heart (*al-ma'rifah al-qalbiyah*) which encompasses all the rational and supra-rational faculties, and adumbrates the form of gnosiology proper to a prophetic philosophy. Thus, on the one hand, the necessity of prophecy demands the existence of these men who are inspired, who are superhuman, of whom it could even be said (without involving the idea of the Incarnation) that they are 'divine man or divine lord in human form' (*insan rabbani, rabb insani*). On the other hand, Shiite prophetology was clearly distinct from the early schools of Sunni Islamic thought. The Ash'arites (see below, III, 2) rejected all notion of *tartib*—that is to say of any hierarchical structure of the world with mediating causes—and thereby destroyed the entire basis of prophecy. The extremist (al-Rawandi) Mu'tazilites, on their side, made the following objection: either prophecy is in accordance with reason, or it is not. In the first case, it is superfluous; in the second case, it must be rejected. Mu'tazilite rationalism was unable to perceive the level of being and of awareness on which this dilemma simply evaporates.

The mediator who is a necessary condition of Shiite prophetology is technically known as *hujjah* (the *proof*, God's guarantee to men). Nevertheless, idea and function transcend the limits of any particular epoch: the presence of the *hujjah* needs to be continuous, even if it is an invisible presence to which the majority of men are oblivious. If, therefore, the term is applied to the Prophet, it is in turn applied even more emphatically to the Imams. (In the hierarchy of the Ismailism of Alamut, the *hujjah* becomes in some sense a spiritual double of the Imam; cf. below, B, II.) The idea of the *hujjah* thus already presupposes the inseparability of prophetology from Imamology; and because it transcends time, it originates in a metaphysical reality, the vision of which takes us back to the gnostic theme of the celestial *Anthropos*.

3. The Imam Ja'far teaches that 'the human Form is the supreme evidence by means of which God testifies to his Creation. It is the *Book* he has written with his hand. It is the *Temple* he has built with his wisdom. It is the coming together of the Forms of all the universes. It is the compendium of the disclosed knowledge of the *Tabula secreta* (*lawh mahfuz*). It is the visible witness, answering for all that is invisible (*ghayb*). It is the guarantee, the proof opposed to all who deny. It is the straight Way between paradise and hell.'

This is the theme on which Shiite prophetology has elaborated. The human Form in its pre-eternal glory is called Adam in the true and real sense of the name (*Adam haqiqi*), *Homo maximus* (*insan kabir*), supreme Spirit, First Intelligence, supreme Pen, supreme Caliph, Pole of Poles. This celestial *Anthropos* is invested with, and is the keeper of, eternal prophecy (*nubuwah baqiyah*), of the essential and primordial prophecy (*nubuwah asliyah haqiqiyah*), which was disclosed before time in the celestial Pleroma. He is also the *haqiqah muhammadiyah*, the eternal Muhammadan Reality, the Muhammadan Light of glory, the Muhammadan Logos. It was to him that the Prophet was alluding when he said, 'God created Adam (the *Anthropos*) in the image of his own Form'. And as the terrestrial epiphany (*mazhar*) of this *Anthropos*, he uses the first person when he says, 'The first thing that God created was my Light' (or the Intelligence, or the Pen, or the Spirit). This was also his meaning when he said, 'I was already a prophet when Adam (the earthly Adam) was still between water and clay' (that is to say, was not yet formed).

This eternal prophetic Reality is a bi-unity. It possesses two 'dimensions', one external and exoteric, and one inner or esoteric. The *walayah* is specifically the esoteric dimension of this eternal prophecy (*nubuwah*); it is the realization of all its perfections according to the esoteric dimension, before the beginning of time, and it is their eternal perpetuation. Just as the exoteric 'dimension' had a final terrestrial manifestation in the person of the Prophet Muhammad, the esoteric 'dimension' likewise needed to have a terrestrial epiphany. It achieved it in the person of him who above all other men was closest to the Prophet: 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, the first Imam. He was thus able to say, echoing the sentence quoted above, 'I was already a *wali* when Adam (the earthly Adam) was still between water and clay.'

The two persons of the Prophet and the Imam, prior to their earthly

kinship, share a spiritual relationship (*nisbah ma'nawiyah*) which is established in their pre-existence: 'I and 'Ali are one and the same Light.' 'I and 'Ali together were one and the same light fourteen thousand years before God created the earthly Adam.' In the same *hadith* the Prophet indicates how this unique Light was transmitted from generation to generation of prophets, and then branched into two and was made manifest in their two persons. In conclusion, the Prophet addresses the Imam: 'If I were not afraid that a part of my community would commit the same excesses towards you as the Christians committed towards Jesus, I would say of you something as a result of which you could no longer pass by a group of men without them gathering up the dust of your feet in order to find healing in it. But it is enough that you are a part of myself, and that I am a part of you. He who inherits from you will be my heir, for you stand in the same relation to me as Aaron to Moses, with the difference that after me there will be no other prophet.' Finally, there is the following decisive statement: "AH was sent *secretly* with every prophet; with me he was sent openly.' This last is as precise a statement as could be wished for. The Muhammadan Imamate, as the esotericism of Islam, is *eo ipso* the esotericism of all previous prophetic religions.

4. These all too brief remarks give us a clearer idea of the work of Shiite thinkers on the categories of prophecy and of the *walayah*. There is an absolute prophecy (*nubuawah mutlaqah*), which is common or general, and there is a prophecy which is limited or particular (*muqay-yadah*). The first of these is proper to the absolute, integral and primordial Muhammadan Reality, from pre-eternity to post-eternity. The second is constituted by the partial realities of the first—that is to say, by the particular epiphanies of prophecy, represented in turn by the *nabis* or prophets of whom the Prophet of Islam was the Seal, being on this account the epiphany of the *haqiqah muhammadiyah*. The same is true in the case of the *walayah*, the esoteric aspect of eternal prophecy: there is a *walayah* which is absolute and general, and there is a *walayah* which is limited and particular. Just as the respective prophecy of each of the prophets is a partial reality and epiphany (*mazhar*) of absolute prophecy, the *walayah* of all the *awliya'* (the Friends of God or men of God) is each time a partial reality and epiphany of the absolute *walayah* whose Seal is the first Imam, whereas the Seal of the Muhammadan *walayah* is the Mahdi, the twelfth Imam

(the 'hidden Imam'). Thus the Muhammadan Imamate, the pleroma of the Twelve, is the Seal (*khatim*) of the *walayah*. All together, the *nabis* stand in the same relation to the Seal of prophecy as the latter to the Seal of the *awliya'*.

It is thus evident that the essence (*haqiqah*) of the Seal of the prophets and that of the Seal of the *awliya'* is one and the same, viewed both exoterically (as prophecy) and esoterically (as the *walayah*). The situation confronting us is as follows. Everyone in Islam is unanimous in professing that the cycle of prophecy came to an end with Muhammad, Seal of the prophets. For Shiism, however, the closing of the cycle of prophecy coincided with the opening of the cycle of the *walayah*, the cycle of spiritual Initiation. As we will explain later, what in fact came to an end, according to the Shiite authors, was 'legislative prophecy'. Prophecy pure and simple characterizes the spiritual state of those who before Islam were called *nabis*, but who from then on were designated *awliya'*: the name was changed, but the thing itself remained. Such is the vision which typifies Shiite Islam, inspiring the expectation of a future to which it remains open. It is a conception based on a classification of the prophets, itself founded on the prophetic gnosiology taught by the Imams themselves (see below, A, 5). It also establishes an order of precedence between *wali, nabi and rasul*, the Twelver Shiite understanding of which differs from that of Ismailism.

In connection with the *nubuawah*, we can distinguish a *nubuawah al-ta'rif*, a teaching or 'gnostic' prophecy, and a *nubuawah al-tashri*, or legislative prophecy. The latter is properly the *risalah*, the prophetic mission of the *rasul* or Messenger, whose mission it is to announce the *shari'ah*—the divine Law, the 'celestial Book which has descended into his heart'—to mankind. There have been many messenger *nabis* (*nabi mursal*), whereas the series of great prophets whose mission it was to announce the *shari'ah* is limited to the *ulu al-'azm* (the men of decision), who are six in number: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad—or, according to some traditions, seven counting David and his psalter.

5. This prophetology establishes a situation which is expressed above all in the definition of the relationship between the *walayah*, prophecy (*nubuawah*), and the mission of the Messenger (*risalah*), and thence between the person of the *wali*, the person of the prophet and the person

of the Messenger. If we represent the three concepts by three concentric circles, the *walayah* is represented by the central circle, because it is the esoteric aspect of prophecy; prophecy is represented by the middle circle, because it is the esoteric or 'inner' aspect of the mission of the Messenger; and this mission is represented by the outer circle. Every *rasul* is also *nabi and wali*. Every *nabi* is also a *wali*. The *wali* can only be the *wali*. Paradoxically, it follows that the order of precedence among the qualifications is the inverse of the order of precedence among the persons. Our authors explain this as follows.

Being the heart and the esoteric aspect, the *walayah* is more eminent than the exoteric appearance, because the latter has need of the former: just as the mission of the Messenger presupposes the spiritual state of the *nabi*, the latter in turn presupposes the *walayah*. The closer something is to the inner realities, the more sufficient it is to itself and the greater its proximity to God, for this proximity is dependent on the inner realities of being. It follows, therefore, that the *walayah*—the quality of being a Friend of God, of a spiritual initiate and initiator—is more eminent than the quality of a *nabi*, and that this is more eminent than the quality of a Messenger (in the order of increasing exteriority). As our authors repeat, the *risalah* is like the shell, the *nubuwwah* is like the almond, and the *walayah* is like the oil within the almond. In other words: the mission of the Messenger, in the absence of the state of a *nabi*, would be like the *shari'ah* or positive religion deprived of the *tariqah*, the mystical way; like the exoteric without the esoteric; like the empty shell without the almond. And the state of a *nabi* without the *walayah* would be like the mystical way of *fangah* without spiritual realization (*haqiqah*); like the esoteric without the esoteric aspect of the esoteric (*batin al-batin*); like the almond without its oil. We come across an analogous relationship between the notions of *wahy*, *ilham* and *kashf* in gnosiology (see below, A, 5).

Nevertheless, in thus affirming the superiority of the *walayah*, the Twelver Shiites do not mean to imply that the person of the *wali* pure and simple is superior to the persons of the *nabi* and the Messenger. What is meant is that of the three qualities, viewed in the single person of the Prophet of Islam, the *walayah* is pre-eminent, because it is the source, foundation and support of the two others. Hence the apparent paradox: that even though the *walayah* is pre-eminent, in concrete terms it is the prophet-Messenger who takes precedence, because he

contains all three qualities: he is *wali-nabi-rasul*. We may observe with Haydar Amuli that on this point Twelver Shiism differs from Ismailism, or more specifically from the reformed Ismailism of Alamut, which was merely the rediscovery, perhaps, of the deepest aims of primitive Shiism. As we shall see (see below, B, II), the Ismaili position adopted in Alamut was no less strict: since the *walayah* is superior to the quality of prophet-messenger, and since the *walayah* of the Imam is of the esoteric order, while the prophecy of the Messenger (the legislator) is of the exoteric order; since, finally, the esoteric aspect is pre-eminent over the exoteric aspect, it must be concluded that the Imam takes fundamental precedence over the prophet, and that the esoteric aspect is independent of the exoteric aspect. Conversely, the position adopted by Twelver Shiism (in spite of the ever-latent tendency of Shiism to affirm the precedence of the Imam), was an endeavour to maintain an equilibrium: any exoteric aspect which is not supported by an esoteric aspect is in fact an infidelity (*kufur*), but, equally, any esoteric aspect which does not at the same time maintain the existence of an exoteric aspect is libertinism. As we can see, the meaning of the relationship between prophetology and Imamology is reversed according to which of the two positions, Imamite or Ismaili, one chooses to adopt.

#### 4. Imamology

1. The concept of the Imam is postulated by the twofold nature of the 'eternal Muhammadan Reality' described above (A, 3), which implies, among other things, that the cycle of prophecy is succeeded by the cycle of the *walayah*. What the Imams persistently stress first of all is that the Prophet annunciator must be followed by a 'Keeper of the Book' (*qayyim al-Qur'an*). This gives rise to much animated discussion in the Imams' circle, and even to debates with certain Mu'tazilites (see below, HI), in which one of the chief protagonists is the young Hisham ibn al-Hakam, favourite disciple of the sixth Imam. The thesis maintained against the opposition is that the text of the Quran in itself is not enough, because it contains hidden meanings, esoteric depth, and apparent contradictions. The knowledge of such a book cannot be grasped by the norms of ordinary philosophy: the text must be 'taken back' (*ta'wil*) to the level on which its true meaning is manifest. Such a task is not within the competence of dialectic, of

the *kalam*: one does not construct the *true meaning out* of syllogisms. Its discernment requires someone who is both a spiritual heir and inspired, who is in possession of both the esoteric aspect (*batin*) and the exoteric aspect (*zahir*). He is God's *hujjah*, the Keeper of the Book, the Imam or Guide. One must therefore endeavour to assess what constitutes the essence of the Imam, in the person of the Twelve Imams.

In his commentary on the texts of the Imams, Mulla Sadra, speaking about this very subject, states its philosophical presuppositions: that which has no cause (that which is *ab-imo*) is not susceptible to being known; its essence is not susceptible to definition; it cannot be proved by means of something else, because *It* is itself the proof. One is only able to know God through God, not, in the manner of the *kalam* theologians, by *starting from* the creatural, not by starting from the contingent being, in the manner of the philosophers (*falasifah*). It is possible to attain exalted knowledge only through divine revelation (*wahy*) or inspiration (*ilham*). After the Prophet who was God's *hujjah*, it is impossible that the Earth should remain without a *hujjah*, God's surety, answering for God before men and thereby enabling them to approach God. He may be publicly recognized, or he may remain unknown to the majority of men, veiled by an *incognito* way of life. He is indispensable as the Guide to the hidden meanings of the Book, meanings that can be grasped only through divine illumination. Imamology is an essential postulate of prophetic philosophy. The first question, therefore, is this: after the Prophet, who could claim to be the 'Keeper of the Book'?

2. The witnesses are unanimous on this point. One of the Prophet's most famous Companions, 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbas, relates how profoundly impressed were those who listened to 'All's commentary on the *Fatihah* (the first Surah of the Quran). The first Imam himself gives this testimony: 'Not a single verse of the Quran descended upon (was revealed to) the Messenger of God which he did not proceed to dictate to me and make me recite. I would write it with my own hand, and he would instruct me as to its *tafsir* (the literal explanation) and the *ta'wil* (the spiritual exegesis), the *nasikh* (the verse which abrogates) and the *mansukh* (the abrogated verse), the *muhkam* and the *mutashabih* (the fixed and the ambiguous), the particular and the general. And he would pray to God to increase my understanding and my memory. Then he would lay his hand on my breast and ask

God to fill my *heart* with knowledge and understanding, with judgement and illumination.'

Once again, our texts resort to the theme of the *heart* in order to make the function of the Imam intelligible: he stands in the same relation to the spiritual community as the *heart* to the human organism. The comparison in itself serves to stress the interiority of Imamology. When, for example, Mulla Sadra speaks of 'that celestial (*malakuti*) reality which is the Imamate within man', he intimates how Imamology comes to fruition in mystical experience. Moreover, the hidden Imam is present in the *heart* of his Shiites up until the day of the Resurrection. We shall speak later of the profound significance of the *ghaybah* (the occupation of the Imam), that divine *incognito* which is essential to a prophetic philosophy because it preserves what is divine from becoming an *object*, as it preserves it from all socialization. The Imam's authority is quite different from the dogmatic magisterium which governs a Church. The Imams are initiators into the hidden meaning of the Revelations; themselves its inheritors, they made over the heritage to those qualified to receive it. One of the fundamental notions in gnosiology is '*ilm irthi*, a knowledge which is a spiritual heritage. This is why Shiism is not what might be called a 'religion of authority', in the way that a Church is. The Imams have, in fact, fulfilled their earthly mission; they are no longer in this world in a material sense. Their continuing presence is a supra-sensible presence, and it is also a 'spiritual authority' in the true sense of the word. Their teaching endures, and is the basis of the entire hermeneutic of the Book.

The first among them, the first Imam, is designated as the foundation of the Imamate. In the Shiite view, however, he cannot be dissociated from the other *eleven* Figures who together make up the pleroma of the Imamate, because the law of the number *twelve*, symbolic cipher of a totality, is constant at all the periods of the prophetic cycle (some of the homologues were mentioned above: the twelve signs of the zodiac, the twelve springs which gushed from the rock struck by the rod of Moses; the relationship with the twelve months of the year is in accordance with the ancient theologies of the *Aion*). Each of the great prophets, annunciators of a *shari'ah*, had his twelve Imams. The Prophet himself said, 'May God take care, after me, of 'Ali and of the *awsiya*' (the inheritors) of my posterity (the eleven), for they are the Guides. God gave them my understanding and my knowledge,



which means that they hold the same rank as me, as regards being worthy of my succession and of the Imamate.' As Haydar Amuli says, 'All the Imams are one and same Light (*nur*), one and the same Essence (*haqiqah*), exemplified in twelve persons. Everything that applied to one of them applies equally to each of the others.'

3. This concept is based on a whole metaphysics of Imamology which has undergone considerable development both within Ismaili theosophy and within Twelver Shiism, particularly in the Shaykhi school. The premisses of this metaphysics are furnished by the Imamic texts themselves. In order to understand the bearing these have, we must remember in addition that if Imamology was confronted with the same problems as Christology, it always tended to find solutions which, although rejected by official Christianity, were nevertheless close to gnostic conceptions. When the relationship is envisaged between *lahut* (divinity) and *nasut* (humanity) in the person of the Imams, there is never a question of anything resembling a hypostatic union of two natures. The Imams are divine epiphanies, theophanies. The technical vocabulary (*zuhur*, *mazhar*) always has reference to the comparison with the phenomenon of a mirror: the image appearing in the mirror is not incarnate in (or immanent in) the substance of the mirror. Understood in this way, as being neither less nor more than divine epiphanies, the Imams are the Names of God, and as such they preserve us from the twofold dangers of *tashbih* (anthropomorphism) and *ta'til* (agnosticism). Their pre-existence as a Pleroma of beings of light had already been affirmed by the sixth Imam: 'God created us out of the Light of his sublimity, and from the clay (of our light) he created the spirits of our Shiites'. This is the reason why their names were written in letters of fire on the mysterious Emerald Tablet in the possession of Fatimah, the originator of their line (one recalls here the *Tabula smaragdina* of Hermeticism).

The titles given to the Imams can be truly understood only when they are considered as Figures of light, pre-cosmic entities. They themselves confirmed these titles during the time of their earthly epiphany. Al-Kulayni included a large collection of them in his massive compilation. In this way, the phases of the famous verse of the Light (Quran 24:35) are ascribed respectively to the Fourteen Most Pure Ones (the Prophet, Fatimah and the Twelve Imams). They are the only 'immaculate Ones' (*ma'sum*), preserved from, and immune to, all

uncleanness. The fifth Imam says, 'The light of the Imam in the *heart* of believers is more brilliant than the sun which gives out the light of day.' The Imams are, in fact, those who illumine the hearts of believers, while those from whom God veils this light are hearts of darkness. They are the pillars of the Earth, the Signs (*'alamat*) mentioned by God in his Book, those on whom the gift of infused wisdom has been bestowed. They are the caliphs of God on Earth, the Thresholds whereby he may be approached, the Chosen Ones, the heirs of the prophets. The Quran guides one to the Imams. (As theophanic figures, the Imams are no longer only the guides to the hidden meaning, but they are that esoteric meaning itself.) They are the mine of gnosis, the tree of prophecy, the place of the Angels' visitation, inheritors of knowledge one from the other. They contain the totality of the books 'descended' (revealed) from God. They know God's supreme Name. They are the equivalent of the Ark of the Covenant in Israel. It is to their descent to earth that the descent of the Spirit and the Angels on the Night of Destiny alludes (Surah 97). They are in possession of all the knowledge 'brought' by the Angels to the prophets and the Messengers. Their knowledge encompasses the totality of all times. They are *muhaddathun* ('those to whom the Angels speak'; cf. below, A, 5). Because they are the light in the hearts of believers, the well-known maxim 'he who knows himself, knows his lord' means: 'he knows his Imam' (that is, the Face that for him is the Face of God). Conversely, he who dies without knowing his Imam dies the death of the oblivious—he dies, that is to say, without knowing himself.

4. These affirmations culminate in the famous 'Sermon of the Great Declaration' (*Khutbah al-Bayan*), attributed to the first Imam, although in it an eternal Imam finds expression: 'I am the Sign of the All-Powerful. I am the gnosis of the mysteries. I am the Threshold of Thresholds. I am the companion of the radiance of the divine Majesty. I am the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden. I am the Face of God. I am the mirror of God, the supreme Pen, the *Tabula secreta*. I am he who in the Gospel is called Elijah. I am he who is in possession of the secret of God's Messenger.' The sermon proceeds to proclaim seventy more such affirmations, all equally extraordinary. To whatever period this *Khutbah* may belong (a period much older, in any case, than certain critics have thought), it demonstrates the fruitfulness in Shiite Imamology of the gnostic theme of the celestial *Anthropos*, of

the 'eternal Muhammadan Reality'. The statements of the Imam are perfectly comprehensible in the light of what we have already said about this Reality. Because 'their *walayah* is the esoteric aspect of prophecy', they are in fact the key to all the Quranic sigla, the mysterious letters inscribed at the head or as the title of certain Quranic Surahs.

Furthermore, since they all share in the same Essence, the same Light, what is said of the Imams in general applies to each of the Twelve. Historically speaking, their succession is as follows: 1. 'Ali, the Amir of believers (d. 40/661). 2. Hasan al-Mujtaba (d. 49/669). 3. Husayn Sayyid al-Shuhada' (d. 61/680). 4. 'Ali Zayn al-'Abidin (d. 92/711). 5. Muhammad al-Baqir (d. 115/733). 6. Ja'far al-Sadiq (d. 148/765). 7. Musa al-Kazim (d. 183/799). 8. 'Ali al-Rida (d. 203/818). 9. Muhammad al-Jawad al-Taqi (d. 220/835). 10. 'Ali al-Naqi (d. 254/868). 11. Hasan al-'Askari (d. 260/874). 12. Muhammad al-Mahdi, *al-Qa'im*, *al-Hujjah*. All of them repeated that they were the heirs of the knowledge of God's Messenger and of all the previous prophets. The meaning of this quality of being an heir will be revealed to us by gnosiology. We have already learned enough to eliminate one prejudice or misunderstanding. Never has physical descent from the Prophet been enough to make an Imam: *nass* and *'ismah*, investiture and impeccability, are also needed. The Imamate does not derive from mere earthly kinship with the Prophet. It is rather the contrary that is true: their earthly kinship derives from, and is the sign of, their pleromatic unity with the Prophet.

5. We may also briefly note here that the idea of *walayah* is so rooted in Shiism itself that it appears inseparable from it. Nevertheless, it was dissociated from it, and this is what constitutes the whole history of non-Shiite Sufism, whose origins, as we said, have not yet been completely explored. In this case the *walayah* loses its support, its source and its coherence; what was ascribed to the Imam is transferred to the Prophet. Once the *walayah* is thus uprooted from Imamology, a serious consequence ensues. The 'four imams', founders of the four juridical rituals of Sunni Islam (Hanbalite, Hanafite, Malikite, Shafi'ite), are credited with being the heirs of the prophets and of the Prophet. The organic link, the bi-polarity of *shan'ah* and *haqiqah*, was broken and, by the same token, legalistic religion—the purely juridical interpretation of Islam—was consolidated. We find ourselves here at the

source of an altogether typical phenomenon of popularization and socialization. The *batin* isolated from the *zahir*, rejected even, produces a situation in which philosophers and mystics are out of true, engaged upon a path which becomes increasingly 'compromising'. We gain a clear idea of this phenomenon, which up to now has not been analysed, from the protests of all those Shiites (with Haydar Amuli at the head) who understand full well the chief reason for Islam's descent into a purely legalistic religion. They deny that 'four imams' can be the heirs of the Prophet, firstly because their knowledge is wholly exoteric, and so is in no way a knowledge which is a spiritual heritage (*'ilm irthi*); and secondly, because the function of the *walayah* is precisely to make the Imams the heirs of the *batin*. Shiite gnosiology enables us to understand what is at stake here, and to grasp the gravity of the situation.

### 5. Gnosiology

1. There is an essential link between the gnosiology of a prophetic philosophy and the phenomenon of the sacred Book 'descended from Heaven'. At the heart of a community of *ahl al-kitab* the theme of prophetic inspiration is bound to be a crucial one for philosophical reflection. The prophetic philosophy which arose in Shiite Islam found its true voice in this theme; at the same time its orientation differs profoundly from that of Christian philosophy, which is centred on the fact of the Incarnation as the entry of the divine into history and chronology. The relationship between knowledge and belief, theology and philosophy, was not conceived in the same way in the two traditions. Where Shiite Islam is concerned, gnosiology was to concentrate on suprasensible knowledge, establishing its categories in relation to prophetic knowledge, and in relation to the hierarchy of persons that was determined by the relationship, described above, between *nubuwwah* and *walayah*. Certainly the rational dialectic of the *mutakallimun* lacked the resources for such a prophetic philosophy. Those who engaged in it were the *hukama'ilahlyun*, a designation whose literal equivalent, as we saw, is the *theosophoi*.

In the work of al-Kulayni, the *hadith* which mainly transmit the gnosiological doctrine of the fifth, sixth and seventh Imams establish a classification of the levels of knowledge and of the prophetic persons that correspond to the degrees of mediation on the part of the Angel.

This link between gnosiology and angelology was to enable the philosophers (*falasifah*) to identify the Angel of Knowledge with the Angel of Revelation. Nevertheless, it would be a fundamental error to see this identification of the '*aql* (Intelligence) with the *ruh* (Spirit), Nous as a rationalization of the Spirit. The notion of '*aql* (intellectus, intelligentia) is not the same as that of *ratio*. (It could even be said that it was angelology, allied with Avicennan gnosiology and cosmology, which was responsible for the rejection of Latin Avicennism in the twelfth century, because at that time Latin scholasticism was taking quite a different line.) Furthermore, it must be stressed that the classification of the prophets and of the modes of knowledge corresponding to them originates in the teaching of the Imams, a more ancient source than which it is impossible to discover.

2. The Imams list, describe and explain four categories. (1) There is the prophet or *nabi* who is a prophet only for himself. He is not obliged to proclaim the message that he has received from God, because it is a strictly personal one. This is so to speak an 'intransitive' type of prophecy, which does not go beyond the limits of his person. He is 'sent' only with respect to himself. (2) There is the *nabi* who has visions and hears the voice of the Angel while dreaming, but does not see the Angel in his waking state, and is likewise not sent to anyone (as in the case of Lot, for example). (3) In addition to these two categories of *nabis* pure and simple, there is the category of the prophet who has the vision or perception of the Angel not only while dreaming, but also in his waking state. He may be sent, like Jonah, to a group more or less numerous. This is the *nablmursal*, the prophet-messenger, with whom we are as yet concerned only with regard to the *nubuwwat al-ta'rif*, the prophecy which teaches or notifies. (4) Within the category of prophet-messengers we may distinguish the category of the six (or seven) great prophets (Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus, Muhammad): Messengers whose mission (*risalah*) it is to proclaim a *shari'ah*, a new divine Law which abrogates the one preceding it. Properly speaking, this is the *nubuwwat al-tashri'* or legislative prophecy (see above, A, 3). Finally, it is specified that the *risalah* can come only to a *nabi* in whom the prophetic quality, the *nubuwwah*, has attained maturity, just as the *nubuwwah* can come only to someone in whom the *walayah* is fully developed. There is a sort of progressive divine initiation.

There are two immediate observations to be made. The first relates to the question of why the notion of *walayah* intervenes at all. In speaking of the first two categories of *nabi*, all our commentators tell us that these are, quite simply, *awliya'*; they are 'men of God', in possession of knowledge that they have not had to acquire from any external source (*iktisab*), through the teaching of men. They do not, however, have the vision of the cause of their knowledge—the vision, that is, of the Angel who 'projects' this knowledge into their hearts. But a most important point is made here: the word *wali* (Friend and Beloved of God) was not applied to any of the *awliya'* during the periods of prophecy previous to the mission of the prophet of Islam. They were called, simply, *anbiya'* (plural of *nabi*), or prophets. (We may call to mind here the *bene ha-nevi'im* of the Bible.) After Islam, the term *nabi* can no longer be used, and one says *awliya'*. But the difference between the *walayah* and simple prophecy (the prophecy which does not involve the mission of revealing a new *shari'ah*) lies only in the use of the word, not in the idea or the meaning. Gnosologically speaking, the case of the ancient *nabis* exactly parallels the case of the Imams: they have auditory perception of the Angel in sleep (the *muhaddathun*, 'those to whom the Angels speak'). This is of decisive importance, as the basis of the whole Shiite idea of the cycle of the *walayah* coming after the cycle of prophecy. The fact that it is only 'legislative prophecy' which has come to an end makes possible the continuation, under the name *walayah*, of an 'esoteric prophecy' (*nubuwwah batiniyah*)—the continuation, that is to say, of *hierohistory* (see below, A, 6).

The second observation is the following. The categories of prophetic gnosiology are established in relation to the visible, audible or invisible mediation of the Angel; in relation, that is, to the awareness of these things that the subject may possess. The mission of the Messenger implies the waking vision of the Angel (a vision whose modality will be explained by a mode of perception which is different from sense perception). This is what is properly called *wahy* (divine communication). As regards the other categories, one speaks of *ilham* (inspiration), with its varying degrees, and of *kashf*, or mystical unveiling. A *hadith* says that 'the Imam hears the voice of the Angel, but does not have the vision of him, either in sleep or in waking'.

3. These differing modes of higher gnosis, *hierognosis*, were studied

at length by our authors. Their meaning can be grasped only when they are related to prophetology in its entirety. When the Prophet himself praises the exemplary case of 'Ali, who above all the other Companions was able to advance towards God through the strength of his *'aql* (intelligence) in quest of Knowledge, what is in question is a prophetic notion of the *'aql*, the predominance of which might have completely altered the philosophical situation in Islam. This philosophy, in making plain the link that it established between the mediation of the Angel and the illumination of the Intelligence, would have been 'at home'. Ultimately, as we saw, the gnosiology of the philosophers rejoins prophetic gnosiology, in identifying the *'aql fa' 'al* (the active Intelligence) with the Holy Spirit, Gabriel, the Angel of Revelation.

For this reason, we would be mutilating our perception of Shiite theosophy if we did not dwell briefly on the way in which our thinkers, in writing their commentaries, developed the gnosiology that was instituted by the Imams. The great master in this respect is Mulla Sadra. The doctrine that he develops in the margin of the Imamic texts presents all true knowledge as an epiphany or a theophany. This is because the *heart* (the subtle organ of light, *latifah nuraniyah*, the support of the intelligence) has through its native disposition the ability to embrace the spiritual realities (*haqa'iq*) of all objects of knowledge. Nevertheless, the knowledge which is epiphanized (*tajalli*) to it from behind the veil of mystery (the supra-sensible, *the ghayb*) may have its source in the *data* of the *shari'ah* (*'ilm shar'i*, and may be a spiritual science {*'ilm 'aqli*) proceeding directly from the Giver of the data. This *'aqli* science can be innate, *a priori* [*matbu'* in the terminology of the first Imam), the knowledge of first principles; or it can be acquired. If acquired, this may be through effort, observation, inference (*istibsar*, *i'tibar*), in which case it is nothing other than the science of the philosophers; or else it can assail the heart, be projected unexpectedly into it, which is what is called *ilham*, inspiration. With regard to this inspiration, it is necessary to distinguish the case in which it comes about without man's seeing the cause which 'projects' it into him (the Angel), as with the inspiration of the Imams and of the *awliya'* in general; and the case in which man has a direct vision of the cause, as happens in the divine communication (*wahy*) from Angel to prophet. Thus, such a gnosiology embraces simultaneously the knowledge of

the philosophers, of those who are inspired, and of the prophets, as graduated variations of one and the same Manifestation.

4. The idea of knowledge as an epiphany whose organ of perception has its seat in the heart leads to the establishment of two parallel series whose respective terms are homologous with each other. As regards external vision (*basar al-zahir*), there is the eye, the faculty of sight, perception (*idrak*), the sun. As regards inner vision [*basirat al-batin*], there is the heart (*qalb*), the intelligence (*'aql*), knowledge (*'ilm*), the Angel (the Holy Spirit or active Intelligence). Without the light of the sun, the eye cannot see. Without the light of the Angel-Intelligence, the human intellect cannot know. (Here the Avicennan theory is integrated to prophetic gnosiology.) This Angel-Intelligence is called the Pen (*qalam*) because he is the intermediary cause between God and man for the actualization of knowledge in the heart, as the pen is intermediary between the writer and the paper on which he is drawing or writing. There is thus no need to go from the sensible to the supra-sensible order, wondering whether it is legitimate to do so, neither does one enter into abstraction on taking leave of the sensible. What is involved is two aspects, on two different levels, of one and the same process. In this way, the idea is established of a perception or knowledge through the *heart* (*ma'rifah qalbiyah*), firstly and expressly formulated by the Imams, and alluded to by the Quranic verse 53:11, in the context of the Prophet's first vision: "The [servant's] heart does not refute that which it has seen'. And again: 'For indeed it is not the eyes that grow blind, but it is the hearts, which are within the bosoms, that grow blind.'(22:46)

Because what is involved is the same Manifestation at different levels of eminence, whether by means of the senses or in some other way—a Manifestation whose highest form is the vision of the Angel 'projecting' knowledge into the heart in a waking state, in a vision *similar to* the vision of the eyes—it could be said that, according to the schema of prophetic gnosiology, the philosopher does not see the Angel but 'intelligizes' through him, to an extent which depends upon his own efforts. The *awliya'*, the Imams, hear him through spiritual audition. The prophets see him. In Mulla Sadra as in the other authors, the comparison which is constantly being made is with the phenomenon of mirrors. There is a veil between the mirror of the heart and the *Tabula secreta* [*lawh mahfuz*] on which all things are imprinted. The

epiphany of knowledge, from the mirror of the *Tabula secreta* into the other mirror of the heart, is like the reflection of the image of a mirror in another mirror facing it. The veil between the two mirrors is lifted, sometimes because it is removed by hand (as the philosophers try to do), sometimes because the wind begins to blow. 'In the same way it comes about that the breeze of divine grace blows; then the veil is lifted from before the eye of the heart (*'ayn al-qalb*).'

The situation is best summed up in the following lines by Mulla Sadra: 'Thus the knowledge that comes from inspiration (*ilham*, the knowledge possessed by the *nabis* and the *awliya'*) does not differ from the knowledge that is acquired through effort (*iktisab*, the knowledge of the philosophers) either as regards the actual reality of Knowing, or as regards its seat (the heart), or as regards its cause (the angel, the Pen, Gabriel, the Holy Spirit, the active Intelligence); but it does differ from it as regards the removal of the veil, although this is not dependent on man's choice. Similarly, the divine communication made to the prophet (*wahy*) does not differ from inspiration (*ilham*) in any of these ways, but only as regards the *vision* of the Angel who confers knowledge. For knowledge through God is only actualized in our hearts through the intermediary of the Angels, as the Quranic verse says: 'It is not vouchsafed to any mortal that God should speak to him save by a communication from behind a veil, or by sending a messenger.' (42:50-51)

5. Prophetic gnosiology, then, includes in its scope both what is the habitual concern of the philosopher, and all that concerns hierognosis: the modes of higher knowledge, the perception of the supra-sensible, and visionary apperceptions. In explaining the postulates of this gnosiology, Mulla Sadra brings out the essential convergence between it and the gnosiology of the *ishraq* (see below, chapter VII), in the sense that the authentication of prophetic visions and of perceptions of the supra-sensible requires the recognition of a third faculty of knowledge, lying between sense-perception and pure intellection of the intelligible world. This is the reason why such importance is accorded to imaginative consciousness and to imaginative perception as the organ of perception of a world which is peculiar to it, the *mundus imaginis* ('alam *al-mithal*); and at the same time, in opposition to the general tendency of the philosophers, this organ is acknowledged to be a pure psycho-spiritual faculty, independent of the perishable physical organ-

ism. We will come back to this in connection with al-Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra. For the moment, let us take note of the fact that the prophetology of the Imams implies the necessity of the triad of universes (sensible, imaginative, intelligible) corresponding to the anthropological triad of body, soul and spirit.

The demonstration of this fact is strengthened by the thesis which affirms that the reality of any act of knowledge is quite different from what it is believed to be by the purely exotericist scholar. Indeed, even when it is a case of the normal perception of an external, sensible object, it cannot be said that what the soul sees is a form which exists within external matter: such is not the nature of sense-perception, and such a form is not the object of it. The object of this perception is actually the forms that the soul sees with the eyes of imaginative consciousness. The forms in the external world are causes of the appearance of a form which 'symbolizes with them' (*mumathalah, tamaththul*). In reality, the object perceived through the senses is this symbolizing form. The production of the symbolizing form may be occasioned by the *external* world, in which case one is *elevated* to its level from the level of the organs of sense; or it may be produced from *within*, in which case one *descends* to its level from the level of spiritual intelligibilities through the activity of the Imagination, which makes these intelligibilities present by endowing them with imaginative form. But in whichever way this form is produced in the imaginative consciousness, it is the real object of vision (*mushahadah*). There is, however, one difference: in the first case, because the external appearance (*zahir*) may not accord with the inner (*batin*), a mistake could occur. In the second case, there can be no mistake. The *form-image* born of a contemplation which is focused on the supra-sensible world, and of the illumination of the world of the *malakut*, 'imitates' divine realities to perfection.

In this manner, prophetic gnosiology leads to a theory of imaginative knowledge and symbolic forms. As a corollary to this, Mulla Sadra, demonstrating the role of the *vital pneuma or ruh hayawani*, elaborates • mystical psycho-physiology—a development of the criteria already proposed by the Imams—which makes it possible to distinguish cases of demoniac suggestion and in general what we know today as schizophrenia. The three orders of perception proper to the *wali*, the *nabi* and the *rasul* are homologized respectively with the three members

of the triad of spirit, soul and body. The prophet of Islam combines in himself all three of these perceptions. It is unfortunately impossible to give here an idea of the richness of this teaching. It consolidates the notions of spiritual vision (*ru'yah 'aqliyah*) and of spiritual hearing (*sama' 'aqli, sama' hissi batini*, sensible inner hearing), the *heart* likewise possessing the five senses of a metaphysical sensibility. It is this sensibility which perceives the *taklim and the tahdith* (the conversation) of the Angel or Holy Spirit, that is invisible to the physical senses. This, precisely, is the *ta'lim batini*, the esoteric teaching or initiation in the proper sense of the term—that is to say, absolutely personal, without the mediation of any collectivity or magisterium, and which is also the source of what is called *hadith qudsi*: an *inspired recital* of the spiritual world, in which God speaks in the first person. These *hadith qudsi* are a unique treasure-house of Islamic spirituality; but it is only possible to recognize their 'authority' through the gnosiology whose origins we have indicated. Ultimately, this gnosiology explains the continuation, up to the day of the Resurrection, of that 'secret, esoteric prophecy' (*nubuwah batiniyah*), deprived of which the Earth of mankind would perish. For only *hierohistory* possesses the secret of a prophetic philosophy which is not a dialectic of the Spirit, but an epiphany of the Holy Spirit.

6. Herein lies the meaning and the strength of the contrast between the 'official sciences', acquired from the external world by means of effort and human teaching (*'ulum kasblyah rasmiyah*), and 'knowledge in the true sense', received by way of a spiritual heritage (*'ulum irthiyah haqiqiyah*), obtained gradually or all at once through divine instruction. Haydar Amuli is among those who have dwelt at greatest length on this theme, showing why the knowledge in the second category was able to flourish independently of the first, but not the other way around. It is not so much the philosophers, the *falasifah*, who are being envisaged, for in a masterly summing-up of the philosophical situation in Islam, Haydar Amuli brings together the evidence of many: Kamal Kashani, Sadr al-Din Turkah Isfahan!, the two al-Bahranis, Afdal al-Din al-Kashani, Nasir al-Din Tusi, al-Ghazali, even Avicenna. Indeed, Avicenna says that we know only the properties, the inherences and the accidents of things, not their essence (*haqiqah*); even when we say of the First Being that his existence is necessary, we are still speaking of an inherent property, not of his essence. In short, all the philosophers

mentioned here are at one in acknowledging that speculative dialectic does not lead to knowledge of oneself, to knowledge, that is, of the soul and its essence. This Shiite critique of philosophy is above all constructive. Certainly, Haydar Amuli is more severe when it comes to the representatives of dialectical theology (*kalam*) in Islam. The pious Ash'arites, as well as the rationalist Mu'tazilites (see below, ch. IE), bandying their theses and antitheses, lapse into self-contradiction and even into agnosticism. But when Haydar Amuli condemns the feebleness of the 'official sciences', he has principally in mind all those who reduce Islamic thought to questions of law, to the science of the *fiqh*, be they Shiites or Sunnis—especially if they are Shiites, for they are then responsible for such a state of affairs.

Only those who are known as the *ilahyun*, the Sages of God, the 'theosophers', have had and will have a share in the inheritance of this knowledge, whose modes have been described as *wahy, ilham* and *kashf*. This knowledge, as a spiritual heritage, differs from the knowledge acquired from the external world in that it is knowledge of the soul—knowledge, that is to say, of oneself; and one's share in the 'inheritance' increases in proportion to one's spiritual development, not merely through the acquisition of technical knowledge. Knowledge through *wahy* has come to an end (with the ending of 'legislative prophecy'); the way of knowledge through *ilham* and *kashf* remains open (no matter where this statement occurs, it is always Shiite in tenor). The knowledge termed *kashf*, or mystical unveiling, can be purely mental (*ma 'nawi*), and can also be the perception of an imaginative form (*kashf surf*). The meaning of the science which is knowledge of oneself is best expressed in a *hadith*. As we said above (A, 3), Shiite theology, in opposition to other schools, rules out all human possibility of 'seeing God', and this position is in accordance with God's reply to Moses {'Never canst thou see Me'; Quran 7:143). Nevertheless, In the *hadith* of the vision, the Prophet testifies that 'I have seen my God in the most beautiful of forms'. The question which this presents it unanswered by the eighth Imam, 'Ali al-Rida (d. 203/818), and his reply paves the way for the meditation of the spiritual masters. The human form, being in the divine image, is more fitted even than the Burning Bush to be the place of epiphany, the divine *mazhar*. In reality, What Muhammad saw was simply the form of his own soul, which was the 'most beautiful of forms' precisely because it was the form

of the 'eternal Muhammadan Reality', the celestial Anthropos—whose esoteric aspect is the Imam. All vision of God is the vision of his human Form. One immediately grasps the implication of the aphorism quoted above: 'He who knows himself (*nafsahu*, his soul) knows his Lord—that is to say, his Imam—the corollary to which is that 'to die without knowing one's Imam is to die the death of those who are oblivious'. The Prophet was able to say, 'You will see your Lord as you see the Moon on a night when it is full'. And the first Imam, in a remark with clear evangelic overtones, said, 'He who has seen me has seen God.' One of his conversations with his follower Kumayy ends with the words, 'A light rises at the dawn of pre-eternity; it shines on the temples of the *tawhid*.'

7. Thus, when speaking of *irthiyah* knowledge (knowledge received in the way that an heir receives the inheritance due to him), it is important to know to whom the Prophet's utterances, such as the following, can be applied: 'The sages are the heirs of the prophets'; 'The sages of my community are homologous with the prophets of Israel'; 'The ink of the sages is more precious than the blood of martyrs.' *A priori* Haydar Amuli excludes all learned exotericists, any interpretation which, for example, would make the 'four imams', the founders of the four great Sunni juridical rituals, the heirs of the prophets (see above, A, 4). They themselves never, in fact, made such a claim, and their knowledge is all of the type 'acquired from the external world' (whether or not it makes use of syllogisms). *Irthiyah* knowledge presupposes a spiritual affiliation (*nisbah ma'nawiyah*), the prototype of which is the case of Salman the Persian, because it was said to him that 'you are a part of us, members of the House of the Prophet' (*anta minna ahl al-bayt*). This House, says our author, is not the external family of wives and children, but 'the family of Knowledge, gnosis and wisdom' (*bayt al-'ihn wa-al-ma'rifah wa-al-hikmah*). From the beginning, this prophetic House is constituted by the Twelve Imams, who together, even before they appeared on earth, were the foundation of relationship and affiliation. For, as we observed above, when refuting those who have accused Twelver Shiism of founding its Imamology on carnal descent, such descent is quite insufficient to form the basis of the Imamate of the Imams. The sixth Imam repeated, 'My *walayah* in relation to the Amir of believers (the first Imam) is more precious than the bond of my carnal descent from him (*wiladati minhu*).' As

we saw, the pleroma of the Twelve pre-exists its terrestrial epiphany, and the earthly consanguinity or kinship between them is the *sign* of their *walayah*, not its basis.

This is why it is they who transmit the knowledge which is a 'prophetic heritage', and through this transmission, as we saw, the 'esoteric prophecy' or *walayah* will continue to exist until the day of the Resurrection. Haydar Amuli, analysing the first of the phrases cited above, warns us against the pitfalls of the Arabic form. He translates it as follows: the sages are those who are heirs to the prophets. Equally, those who are not heirs are not sages. The quality of being an heir means that the good which is received is not acquired from outside, but is the trust which comes back to us anew. It is true that to enter into possession of this trust may require effort (*ijtihad*) and spiritual discipline. But one must not be misled. It is as with a treasure buried underground which a father has left to his heir: the effort removes the obstacle, but it does not produce the treasure. Our author concludes: 'In the same way, the *Verus Adam* (*Adam haqiqi*) left behind him, *beneath the earth of their hearts*, the treasure of the theosophies. And that is the meaning of the Quranic verse: If they would but truly observe the Torah and the Gospel and that which was revealed unto them from their Lord, they would indeed partake of blessings from above them and from beneath their feet'. (5:66) In this way, we come back to the idea of the trust confided to man, the trust of the divine secrets (33:72), which is the basis of Shiite esotericism (see above, A, 1), and the reason why its history cannot but be a sacred history.

## 6. Hierohistory and metahistory

1. The name *hierohistory* here signifies the configurations implicit in the idea of *cycles* (*dawr*, plural *adwar*) of prophecy and of the *walayah*—a history, that is, which does not consist in the observation, recording or critique of empirical facts, but derives from a mode of perception that goes beyond the materiality of empirical facts. Such perception is of the supra-sensible world, the gradations of which were explained to us in the preceding section on gnosiology. *Hierognosis* and *hierohistory* are related. Facts perceived in this manner possess, to be sure, the reality of events; but these events do not possess the reality of the physical world and its people—the events with which our history books are filled, since it is out of them that 'history is made'.

We are dealing with *spiritual facts* in the strict sense of the word. They take place in *metahistory*, as in the case of the day of the Covenant between God and the human race; or else they *show through* the course taken by the things of this world: they are both the invisible aspect of the event and the invisible event which eludes profane empirical perception because implicit in it is the 'theophanic perception' which alone is able to apprehend a *mazhar* or theophanic form. The prophets and the Imams are perceived as such only on the level of a hierohistory, of a sacred history. The complete cycle of this hierohistory—the prophetic periods and the post-prophetic cycle of the Imamate or *walayah*—forms a structure which is not that of some evolutionary process, but which takes us back to the origin. Thus, hierohistory begins by envisaging that which constitutes the 'descent', in order to conclude by describing the 're-ascent', the closing of the cycle.

Mulla Sadra, expounding the teaching of the Imams, explains how that which 'descended' (was epiphanized) in the heart of the Prophet was first and foremost the *haqa'iq*, the spiritual truths and realities of the Quran, *before* the text took on a visible form made up of words and letters. These spiritual realities are themselves the 'Light of the Word', *nur al-kalam*, already present before the Angel manifested himself in visible form and 'dictated' the text of the Book. The spiritual truth was already there, and this, precisely, is the Prophet's *walayah*, which his prophetic mission presupposes and which is therefore anterior to it in his person. That is why the Prophet, as we saw, says, 'Ali (the *haqa'iq* or esoteric aspect) and I are one and the same light.' Thus, since prophecy began on earth with Adam (*cf.* in this connection Ismaili hierohistory; see below, B, I, sects. 2 and 3), we need to clarify the difference between the divine revelation granted to the *last* prophet-Messenger, and those revelations which were granted to previous prophets. It can be said of each of the previous prophets that a *nabi* came, and that with him came a Light proceeding from the Book that he brought. Of the last Messenger it can be said that a *nabi* came who was of himself a Light, and that with him he had a Book. In the case of the latter, it is his heart, his secret (*batin*), which illuminates the Book; and this *batin* or esoteric aspect is, precisely, the *walayah*, that which constitutes the essence of Imamology. For this reason, and in contrast to other communities, it is said of those who are Faithful in the true sense that 'God has *written* faith upon their hearts', (58:22)

because faith (*iman*) becomes perfect only when it attains to this *batin*. In order to perceive fully the prophetic reality, one must have gained access to this interiority and to the *events* which take place in it; and this is quite different from what is gained by empirical perception from the *facts* of external history.

2. We spoke earlier (see above, A, 3) of the relationship between the Prophet and the eternal 'Muhammadan Reality' (*Haqiqah muhammadiyah*), the celestial *Anthropos* whose epiphanic form, or *mazhar*, he is. We see from this that there is no question of an entry into history, of a *historicization* of the divine, which is implicit in the Christian idea of the Incarnation. The epiphanic function (*mazhariyah*) demands that a distinction should always be made between, on the one hand, the attributes of the eternal *haqiqah* whose Manifestation is actualized only for the heart and, on the other hand, the attributes of the external appearance, which is visible to all the world, whether or not they are believers. The Prophet, of course, is the *mazhar* of the spiritual and corporeal worlds, and also the 'meeting-place of the two seas' (*majma' al-bahrayn*). Nevertheless, when he speaks 'from the side' of the sea representing his humanity, he cannot but say, 'I am only a mortal like you. The inspiration has come to me that your God is only One God'. (18:110) This is why we pointed out above that, although their prophetology and Imamology confronted Shiite thinkers with problems analogous to those of Christology, the idea they had of the *mazhariyah* (like a mirror in which the image appears without being incarnate in it) always guided them towards solutions which differed from those reached by official Christian dogma. It is to this supra-sensible reality, 'trans-apparent' through its *mazhar*, that the idea of cycles is related; and since a cycle exists, there also exist two limits to which each of the events occurring in spiritual history has reference. These two limits form the threshold of *metahistory* (or trans-history); it is this metahistory that bestows meaning on history, because it makes it into a hierohistory. In the absence of metahistory—that is to say, in the absence of anteriority 'in Heaven'—and in the absence of an eschatology, to speak of a 'sense of history' is absurd.

Centred as it is on the perception of theophanic forms, the sense of origin and end differs profoundly from the 'historical awareness', whose advent was linked with the advent of Christianity, with the



Incarnation of God in history at a specific date. The problems created over the centuries by this view of things for Christian religious philosophy have not been present in Islamic thought. For this reason, our own philosophy should take note of the testimony of the prophetic philosophy of Shiite Islam and, in the light of this testimony, reflect upon itself.

As we observed at the start (see above, I, 1), the awareness of Christian man is centred on certain facts, such as the Incarnation and the Redemption, to which it is possible to assign historical dates. By contrast, the awareness that the *mu'min* or believer has of his origins, and of the future on which the meaning of his present life depends, is centred on facts which are *real*, but which belong to metahistory. The sense of his origin is perceived in the question which God, on the 'Day of the Covenant', asked of Adamic humanity, before this humanity was transferred to the terrestrial plane. No system of chronology can fix the *date* of this 'Day of the Covenant', which takes place during the *time* of that pre-existence of souls which Shiism in general affirms. The other limit for the Shiite, be he a thinker or a simple believer, is that of the coming of the Imam who for the present is hidden—the Imam-Mahdi, the Shiite idea of whom is quite different from the idea of the Mahdi held by the rest of Islam. The present, whose denominator is the hidden Imam, is the time of his occultation (*ghaybah*); and by the same token, 'his time' bears a different hallmark from what, for us, is the time of history. Only a prophetic philosophy can encompass it, because such a philosophy is essentially eschatological. Between these two limits—the 'prologue in Heaven' and the denouement which opens onto 'another time' through the coming of the awaited Imam—the drama of human existence, lived by every believer, is played out. The movement of the 'time of occultation' towards the denouement brought about by the *parousia* is the cycle of the *walayah* following on the cycle of prophecy.

3. It is unanimously agreed (*cf.* above, A, 3) that the prophet of Islam was the Seal of prophecy. There will be no other prophet after him; or, more accurately, there will be no other Messenger charged with the mission of proclaiming a *shari'ah*, or divine Law, to humankind. We are now confronted with the following dilemma. Either religious awareness centres, from generation to generation, on this prophetic *past* which is now over, doing so because it perceives in the Book

only a code of social and moral life, and because the 'time of prophecy' (*zaman al-nubuwah*) is consummated in this literal and altogether exoteric meaning; or, alternatively, this prophetic past itself is *to come*, because the text of the Book conceals a hidden spiritual meaning—an alternative which postulates the spiritual initiation realized in the ministry of the Imams. The cycle of prophecy (*da'irat al-nubuwah*) is succeeded by the cycle of the *walayah*, a concept which remains fundamentally Shiite. Many remarks made by the fifth and sixth Imams refer to the principle of *ta'wil*, thereby eluding the trap of historicism and legalism before the terms even existed. The following is an example of this: 'When those on account of whom such and such a verse had been revealed are dead, is the verse also dead? If this is so, nothing now remains of the Quran. No, the Quran is alive. It will continue on its course as long as Heaven and Earth endure, because it enshrines a sign and a guide for every man and every group to come.'

We have seen how Mulla Sadra, in his commentary on the texts of the Imams, systematized all that had been said on this theme (see above, A, 5). What is now over is legislative prophecy alone (*nubuwah al-tashri'*), and what has been abolished is the use of the term *nabi*. In saying that prophecy is temporary, whereas the *walayah* endures perpetually, it is this legislative prophecy that is envisaged. For if we consider not the modalities particular to the condition of Messenger, but those of the *nabi* pure and simple, as we know them from gnosiology, they are seen to be common to the Imams and the *awliya'* in the broadest sense. This is why what continues to exist in Islam under the name of *walayah* is in fact an esoteric prophecy (*nubuwah batiniyah*)—a form of prophecy, moreover, deprived of which earthly humanity would collapse. It goes without saying that in the eyes of the orthodox Sunnis, such an affirmation appeared revolutionary (*cf.* the meaning of al-Suhrawardi's trial, below, ch. VII).

Basing itself on this fundamental intuition, Shiite prophetology elaborated the schema of an impressive hierohistory, in which it is possible to discern the precursor of a 'general theology of the history of religions'. Haydar Amuli illustrated it with his complex and detailed diagrams, and Shams al-Din al-Lahiji developed the theme at length. From the start there is a concept which is common to both Twelver Shiite and Ismaili prophetology: the concept of eternal prophecy, which is no other than the *walayah*, and which originates in the Pleroma (see

below, B, 1, sects. 2ff.). The absolute, essential and primordial prophecy belongs to the supreme Spirit (the celestial Anthropos, the First Intelligence, the eternal Muhammadan Reality), whom God sends first towards the universal Soul, before sending it to individual souls in order to apprise them of the divine Names and Attributes (*nubuwah al-ta'rif*). For our Islamic thinkers, the theme is an extension of the theme of the *Verus Propheta*, the true Prophet who, in the Judaeo-Christian prophetology of the Ebionites, 'hastens from prophet to prophet until he comes to his resting-place'. In this case, his 'resting-place' is the last prophet, the prophet of Islam.

4. The totality of this prophecy is pictured as a circle whose circumference is constituted by a series of points, each of which represents a prophet, a partial moment of prophecy. The starting-point of the prophetic cycle on earth was the existence of the terrestrial Adam. From *nabi to nabi* (according to tradition, there are 124,000 of them), from Messenger to Messenger (of whom there are 313), from great prophet to great prophet (of whom there were six, if not seven), the cycle progresses up to the existence of Jesus, who was the last great partial prophet. With the coming of Muhammad the circle is completed and closed. As the *khatim*, the Seal who recapitulates all previous prophets, Muhammad is the epiphany of the eternal prophetic Reality, the supreme Spirit, the celestial Anthropos. The supreme Spirit is epiphanized in him through the very essence of prophecy. This is why he can say, 'I am the first of prophets with respect to creation (the supreme Spirit pre-exists the universe), and the last of them with respect to mission and Manifestation'. From Adam to Jesus, each prophet was a particular *mazhar*, a partial reality of the eternal prophetic Reality. The fundamental reality, or *haqiqah*, which exists in each prophet as the basis of the prophetic qualification, is the subtle organ (*latifah*) of the heart, which is engendered in the hierogamy (*izdiwaj*) of Spirit and Soul, and which constitutes the place in each prophet of the 'descent' of the Spirit (this is what is meant in the deepest sense by the Angel as *heart*). One face of the heart is turned towards the Spirit, which is the source of its visions, and one face is turned towards the Soul, the place of its knowledge. "The heart is the throne of the Spirit in the world of Mystery."

Since the *walayah* is the interior or esoteric aspect of prophecy, and as such the constitutive component of the Imamate, the hierohistoric

schema must embrace prophetology and Imamology in their totality. The final term of the cycle of prophecy coincides with the initial term of the cycle of the *walayah*. The diagrams of Haydar Amuli which illustrate the relationship between *walayah* and *nubuwah* show the cycle of the *walayah* as a circle *inside* the circle representing the prophetic cycle. In effect, the cycle of the *walayah* represents the cycle of interiorization, for the Muhammadan Imamate is the esoteric aspect of all previous prophetic religions. This is why the cycle of the *walayah* prepares the way not for the advent of a new *shari'ah*, but for the advent of the *qa'im* the Imam of the Resurrection.

We now know that what is called *walayah* in Islam used to be called simply *nubuwah* during the pre-prophetic periods; that is, it did not comprise the mission of a Messenger. Just as Muhammad had his twelve Imams, each of the six (or five) great prophet-Messengers before him (Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and Jesus) had his twelve Imams or *awsiya'* (spiritual heirs). The twelve Imams of Christ are not precisely those whom we know as the twelve apostles, but the twelve who took on the task of transmitting the prophetic message until the advent of the last prophet. Just as the Prophet Muhammad, as the Seal of prophecy, was the *mazhar* of prophecy in the absolute sense, the first Imam, Muhammad's *wasi* or heir, was the *mazhar* and the Seal of the *walayah* in its absolute sense. The partial manifestations of the *walayah* began with Seth, the son of the Imam Adam, and will culminate with the twelfth Imam or *Madhi*—at present the hidden Imam—as Seal of the particular *walayah* during the final period of prophecy. Each of the *awliya'* is in the same relationship to the Seal of the *walayah* as is each of the *nabis* to the Seal of prophecy. It is thus clear that the line of prophecy is inseparable from the line of its spiritual exegesis. It is by means of such exegesis that the 're-ascension' of prophecy to its origin is accomplished.

5. This hierohistory in its entirety is of a perfect coherence. The Muhammadan Imamate, in the persons of those who are the exemplifications on earth of the pleroma of the Twelve, is the consummation of the prophetic religions, for it leads these religions back to their own inwardness. Shiism, the esotericism of Islam, perfects all other esotericisms. The threshold of legislative prophecy is barred; the threshold of the *walayah* remains open until the day of the Resurrection.

It is clear that this theme is fundamental. Even in cases when it is

displaced, it may still be recognized. Thus, even though the mystical theosophy of Ibn al-'Arabi (see part II) was immediately adopted by the Shiite theosophers, who found their own vision reaffirmed in it, there was one point of capital importance over which it aroused opposition, and over which its Shiite followers (Haydar Amuli, Kamal Kashani, Sadr al-Din Turkah Isfahani, and so on) found it impossible to compromise. Ibn al-'Arabi transfers the quality of Seal of the *walayah* in its absolute and general sense from the Imam to Jesus, and possibly attributes to himself the quality of being the Seal of the Muhammadan *walayah*. We cannot dwell on this here, but one can perceive what dislocation and incoherence this involved for the schema described above, since the cycle of the *walayah* presupposes the fulfilment of the prophetic cycle. Shiite commentators have not been able to explain why Ibn al-'Arabi makes this transference. In any case, this endeavour draws attention to the fact that Imamology and a certain type of Christology possess homologous functions. But it remains true that the sense of eschatological expectation, as the *ethos* of Shiite awareness, presupposes that the Seal of the *walayah* can only be the Muhammadan Imamate, in the dual person of the first and twelfth Imam; for the Muhammadan Imamate is the manifestation of the esoteric aspect of the eternal prophetic Reality.

### 7. The hidden Imam and eschatology

1. This theme—the culminating theme of Imamology and its sacred history—is one of particular attraction for prophetic philosophy. It is unquestionable that the idea of the hidden Imam was projected upon several Imams in turn, but it could take definite shape only around the person of the twelfth, with whom the pleroma of the Imamate is fulfilled. There is a considerable body of literature about him, both in Persian and in Arabic. (The sources of this literature have been assembled by Saffar al-Qummi, d. 290/902, reporter-witness of the eleventh Imam; al-Kulayni and his follower al-Nu'mani, fourth/tenth century; Ibn Babuyah, d. 381/991, who owed his information to a contemporary witness, Hasan ibn Muktib; al-Shaykh al-Mufid, d. 413/1022; Muhammad ibn Hasan Tusi, d. 460/1068. The principal traditions are collected in volume XIII of al-Majlisi's Encyclopaedia. Even in our day, books on this theme appear frequently; for example, *Ilzam al-Nasib*, by Shaykh 'Ali al-Yazdi, *al-Kitab al-'abqari*, by

'Allamah al-Nihawandi, and so on. Only a few pages of this body of literature have been translated.)

The fundamental concept meditated by the representatives of Shiite philosophy (*'irfan-ishi'i*) is the one already described: just as the cycle of prophecy culminates in the Seal of the prophets, so the *walayah*, which runs parallel to prophecy from period to period, possesses a double Seal in the Muhammadan Imamate: the Seal of the general *walayah* in the person of the first Imam, and the Seal of the Muhammadan *walayah*, the esoteric aspect of the previous esotericisms, in the person of the twelfth Imam. As a master of Iranian Shiite Sufism, 'Aziz al-Din al-Nasafi (sixth/thirteenth century), a disciple of Sa'd al-Din Hamuyah, puts it: 'The millions of prophets who appeared prior to it successively contributed to the establishment of the theophanic form which is prophecy, and Muhammad consummated it. Now it is the turn of the *walayah* (spiritual Initiation) to be manifested and to make manifest the esoteric realities. The man of God in whose person the *walayah* is made manifest is the *sahib al-zaman*, the Imam of this time.'

The term *sahib al-zaman* (he who rules over this time) is characteristically used to designate the hidden Imam, 'invisible to the senses, but present to the hearts of those who believe in him'. He polarizes both the devotion of the pious Shiite and the philosopher's meditation, and was the child of the eleventh Imam, Hasan al-'Askari, and the Byzantine princess Narkes (Narkissa). He is also known as the awaited Imam (*al-imam al-muntazar*), the Mahdi (the Shiite idea of whom differs profoundly, as we saw, from the Sunni idea), the *Qa'im al Qiyamah*, the Imam of the Resurrection. The hagiography of the twelfth Imam abounds in archetypal and symbolical features concerning his birth and his occultation (*ghaybah*). We should point out at once that historical criticism would be quite at sea here, because what is involved is something altogether different, which we have described as *hierohistory*. Here above all our approach should be that of the phenomenologist: we must discover the *aims* of Shiite awareness. In order to share its vision, the vision which it has been acquiring ever since it began.

2. We must confine ourselves here to the essential facts. We recall that the eleventh Imam, Hasan al-'Askari, was kept more or less a prisoner by the 'Abbasid police in the camp at Samarra, about 100 kilometres north of Baghdad, and died there at the age of twenty-eight,

in 260/874. On the very same day his young son, then aged five or a little over, disappeared, and initiated thereby what is known as the *lesser Occultation* (*al-ghaybah al-sughra*). The simultaneity of these occurrences is rich in meanings from the mystical point of view. The Imam Hasan al-'Askari is seen by his followers as the symbol of their spiritual task. As soon as he leaves this world, the child of his soul becomes invisible; and it is to this child's *parousia*, his 'return to the present', that the souls of his followers must give birth.

The occultation of the twelfth Imam takes place on two occasions. The lesser occultation lasted for seventy years, during which the hidden Imam had four representatives, or *na'ib*, in turn, through whom his Shiites were able to communicate with him. In a last letter, he ordered the last of them, 'Ali al-Samarri, not to choose a successor, for now the time of the Great Occultation (*al-ghaybah al-kubra*) had arrived. The last words of his last *na'ib* (d. 330/942) were, 'Henceforth this is the business of God alone'. This was the beginning of the secret history of the twelfth Imam. To be sure, it has nothing to do with what we call the historicity of material facts; nevertheless, it has dominated Shiite consciousness for more than ten centuries—indeed, it *is* the history itself of this consciousness. The Imam's final message is a warning against any imposture, any pretext which seeks to put an end to its eschatological expectation, to the imminence of the Awaited One (which was the drama of Babism and Baha'ism). Until the hour of his Advent, the hidden Imam is visible only in dreams, or in personal manifestations having the character of visionary events (the subject of many recitals), and which for that reason do not suspend the 'time of the occultation', nor enter the material web of 'objective' history. Because the Imamate is the esoteric aspect of all prophetic Revelations, the Imam must of necessity be present both in the past and in the future. The meaning of this *occultation* and of the expected advent has occupied philosophical meditation down to our day, particularly in the Shaykhi school.

3. The concept of the hidden Imam has led the masters of the Shaykhi school into a deeper appreciation of the meaning and mode of this invisible presence. Here again an essential part is played by the *mundus imaginalis* (*'alam al-mithal*). To see the Imam on the celestial Earth of Hurqalya (*cf.* the Earth of Light, *Terra lucida*, in Manichaeism), is to see him where he truly is, in a world which is simultaneously

concrete and supra-sensible, and to see him with the organ appropriate to the perception of such a world. Shaykhism has outlined what could be called a phenomenology of the *ghaybah*. A figure like that of the twelfth Imam does not appear and disappear according to the laws of material historicity. He is a supernatural being, typifying the same profound aspirations as those which, in a certain type of Christianity, correspond to the idea of a pure *caro spiritualis Christi*. The decision of the Imam as to whether or not he can appear to men is dependent on the men in question. His appearance is the very meaning of their renewal, and in this lies, ultimately, the deepest significance of the Shiite idea of the occultation and the appearance. Men have concealed the Imam from themselves behind a veil, have made themselves incapable of seeing him, because they have lost or paralysed the organs of 'theophanic perception', of that 'knowledge through the heart' which is defined in the gnosiology of the Imams. It is meaningless, therefore, to speak of the Manifestation of the hidden Imam as long as men are incapable of recognizing him. The *parousia* is not an event which may suddenly erupt one fine day; it is something that happens day after day in the consciousness of the Shiite faithful. Here, then, esotericism shatters the rigidity of which legalistic Islam is so often accused, and its disciples are caught up in the ascending movement of the cycle of the *walayah*.

In a famous *hadith* the Prophet said, 'If the earth had only one day of existence left to it, God would prolong that day until a man of my posterity, whose name will be my name, and his surname my surname, manifests himself; he will fill the Earth, filled till then with violence and oppression, with harmony and justice.' The day which is prolonged is the time *of the ghaybah*, and this clear proclamation has been echoed through all the ages and stages of Shiite consciousness. What the sages perceived is that the advent of the Imam would make manifest the hidden meaning of all the Revelations. The *ta'wil* will triumph, enabling the human race to discover its unity, just as, throughout the time of the *ghaybah*, the secret of the only true ecumenism will have been contained in esotericism. This is why the great Sufi shaykh and Iranian Shiite already mentioned, Sa'd al-Din Hamuyah (seventh/thirteenth century), declared, 'The hidden Imam will not appear before the time when people are able to understand, even from the very thongs of his sandals, the secrets of the tawhid'—that is to say, the esoteric

meaning of the divine Unity.

*He* is this secret: the awaited Imam, the Perfect Man, the Integral Man, 'for it is he who enables all things to speak, and, in becoming alive, each thing becomes a threshold of the spiritual world'. The Advent-to-come of the Imam presupposes, therefore, the metamorphosis of men's hearts; on the faith of his followers depends the progressive fulfilment of this *parousia*, through their own act of being. Hence is derived the whole ethic of the *javan-mard*, the 'spiritual knight', an idea in which is contained all the *ethos* of Shiism, the paradox of its pessimism whose very desperation is an affirmation of hope, because its vision encompasses, from one end to the other, the horizon of metahistory: both the pre-existence of souls, and the Resurrection [*qiyamah*) which is the transfiguration of all things. The ethic of ancient Zoroastrian Persia was already determined by the anticipation of this same Resurrection.

Until this Resurrection, the time of the 'Great Occultation' is the time of a divine presence *incognito*; and because it is *incognito*, it can never become an object or a thing, and it defies all socialization of the spiritual. By the same token, the members of the esoteric mystical hierarchies (*nujaba'* and *nuqaba'*, Nobles and spiritual Princes, the *awtad* and the *abdal*) also remain *incognito*. These hierarchies are well-known to Sufism, but it must never be forgotten that, conceptually and historically, they presuppose the Shiite idea of the *walayah*; for the hierarchies originate in him who is the *pole of poles*, the Imam, and they pertain to the esoteric aspect of prophecy which has its source in the Imam. Moreover, their names feature in the discourses of the fourth and fifth Imams; and the first Imam, in a conversation with his disciple Kumayi, makes precise reference to the succession of God's Sages who, from century to century, remain largely unknown to the majority of men. This was later to be known as *silsilat al-'irfan*, the 'succession of gnosis'; and it consists of all those who, from the time of Seth, the son of Adam, down to the Muhammadan Imams, and including all those who acknowledge them as Guides, have been transmitters of the esoteric aspect of eternal prophecy. However, the essential reality of their being, their *haqiqah*, does not belong to the visible world, dominated as it is by forces of constraint. They make up a pure *Ecclesia spiritualis*, and are known to God alone.

4. As we know, the Prophet Muhammad was identified, as Mani had

been, with the Paraclete. But because of the homology which exists between the Seal of prophecy and the Seal of the *walayah*, Imamology retains the idea of the Paraclete as a vision to come. Several Shiite authors, among whom are Kamal Kashani and Haydar Amuli, explicitly identify the twelfth Imam, the awaited Imam, with the Paraclete whose advent is proclaimed in the Gospel of John to which they allude. This is so because the coming of the Imam-Paraclete will inaugurate the reign of the purely spiritual meaning of the divine Revelations—that is to say, the true religion which is the eternal *walayah*. For this reason, the reign of the Imam is the prelude to the Great Resurrection (*qiyamat al-qiyamat*). As Shams al-Din al-Lahiji puts it, the resurrection of the dead is the condition on which the end and aim of the existence of beings may be realized. Our authors know that, philosophically speaking, the annihilation of the world is conceivable; but their Imamology challenges any such eventuality. Both before and after Islam, the eschatological horizons of Iran have remained constant. Shiite eschatology is dominated by the figures of the *qa'im* and his companions, as Zoroastrian eschatology was by the figures of *Saoshyant* and his companions. It does not dissociate the idea of the 'lesser resurrection', the individual exodus, from that of the 'Great Resurrection', the coming of the new Aion.

Attention has just been drawn to the identification, established by Shiite thinkers, between the awaited Imam and the Paraclete. This identification reveals a striking convergence between the most profound concept in Shiism and the whole body of philosophical thought in the West which, from the Joachimites of the thirteenth century down to our day, has been guided by the *paracletic* idea, inspiring modes of thought and action with a view to the reign of the Holy Spirit. The consequences of this fact, once it has come to be noticed, could be enormous. As we have explained, the fundamental idea is that the awaited Imam will not bring with him a new revealed Book—a new Law—but will reveal the hidden meaning of all the Revelations, because, as the Integral Man [*al-insan al-kamil*, *Anthropos teleios*), the esoteric aspect of the 'eternal prophetic Reality', he is himself the revelation of Revelations. *The parousia* of the awaited Imam signifies a plenary anthropological revelation, unfolding *within* the man who lives in the Spirit. In the final analysis, this means the revelation of the divine secret that man took on himself, the burden which, according

to Surah 33:72 of the Quran, Heaven, Earth and the mountains refused to assume. We have seen (above, A, 2) how from the beginning, from the time of the teaching of the Imams, this verse has been understood by Imamology as an allusion to its own secret, the secret of the *walayah*, for the divine mystery and the human mystery, the mystery of the *Anthropos* and of the *haqiqah muhammadiyah*, are one and the same.

Our brief sketch may conclude with this theme, its first and its last. It has been possible to envisage here only a limited number of aspects of Twelver Shiite thinking, but they will suffice to show that this thinking is essentially the 'prophetic philosophy' which arose from the premisses of Islam as a prophetic religion. But any account of Shiite thought would be incomplete if it did not indicate the role of Ismailism and Ismaili gnosis alongside that of Twelver Imamism.

## B. ISMAILISM

### Periods and sources: proto-Ismailism

1. A few decades ago, it would have been extremely difficult to write this chapter, so largely had the truth about Ismailism disappeared beneath the plot of a frightful 'horror story', responsibility for which lay with those discussed below in relation to Alamut. The division between the two main branches of Shiism, namely Twelver Imamism and Sevener Ismailism, was effected when the sixth Imam, Ja'far al-Sadiq, one of the greatest figures of them all, departed this world in 148/765. His eldest son, the Imam Isma'il, had died an untimely death before him. Would the investiture of the Imamate develop onto the latter's son, or did the Imam Ja'far have the right—making use of his prerogative as he saw fit—to transfer the investiture to another of his own sons: Musa al-Kazim, younger brother of Isma'il? In reality, this question of personages arises from something more fundamental: the perception of a transcendental structure whose typology is exemplified by the earthly figures of the Imams. This typology is what divides Twelver Shiites from Sevener Shiites.

Around the young Imam Isma'il—eponym of the term *Ismailism*—had formed a group of his enthusiastic followers whose tendencies could be described as 'ultra-Shiite' in the sense that they aimed at deriving the most radical consequences from the premisses of Shiite gnosis described above: the divine epiphany in Imamology,

the certainty that each exterior or exoteric thing corresponds to an inner, esoteric reality, and the emphasis laid on the *qiyamah* (spiritual resurrection) at the expense of the observance of the *shari'ah* (the Law or ritual). The same spirit is present in the reformed Ismailism of Alamut. All this made up the tragedy at whose centre were the moving figures of Abu al-Khattab and his companions, friends of the Imam Isma'il and disowned, externally at least, by the Imam Ja'far, an action which rent his own heart.

2. Only a few texts are left today that witness to the spiritual ferment taking place in the second/eighth century, but they suffice to show the link between ancient gnosis and Ismaili gnosis. The oldest of these texts, entitled *Umm al-Kitab* ('The Archetype of the Book'), is preserved in the archaic Persian language; whether this is the original text or a version from the Arabic, it is at any rate a faithful reflection of the ideas current wherever Shiite gnosis was given shape. The book takes the form of a conversation between the fifth Imam, Muhammad al-Baqir (d. 115/733) and three of his followers (*rawshaniyan*, 'beings of light'). From the start it is clearly reminiscent of the Gospel of the Infancy, thus already making it evident how Imamology is homologous to gnostic Christology. Among the principal motifs are the mystical science of letters (the *jafr*), practised already, and especially, in the school of Mark the Gnostic, and the groups of five, or *pentadism*, governing a cosmology which plainly contains traces of Manichaeism, and in which we can discern upon analysis a *cathenotheism* of extraordinary interest.

Another of the dominating themes is the 'seven battles of Salman' against the Enemy. Salman combines the characteristics of the archangel Michael with those of the celestial *Anthropos* in the form of a primordial theophany. He declines to accept divinity for himself, and this refusal renders him transparent to that divinity which can be worshipped only through him. As we will see later, the most exalted philosophical speculations of Ismailism see this as the secret of the esoteric *tawhid*. Deprived of theophanic figures, monotheism suffers a self-inflicted self-denial and perishes in a metaphysical idolatry which is unaware of itself. At the end of the book comes the theme of the 'Salman of the microcosm'. The fructification of Imamology in mystical experience, fully realized in the Sufi Ismailism derived from Alamut, has already begun.

Reference has just been made to the 'science of letters' which was to be so important for Jabir ibn Hayyan (see below, IV, 2), and even for Avicenna (see below, V, 4). It was borrowed from the Shiites by the Sunni mystics, and was extensively developed by Ibn al-'Arabi and his school. We know that for Mark the Gnostic, the body of *Aletheia*, Truth, was made up of the letters of the alphabet. For Mughirah ibn Sa'id al-'Ijli—possibly the most ancient of Shiite gnostics (d. 119/737)—letters are the elements out of which the very 'body' of God is composed. Hence the significance of his speculations on the supreme Name of God: for example, seventeen people will rise again at the coming of the Imam-Mahdi, and each of them will be allotted one of the seventeen letters which make up the supreme Name. A systematic comparison of this with the Jewish Cabbalah has not yet been attempted.

3. Unfortunately, it is very difficult to follow the transition between these texts which express what could be termed *proto-Ismailism*, and the triumphal period in which the coming of the Fatimid dynasty to Cairo in 296/909, with 'Ubayd Allah al-Mahdi, was seen as the realization on earth of the Ismaili hope for the kingdom of God. Between the death of the Imam Muhammad, son of the Imam Isma'il, and the founder of the Fatimid dynasty, there is the obscure period of the three hidden Imams (*mastur*—not to be confused with the idea of the *ghaybah* of the twelfth Imam in Twelver Imamism). Let us merely observe that in Ismaili tradition, the second of these hidden Imams, Imam Ahmad, great-grandson of the Imam Isma'il, is considered to have sponsored the writing of the Encyclopaedia of the *Ikhwan al-Safa'*, and to have been the author of *al-Risalat al-Jami'ah*, the synthesis which recapitulates the contents of the Encyclopaedia from the point of view of Ismaili esotericism (see below, IV, 3). In addition, we can mention a Yemeni author, Ja'far ibn Mansur al-Yaman. This brings us to the middle of the fourth/tenth century.

At the end of this obscure period, we may remark the appearance of great systematic works, composed with perfect technique and using a precise philosophical vocabulary, even though we are unable to determine the context in which they were produced. Even more explicitly than in the case of the Twelver Shiites, the greatest names among these masters of Ismaili thought, apart from Qadi al-Nu'man (d. 363/974), all belong to Iranians: **Abu** Hatim al-Razi (d. 322/933),

whose famous controversies with his compatriot, the philosopher-doctor Rhazes, are discussed later (see below, IV, 4); Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani (fourth/tenth century), a profound thinker and the author of about twenty works written in a concise and difficult language; Ahmad ibn Ibrahim al-Nisaburi (fifth/eleventh century); Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani (d. ca. 408/1017), a prolific and extraordinarily profound writer; as a *da'i* of the Fatimid caliph al-Hakim, he was also the author of several treatises in which he argues against the Druze, the 'separated brethren' of Ismailis; Mu'ayyad fi al-Din al-Shirazi (d. 470/1077), equally prolific in both Arabic and Persian, and holder of the high rank of *bab* (Threshold) in the esoteric hierarchy; the famous Nasir-i Khusraw (d. between 465/1072 and 470/1077), all of whose many works are written in Persian.

4. As we will see below (B, II, 1), the decision taken by the eighth Fatimid caliph, al-Mustansir bi-Allah, with regard to his successor, split the Ismaili community, after his death in 487/1094, into two branches. On the one hand, there was the branch of the so-called 'Oriental' Ismailis, the Ismailis of Persia, whose main centre was the 'command post' of Alamut in the mountains to the south-west of the Caspian Sea. In India today they are called Khojas, and they acknowledge the Aga Khan as their head. On the other hand, there was the branch of the so-called 'Occidental' Ismailis, the Ismailis of Egypt and Yemen, who acknowledged the Imamate of al-Musta'li, second son of al-Mustansir, and continued the ancient Fatimid tradition. For them, the last Fatimid Imam was Abu al-Qasim al-Tayyib, son of the tenth Fatimid caliph al-Amir bi-Ahkam Allah (d. 524/1130), and twenty-first Imam in the Imamic line which started with 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (thus giving us three *heptads*). But he disappeared while still a child, and as a matter of fact the Ismailis of this branch, known in India as Bohras, affirm, like the Twelver Shiites, the necessity of the Imam's occultation, with all its metaphysical implications. They owe obedience to a *da'i* or high priest, who is simply the representative of the invisible Imam.

The fate of the literature of the Ismailism of Alamut will be discussed later. The literature of the 'occidental' Ismailis, who remained faithful to the ancient Fatimid tradition, is represented by a number of monumental works, which appeared particularly in Yemen towards the end of the sixteenth century, when the residence of the great *da'i* was

moved to India. Needless to say, this Yemeni philosophy has been completely absent up till now from our histories of philosophy, for the good reason that it has long been kept under the seal of the strictest secrecy. (We may recall that Yemen belongs officially to the Zaydi branch of Shiism, which we cannot discuss here.) Some of these Yemeni Ismailis were prolific authors: Sayyid-na Ibrahim ibn al-Hamidi, second *da'i* (died at San'a' in 557/1162); Sayyid-na Hatim ibn Ibrahim, third *da'i* (d. 596/1199); Sayyid-na 'Ali ibn Muhammad, fifth *da'i* (d. 612/1215), author of twenty great works, outstanding among which is his monumental response to al-Ghazali's attacks (see below, V, 7); Sayyid-na Husayn ibn 'Ali, eighth *da'i* (d. 667/1268), hitherto the only one among them to have had a treatise translated (into French; see bibliography). This whole Yemeni period culminates in the work of Sayyid-na Idris 'Imad al-Din, nineteenth *da'i* of Yemen (d. 872/1468). Even though the last three authors specified are posterior to the date we assigned as the limit of the first part of this study, reference to them is unavoidable.

5. The precise significance of philosophy in Ismailism must be sought in the Ismaili exegesis, developed in the commentary of a *qasidah* by Abu al-Haytham al-Jurjani, of the following *hadith* of the Prophet: 'Between my tomb and the pulpit where I preach, there is a garden from among the gardens of Paradise.' Needless to say, this saying is not to be understood in a literal, exoteric sense (*zahir*). The pulpit for preaching is precisely this literal appearance, that is to say, positive religion with all its imperatives and dogmas. The tomb is philosophy (*falsafah*), for in this tomb the exoteric aspect of positive religion and its dogmas must undergo the decomposition and dissolution of death. The garden of paradise which stretches between the pulpit and the tomb is the garden of gnostic truth, the field of Resurrection where the initiate rises again to an incorruptible life. Such a concept makes philosophy into a necessary *initiatory* stage, and this is without doubt unique in Islam: it is the whole spirit of Shiite gnosis, and the whole point of the *da'wah*, the 'Ismaili Convocation' (literally, the Ismaili *kerygma*).

We are dealing here not with a more or less precarious balance between philosophy and theology, not with the 'double truth' of the Averroists, still less with the idea of philosophy as *ancilla theologiae*. The religion which is *theosophia*, True Religion (*din-i haqq*), is reborn

from the intermediate, from what lies between the dogma and the tomb where dogmatic belief must die and be metamorphosed. *Ta'wil* is the exegesis which transcends all known facts and redirects them to their origin. Philosophy culminates in gnosis, for it leads to spiritual birth (*wiladah ruhaniyah*). We can perceive the themes which are common to Twelver Imamism and Ismailism, as well as the themes on which Ismailism, particularly that of Alamut, was to differ: the relationship between *shari'ah* and *haqiqah*, between prophecy and the Imamate. They are not, however, themes which derive from Greek philosophy.

We cannot enter here into details—for example, the differences between the *pentadic* schema of Nasir-i Khusraw's cosmology, and the structure of the *pleroma* according to Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani; or the *decadic* system described by the latter, which accords with those of al-Farabi and Avicenna. We may observe, however, particularly in the case of al-Farabi (d. 339/950), a concern with prophetic philosophy (see below, V, 2), while for their part certain great Ismaili works of capital importance (by Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani and Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani) were written prior to Avicenna (d. 429/1037). To undertake a comparative study of the features of Islamic thought, which is far more diverse and rich than has been hitherto supposed in the West, and to isolate the particular context of a philosophy which does not identify itself with the Greek contribution, is a task for the future. Here, we can but make a brief survey of some of the themes, taking Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani, Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani, and the Yemeni writers as our principal guides.

## I. Fatimid Ismailism

### 1. *The dialectic of the Tawhid*

1. If we are to understand what it is that makes the Ismaili doctrine, •• the form *par excellence* of Islamic gnosis, so profoundly original, and what it is that differentiates it from the Hellenizing philosophers, We must consider the intuition on which it is based. In order to preserve the divine Abyss from being assimilated to any of its derivatives, the ancient Gnostics had recourse to purely negative terms in describing it: Unknowable, Unnameable, Ineffable, Abyss. These expressions have their equivalents in Ismaili terminology: the Principle or Originator (*mubdi'*), the Mystery of Mysteries (*al-ghayb al-ghuyub*), 'he who



transcends the boldness of thought'. It is impossible to attribute to him names, attributes, qualifications, being or non-being. The Principle is Super-being; he is not, but *causes to be*, is the *cause of being*. In this sense, Ismailism truly pursued a 'primal philosophy'. Everything, in fact, that the Avicennan philosophers say about the Necessary Being, the First Being (*al-haqq al-awwal*), must be displaced in order to be true: their metaphysics starts with the affirmation of being, and thus starts but with *caused-being*. Ismaili metaphysics ascends to the level of the *cause of being*: prior to being, there is the putting of being into the imperative, the originating *KN (Esto!)*. Beyond even the One, there is the Unific (*muwahhid*), he who monadizes all monads. The *tawhid* thus assumes the aspect of a monadology: it isolates this Unifying Principle from all the *ones that* is unifies, and at the same time it affirms this Principle in and through them.

2. The *tawhid*—the affirmation of the Unique—must therefore avoid the dual trap of *ta'til* (agnosticism) and of *tashbih* (the assimilation of that which is Manifested to its Manifestation). Hence we have the dialectic of double negativity: the Principle is non-being and *not* non-being, not in time and *not* not in time, and so on. Each negation is true only on condition of being itself denied. The truth lies in the simultaneity of this double negation, whose complement is the dual action of the *tanzih* (the subduction of the Names and operations from the supreme divinity in order to transfer them to the *hudud*, the celestial and terrestrial stages of his Manifestation), and the *tajrid* (the isolation and re-projection of the divinity beyond his Manifestations). In this way, the 'theophanic function' is initiated and defined. A twelfth-century Yemeni author defined the *tawhid us* 'consisting in knowledge of the celestial and the terrestrial *hudud* (plural of *hadd*, limit or degree), and in the recognition that each of them is unique in its rank and degree, without having another associated with it'.

Described in these terms, the esoteric *tawhid* appears some way removed from the usual monotheism of the theologians. In order to understand it, full weight must be given to the idea of *hadd*, meaning limit or degree. The idea is distinctive in that it confirms the bond between the 'monadological' conception of the *tawhid* and the fundamental hierarchism of Ismaili ontology, thus establishing a close correlation between the action of the *tawhid*—recognition of the Unique—and the *tawahhud*—the process that constitutes a unity, the

monadization of a monad. In other words, the *shirk* which disintegrates the divinity by pluralizing it is *eo ipso* the disintegration of the human monad, which is only able to make itself into a true unity through knowing the *hadd* of which it is the *mahdud*—through knowing, that is, the limit which determines its rank in the scale of being. The question confronting us, then, is the following: at what limit or *hadd* sequent to Super-Being does the revelation of being unfold? In other words: how is the first *hadd*, the First Being, made? What is the *limit at* which the divinity rises from its abyss of absolute unknowability, the limit at which it is revealed as a Person, with whom a personal relationship of knowledge and love is possible? And, following on the primordial divine Epiphany, how do all the *hudud* unfold? (The word *hudud* is often translated as 'grades' or 'dignitaries' of the esoteric hierarchies, whether celestial or terrestrial. While this is not inaccurate, it veils the metaphysical aspect of the word.) To ask these questions is to enquire into the eternal birth of the Pleroma.

3. The earlier authors—the Iranians whom we mentioned earlier—envisaged it in terms of the procession of being from the First Intelligence. The Yemeni writers say that all the Intelligences—the archangelic 'Forms of light' in the Pleroma—were established simultaneously and equally, but that this was as yet no more than 'first perfection'. The 'second perfection', which was to have established them definitively in being, was dependent on their attaining the *tawhid*, for it is on this *tawhid* that the integration of each being (*tawahhud*) depends. The differentiation, structure and hierarchization of being is achieved through the *tawhid*. It should be observed at once that the term *ibda'*, signifying the immediate creative origination (our authors refuse to say either 'as a result of something' or *ex nihilo*), is reserved for the eternal act which puts the being of the celestial Pleroma into the *imperative* mode. The Pleroma is designated '*alam al-ibda'*', '*alam AL-amr*'. the world of being in the imperative mode, *Esto*. It contrasts with the '*alam al-khalq*', which is the creatural world, the object of creation. Both in the older schema and in that of the Yemenis, the procession of being or *Emanation (inbi'ath)* originates solely in the First Intelligence, the integral or universal Intelligence (*al- 'aql al-kull*).

This Intelligence is itself Being in the imperative mode. As the first Originated (*al-mubda' al-awwal*), it is the act itself of eternal Origination (*ibda'*), the creative divine Word (*kalam Allah*); for this imperative

Word, in effectuating the epiphany of the first Intelligence as the first Being, is one with the Intelligence Manifested. The Yemeni writers say that the first Intelligence was the first to accomplish the *tawhid*, and that it summoned thereto the other Forms of light. Hence the name, *sabiq*, by which the Intelligence is known—as name signifying 'he who goes before, who precedes'. The ancient writers did in fact apply themselves to the task of studying the exemplary case of this initial *tawhid* as being that of a cosmic liturgy, typified in the two moments of the profession of the Islamic faith: *la ilaha illa Allah*. For in this *tawhid* the *delimitation* of the being of the First Intelligence is accomplished—a delimitation which makes it the first *hadd*, the essential Epiphany. The act of intellection whereby the First Intelligence recognizes its Principle is also the only divine Ipseity accessible to our apprehension: the *Deus determinatus* or *Deus revelatus*.

4. In its two phases, the *tawhid* constitutes the secret of being of the first Intelligence. *La ilaha*: there is no God, absolute negation. The divine *Absconditum* disallows the possibility of apprehending or affirming any divinity of which something could be predicated. It is succeeded (*cf.* the dialectic described above) by an exceptive proposition (*illa = nisi*), an absolute and particular affirmation which does not derive from any logical premiss. Between the two moments of the profession runs the ridgeway—between the two abysses of *ta'til* and *tashbih*. For insofar as, and because, the first Intelligence or first Being recognizes that divinity in its essence is beyond it, and because it denies itself this divinity, it is actually invested with the supreme Name of divinity, and is the only Ipseity of the Principle that it is possible for us to apprehend. The entire mystery of the *Deus revelatus* consists in this. The affirmative *ilia Allah* is the challenge which the first Intelligence, through its adoration, levels at its own powerlessness; it is the positive 'dimension' of its being, and as such it summons into being the second Intelligence, the universal Soul, its first Emamant (*al-munba'ith al-awwal*), known as the *tailor* 'he who follows'. In Yemeni terms, the *tawhid* of the first Intelligence makes possible the *tawhid* of the second Intelligence, in the sense that the latter, of which the first Intelligence is the 'limit' (*hadd*), the 'horizon', the *sabiq*, refers the words *ilia Allah* back to the first Intelligence. But from the start, the first Intelligence assigned divinity, not to itself, but back to its Principle, beyond itself. In the same way, therefore, going from stage

to stage (*hadd to hadd*), the *tawhid* is possible without *tashbih* or *ta'til*, whereas the orthodox literalists fall into the very trap of metaphysical idolatry which they claimed to avoid.

To avoid this metaphysical idolatry it has to be recognized that the only ipseity of the Principle which we can attain is the knowledge possessed by the first Intelligence, the archangel Logos, of the Principle which establishes it—a knowledge it possesses through the very act of its being. This knowledge, however, is itself an Unknowingness: the Intelligence knows that it cannot attain to the essential ground of the Principle. Nevertheless, apart from that, there is no sense in talking of the existence or absence of a divine reality, for the Principle pertains neither to the being of which one can say what it is, nor to the non-being of which one can declare negatively what it is not. This is why for all Ismaili gnosis the first Intelligence is the *Deus revelatus*, both the Veil and the support of the supreme Name *Al-Lah*. All the Quranic verses in which this name is named refer to the first Intelligence. But it must be understood in the sense specified by the etymology of the name *Al-Lah*, as professed by Ismaili thinkers and certain Arabic grammarians. (We are not concerned here to accommodate grammarians and linguists, but to ascertain what is really present to the Ismaili consciousness.) They derive the word from the root *wlh*, which denotes the idea of being stricken with stupor and sadness (like the traveller in the desert): *ilah = wilah*. Similarly, the Arabic script makes it possible to read, ideographically, in the word *ulhaniyah*—divinity—the word *al-hanniyah*: the state of him who sighs or desires. There is an affective sense here of the divine mystery: the idea that the divine ipseity 'essencifies' itself only in negativity, in the stupor or sadness of the first Archangel or first Intelligence as he experiences his powerlessness to reach the self-hood of this divinity, whose Name devolves upon him even while he disclaims such divinity for himself. In the same way he becomes the object of desire or nostalgia for all those who proceed from the first Intelligence. The same paradox is repeated at all the levels (*hudud*) of the hierarchies of Heaven and Earth. Whatever may be the limit (*hadd*) attained, there is always another limit beyond. The metaphysical hierarchism of Ismaili gnosis is rooted in this sense of distances—a sense which, as we shall see, involves the entire *da 'wah* in a continuous ascending motion.

5. The relationship initially determined is, then, that between the first

*hadd* and the first *mahdud*, that is to say, between the first Intelligence and the second Intelligence, which proceeds from the first and of which the first is the 'limit' or horizon. This is the dyad of *sabiq* and *tali*, Pen and Tablet (*lawhah*), whose earthly homologues are the Prophet and his *wasi* or heir, the first Imam of a period (see below, B, I, 3). This dyadic structure is repeated at all levels of both the celestial and the terrestrial hierarchy, the one corresponding with the other, and gives an Ismaili significance to the phrase, 'He who knows himself knows his Lord'. However, the procession of the third Intelligence initiates a drama in which the origin of evil is ascribed to a 'past' long preceding the existence of earthly man.

## 2. *The drama in Heaven and the birth of Time*

1. If the Ismaili community calls itself the *da'wah*, the 'Convocation' to the esoteric *tawhid*, it is because this Convocation, or 'Proclamation' (*keiygma*) began 'in Heaven' with the summons addressed by the First Intelligence, prior to time, to all the Forms of light in the archangelic Pleroma. This *da'wah* 'in Heaven' is the eternal Convocation of which the 'Ismaili Convocation' is merely the terrestrial form, the form appropriate to the Muhammadan period of the present cycle of prophecy. On earth—that is to say in the phenomenal world—its existence began with the initial Adam, well before the Adam of our own cycle. Whereas the Second Intelligence—the First Emanant—obeyed this summons, the Third Intelligence, which proceeded from the dyad of the first two, opposed it with negation and refusal. This Third Intelligence was the *Adam ruhani*, the celestial spiritual Adam, angel-archetype of humanity, in whose person the Ismaili metaphysical imagination represents, in symbolic form, the hierohistory of humanity's origin.

The spiritual Adam, then, remains motionless in a state of amazed bedazzlement before himself. He refuses the 'limit' (*hadd*) preceding him, the Second Intelligence, because he does not see that even if this *hadd* 'limits' his horizon it also points towards the beyond. He believes that he can attain the inaccessible Principle without this intermediary 'limit' because, being ignorant of the mystery of the *Deus revelatus* in the First Intelligence, he thinks that to do otherwise would be to identify this limit with the absolute deity, the *mubdi'*. In order to escape this idolatry, he exalts himself into the absolute, thus succumbing to

the worst metaphysical idolatry of all. When, finally, he rouses himself from this stupor, rather in the manner of an archangel Michael winning the victory over himself, he hurls away from him the demonic shadow of Iblis (Satan, Ahriman) into the lower world, where it reappears with every cycle of occultation. But he realizes that he has been 'overtaken', 'delayed' (*takhalluf*), that he has fallen behind himself: from being the Third Intelligence he has become the Tenth. This interval is the measure of the *time* of his stupor, a time which he must redeem. It corresponds to the emanation of *seven* other Intelligences who are called the 'Seven Cherubim' or the 'Seven divine Words', and who assist the Angel-Adam to come to himself. The *Seven* denote the ideal distance of his fall. The *time* is his delay over himself—it is literally true, in this context, to say that time is 'eternity delayed'. This is why *seven* periods govern the rhythm of the prophetic cycle, and *seven* Imams govern the rhythm of each period of this cycle. Herein lie the metaphysical roots of Sevener, or Ismaili, Shiism. The number seven represents the delay of eternity in the Pleroma, a delay which the Third Angel, now become the Tenth, must reclaim for his followers, and with their help.

This 'delay' introduces into a being of light a dimension which is alien to it and which expresses itself in the form of an 'opaqueness'. It is interesting to recall that in the Zarvanist theosophy of ancient Iran, Tenebrosity {Ahriman} originated in a *doubt* which arose in the thought of Zarvan, the supreme divinity. However, for the Zarvanists and Gayomarthians described in the sixth/twelfth century by al-Shahra-Ntani, Zarvan was no longer the supreme divinity but an angel of the Pleroma. It could be said that the spiritual Adam, the Third Angel of the Ismaili cosmogony, is the homologue of the Angel Zarvan in this lute neo-Zarvanism.

2. Each archangelic Intelligence in the Pleroma itself contains a pleroma of innumerable Forms of light. All the Forms who composed the pleroma of the celestial Adam were immobilized with him in the same *delay*. In his turn, he communicated to them the *da'wah*, the eternal Summons. Most of them, however, in varying degrees of obstinacy and rage, rejected him and even denied him the right to make such an appeal. This denial darkened the essential ground of their being, which had previously been purely incandescent. The Angel-Adam realized that if they were to remain in the pure spiritual world, they

would never free themselves of their Tenebrosity. This is the reason why he made himself the *demiurge* of the physical cosmos, as the instrument through which the Forms who had once been of Light would find their salvation.

This symbolical history is clearly reminiscent of Manichaeism. Furthermore, in the Ismaili schema, the Third Intelligence who becomes the Tenth takes on the same position and role as the 'active Intelligence' in the writings of the Avicennan philosophers and the *ishraqiyun* {see below, V, 4 and VII}. (We explained above why this Intelligence is identified with the Holy Spirit, with Gabriel as the angel of Knowledge and Revelation.) There is a difference in that, for Ismaili theosophy, this Intelligence does not simply come tenth in the normal course of Emanation: it is seen as the central figure in a 'drama in Heaven' which precedes and explains our present terrestrial humanity.

All the members of his pleroma were seized with panic terror when they saw the Tenebrosity invade their being. The triple movement which they executed in a vain attempt to tear themselves away from it resulted in the three dimensions of cosmic space. The densest mass consolidated itself at the centre, while cosmic space exploded into several regions: those of the celestial Spheres and those of the Elements. Each of the planets in turn ruled for the space of a millennium over a world in gestation, up till the beginning of the seventh millennium, the cycle of the Moon. At this point, like a plant growing out of the Earth, appeared the first human being surrounded by his companions.

### 3. Cyclical Time: Hierohistory and Hierarchies

1. This earthly *Anthropos* is designated as the *integral primordial Adam* (*Adam al-awwal al-kulli*), the *pananthropos*. He must therefore be distinguished both from his celestial archetype, the spiritual Adam, the Third Intelligence who became the Tenth, and from the partial {*juz'i*} Adam who inaugurated our present cycle. He is described as the 'physical personification of the primordial Pleroma'. Needless to say, he has no connection with the primitive man of our philosophizing palaeontologies. He made his appearance in Ceylon (*Sarandib*), because Ceylon then possessed the most perfect temperate climate; and with him appeared twenty-seven companions. 'As the red hyacinth stands out among the other stones', so he stood out among these twenty-seven companions, just as they stood out from the rest of

humanity which arose at the same time as them. Together with him, these twenty-seven companions are the visible typification, in a form possessing 'physical mass', of the primordial archangelic Pleroma, for they are the faithful humanity of the pleroma of the Tenth Angel, those who responded to his *da'wah*. Their fidelity 'in Heaven' is expressed in their earthly condition by a physical and spiritual superiority over all the human beings of other climes (*jazirah*), who came into existence with them at the conclusion of the same anthropogonic process.

This first earthly Adam is simultaneously the epiphanic form (*mazhar*) and the Veil of the celestial Adam. He is the celestial Adam's first thought and the limit of his knowledge, the substance of his action and the ray which concentrates the brilliance of his light. Like the Adam of Judaeo-Christian prophetology, he is *αναμάρτητος* (whose exact equivalent is the Arabic term *ma 'sum*), immune from all impurity and sin—a privilege that he transmitted from cycle to cycle to all the holy Imams. His own cycle was one of epiphany (*dawr al-kashf*), an era of felicity in which the human condition, including even its physical characteristics, was still that of a paradisaical humanity. Human beings perceived the spiritual realities (*haqa'iq*) directly, not through the veil of symbol. The first Adam founded the 'Noble Convocation' (*al-da'wah al-sharifah*) in this world; he it was who established the hierarchy of the hierocosmos (*'alam al-din*), which symbolizes both with that of the Pleroma and with that of the macrocosm. He sent out *twelve* of his twenty-seven companions, twelve *da'is*, into the twelve *jazirahs* of the Earth, and he appointed twelve *hujjahs*, the 61ite among his companions, in his presence. In short, he was the founder of the permanent esoteric hierarchy, uninterrupted from cycle to cycle, and from period to period in each cycle, up to and since Islam.

After having invested his successor, the first Adam was transferred to the Pleroma. Here he succeeded the Tenth Angel—the celestial Adam—who himself rose, together with the entire hierarchy of Intelligences, to a level higher than the one he had previously occupied. This ascending movement will not cease until the Third Angel-Intelligence, whose aberrance immobilized him and thus demoted him to the rank of Tenth Intelligence, has regained the sphere of the Second Emanant or Second Intelligence. The same pattern applied to each of the Imams who succeeded the first Adam in the first epiphanic cycle. This cycle of epiphany was followed by one of occultation (*dawr*

*al-satr*), which was followed by a new cycle of epiphany and so on, the cycles alternating with each other in rotatory succession. This will continue until the ultimate Resurrection of Resurrections (*qiyamat al-qiyamat*, which will be the consummation of our *Aion* and will restore humanity and its Angel to their initial state. In some of their sayings, the holy Imams go as far as calculating the Great Cycle {*al-dawr al-a'zam*) at 360,000 times 360,000 years.

2. Understandably, the only case about which our Ismaili theosophers are able to speak at length is the transition leading to our present cycle of occultation from the epiphanic cycle which precedes it. The Ismaili *ta'wil* was applied with extraordinary depth to the Quranic and Biblical history of Adam—an account which is concerned not with an absolute beginning, but with things occurring in the wake of terrible disasters. During the three final millennia of the previous epiphanic cycle, serious disturbances forced high-ranking dignitaries to re-institute the 'discipline of the arcane'. The exalted spiritual sciences were silenced, and humanity became unworthy of the revelation of the mysteries. A religious Law, *shari'ah*, had to be established, from which the *ta'wil* would liberate only those whom it would lead to resurrection through rebirth, in the night of symbols. This is the fall known as the 'departure from Paradise'. Henceforth, there is only the 'potential paradise'—that is to say, the esoteric fellowship, the Ismaili *da'wah*.

The Quranic history of Adam is seen as that of the investiture of the young Imam Adam by his father Hunayd, the last Imam of the preceding epiphanic cycle. All the 'terrestrial Angels'—the members of the *da'wah*—acknowledged him except Iblis-Satan and his followers. Iblis was a dignitary of the previous cycle, in whose person there now reappeared the form of the Tenebrosity originally precipitated on the Earth by the celestial Adam. Iblis' intention was to move Adam, to appeal to his generosity and thus induce him to reveal to men that 'knowledge of the resurrection' which they had both possessed in the previous cycle. Whereupon Adam, carried away by a mad impulse, betrayed it, giving up to the incomprehension of all men that which could be revealed only by the last Imam of our cycle, the Imam of the Resurrection (*qa'im al-qiyamah*).

3. The structure of the cycle of occultation inaugurated by our own Adam may be understood with reference to the original structure

established on earth by the first Adam, the first Imam on earth, in correspondence with that of the visible and of the invisible Heavens. As we have shown, the 'grades' of the celestial and the terrestrial hierarchies are designated by the term *hadd* ( *l i m i t* ) . The *hadd* defines the horizon of consciousness of each level, the mode of knowledge proper to its mode of being. Thus, each lower limit is 'delimited' (*mahdud*) by the *hadd* immediately superior to it. Essential for the understanding of the *tawhid*, this structure determines the entire course of anthropology.

Even though the full significance of the esoteric hierarchy throughout the periods of Ismailism still presents problems, its structure has been fully delineated by Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani (d. ca. 408/1017). There is the celestial hierarchy (the *hudud* above), and there is the terrestrial hierarchy (the *hudud* below), which symbolize with each other. Altogether, each of these hierarchies forms *ten grades*, linked together as a *triad* (the higher levels) and a *heptad*. (1) On earth there is the *natiq*, that is to say, the prophet who *annunciates* a *shari'ah*, a divine Law communicated to him by the Angel (*cf.* above, A, 5). This is the letter of the text uttered in exoteric form (*zahir*), as the code of positive religion. The *natiq* is the earthly homologue of the First Intelligence, the Intelligence who inaugurated the *da'wah* 'in Heaven'. (2) There is the *wasi*, the Imam who is the prophet's direct spiritual heir, the foundation (*asas*) of the Imamate and the first Imam of a period. As the depository of the secret of prophetic revelation, his proper function is the *ta'wil*, the esoteric exegesis which 'redirects' the exoteric aspect to the hidden meaning, to its archetype (*asl*). He is the homologue of the Second Intelligence, the First Emanant or universal Soul. (The dyad of *nabi-wasi*, First and Second Intelligences, corresponds here to the two aspects of the 'eternal Muhammadan Reality' in Twelver Shiism; see above, A, 3.) (3) There is the Imam who succeeds of *asas*, and who throughout the cycle maintains the equilibrium of esoteric and exoteric, whose relatedness is indispensable. He is the homologue of the Third Intelligence, the spiritual Adam. This is why each period will have a *heptad*, or several heptads, of Imams, typifying the interval of 'delay', the *time* that the celestial Adam must redeem with the help of his followers in order to regain his rank. With regard to the *seven* other grades, each is, respectively, the homologue of one of the other Forms of light or Intelligences in the Pleroma: the *bab* or 'threshold'

of the Imam; the *hujjah*, the Proof or Guarantee (which assumes an altogether special significance in the Ismailism of Alamut); three degrees of *da'i* or preacher (literally 'convoker'); and two lower grades: the senior master (*al-ma 'dhun al-mutlaq*), who may accept the commitment of the new initiate, and the junior master (*al-ma 'dhun al-mahsur*) whose task is to attract neophytes.

Such is the vertical structure of the esoteric hierarchy which, according to our authors, endures from cycle to cycle. The form of hierocosmos in space has its temporal isomorph in the form of hierohistory. Each period of a cycle of prophecy—that is to say, a cycle of occultation—is inaugurated by a *natiq*, a *wasi*, who are succeeded by one or more heptads of Imams. It is terminated by a last Imam, the *qa'im* or Imam of the Resurrection, who puts an end to the preceding period and who raises up (*muqim*) the new prophet. The seven periods as a whole make up the totality of the prophetic cycle, an idea which is common to all Shiite prophetology. These periods appertain to seven great prophets: Adam, whose Imam was Seth; Noah, whose Imam was Shem; Abraham, whose Imam was Ishmael; Moses, whose Imam was Aaron; Jesus, whose Imam was Sham'un (Simon); Muhammad, whose Imam was 'Ali. The seventh *natiq* is the Imam of the Resurrection (who corresponds to the twelfth Imam of the Imami Shiites). He does not bring a new *shari'ah*; he reveals the hidden meaning of the Revelations, with all the tumults and upheavals that this involves, and prepares the way for the future Cycle of epiphany.

#### 4. *Imamology and eschatology*

1. We are in a better position to understand the meaning of Imamology, and with it the eschatological *ethos* dominating all Shiite consciousness, when we remember that, as we observed above, Ismaili Imamology, like Shiite Imamology in general, was confronted with problems similar to those which confronted Christianity during the first centuries of our era, and that it always tended to find solutions of a type characteristic of the Gnostics—precisely the sort of solutions, in fact, which were rejected by official Christology.

In speaking of the *nasut* or humanity of the Imam, Ismaili authors are concerned to intimate that the Imam's body is not a body of flesh, constituted like that of other human beings. The Imam's body results from a whole cosmic alchemization of the 'etheric bodies' (*al-nafs*

*al-rihiyah*, the 'effluvious soul') of faithful initiates. These 'etheric' particles rise from Heaven to Heaven and then re-descend, purified, invisible to the eye's perception, by means of lunar rays, settling like a heavenly dew on the surface of pure water or of certain fruits. The water and the fruit are consumed by the current Imam and his wife, and the heavenly dew becomes the germ of the subtle body of the new Imam. A simple envelope or sheath (*ghilaf*), it is designated *jism kafuri*, a body which possesses the subtlety and whiteness of camphor; and this is the body which constitutes the humanity (*nasut*) of the Imam. If it is possible to speak in this context of 'Docetism', we do so not because we are dealing in any sense with a 'phantom', but because we are concerned with the attempt to imagine and conceive, as though in a Gnostic form of Christology, a *caro spiritalis*. For this reason, the union of *nasut* (humanity) and *lahut* (divinity) in the person of the Imams never culminates in the idea of a 'hypostatic union of two natures', with all the philosophical, historical and social consequences that such a concept entails.

2. In order to understand what Ismaili gnosis means by the divinity (*lahut*) of the Imam, we must start with what it characterizes as the 'spiritual birth' (*al-wilada al-ruhanlyah*). Here we may discern unmistakable Manichaeic overtones. The Yemeni writer already quoted has the following to say: 'When the new initiate (*mustajib*) expresses his assent between the hands of one of the dignitaries (*hudud*), at the moment when he repeats the formula which commits him, and if his intentions are true and pure, behold, a point of light is joined to his soul and remains beside it without forming part of it.' His thought and actions will determine whether this nascent point of light grows into ; a Form of light. If it does, then at the time of his *exitus* the faithful initiate's Form of light is drawn by the 'magnetism of the Pillar of light' towards the Form of light of the Companion who precedes him in mystical rank. (There is as it were a pact of mystical chivalry which **makes** the initiates responsible for each other even in the beyond.) **Together** they rise towards the hadd which is superior to both of them. In this way, all assume their stations and together constitute, with the *hudud*, the 'Temple of Light' (*al-haykal al-nurani*), which, while possessing the human form, is a purely spiritual Temple. This *Temple of Light* is the Imamate, and as such is the *lahut* or *divinity of the* Imam.

3. As soon as he is 'invested' (*nass*), the young Imam becomes the

support of the Temple of Light. His Imamate or 'divinity' is the *corpus mysticum* composed of all the Forms of light of his disciples. As in the case of the first Adam, each of the Imams who succeed each other in each of the periods of the cycle has his own 'sacrosanct Temple of Light' (*haykal nurani qudsani*), which is formed in the same manner. All the Imams together form the 'Sublime Temple of Light' (*al-haykal al-nurani al-a'zam*), which is as it were the dome of the Temple of Light. When an Imam departs from this world, his Temple of Light rises with him into the precinct of the Tenth Angel (the spiritual Adam or celestial Anthropos); and all of them, gathered together in this precinct, await the coming of *qa'im*, the Imam-resurrector who brings the cycle to a close, to rise with him at his accession as the successor of the Tenth Angel.

At each Great Resurrection (*qiyamat al-qiyamat*) which ends a cycle of occultation or of epiphany, the last Imam or *qa'im*, drawing with him the entire mystical Temple of the *hudud*, rises to the Pleroma where he succeeds the Tenth Angel, the spiritual Adam, as the demiurge of the natural world. The Tenth Angel himself then rises one rank in the Pleroma, drawing the whole Pleroma with him in this ascent. In this way, each Great Resurrection—each completed cycle—enables the Angel of humanity and all his followers to approach his and their original rank. This is how the succession of cycles and millennia redeems *time*, that 'eternity delayed' by the Angel's momentary plunge into darkness, and how the way is prepared for the dénouement of the 'drama in Heaven'. Cosmogony and soteriology are two aspects of the same process leading up to this dénouement. The *meaning* and aim of the creation of the cosmos is to make it an instrument whereby the celestial Adam may regain his lost rank. He regains it from cycle to cycle with the help of all those who, previously to their earthly state, obeyed his 'summons' in the Pleroma, or who respond in this life to the convocation (*da'wah*) of the prophets and the Imams.

4. As for the tenebrous form of the malefic denegators, it rises at the time of their *exitus* to the region known in astronomy as 'the head and tail of the Dragon' (the point at which the Moon's orbit intersects with that of the Sun). This is the region of tenebrosity, swirling with the *massa perditionis* of all the demons of humanity, the mass of evil thoughts and plots conspiring to bring about the catastrophes which shake the world of men.

For this reason, earthly events can be explained only by their esoteric reality, that is to say, with reference to the 'drama in Heaven' whose dénouement they in fact prepare. In this 'philosophy of history' is expressed the majestic vision of a prophetic philosophy characteristic of Ismaili thought. In fact, the Ismaili version of Shiism has features which are common to all Shiism: the eschatological ethic, the dominating figure of the *qa'im* who, as we saw, is expressly identified with the Paraclete proclaimed in the Gospel of John. This is why Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani (fourth/tenth century) perceived, in the four arms of the Christian Cross and in the four words which make up the Attestation of the Islamic faith (*the tawhid*), a symbol of one and the same secret: the coming of the Imam at the end of the Night of Destiny (*laylat al-qadr*, Surah 7); for this is none other than the Night of humanity in this cycle of occultation.

## II. The reformed Ismailism of Alamut

### I. Periods and sources

1. There is no need here to speak at any length of the 'horror story' which, in the absence of authentic texts, eclipsed for so long the name of Ismailism and in particular the memory of Alamut. There is no doubt that responsibility rests in the first place with the imagination of the Crusaders and of Marco Polo. But even in the nineteenth century, an Austrian orientalist and man of letters, von Hammer-Purgstall, projected onto the unfortunate Ismailis his obsession with 'secret societies', and suspected them of all the crimes which in Europe are attributed by some to the Freemasons and by others to the Jesuits. The result was the *Geschichte der Assassinen* (1818), a work which continued to be taken seriously for a long time. In his turn S. de Sacy, in his *Expose de la religion des Druzes* (1838), passionately defended his etymological explanation of the word 'Assassins' by the word *hashshashin* (those who make use of *hashish*). All this comes from the usual zeal with which religious or philosophic minorities are accused of the worst moral depravities. What is most strange is that orientalists, like admen greedy for sensationalism, should have made themselves the accomplices down to our times of the violent anti-Ismaili propaganda, put about by the Abbasid caliphate of Baghdad. After the impulse given to Ismaili studies by W. Ivanow and the Ismaili Society

of Karachi (formerly of Bombay), there is no longer any excuse for these fantasies. The following is a significant example. We saw that the Ismaili *da'wah* is designated the 'potential paradise', and the Ismaili exegesis of the '*hadith* of the tomb' {see p. 78 above} gives us to understand how entry into the *da'wah* is in fact entry into the 'potential paradise' (*jinnah*, paradise or garden). This was all that was needed for the propaganda of the opposition to imagine 'orgies' in the 'gardens of Alamut'. For the rest, it is a question of an anti-Turkish phenomenon of resistance, and of a struggle carried on by the Ismailis in tragic circumstances. But the philosophy and the spiritual doctrine of Ismailism have no connection with the 'stories of the assassins'.

2. We have already given a brief account of how al-Mustansir bi-Allah, the Fatimid caliph of Cairo, transferred the investiture of the Imamate from his elder son Nizar to his younger son al-Musta'li. On the death of the caliph in 487/1094, some people gave allegiance to al-Musta'li—they are those who continued the Fatimid *da'wah* and who are also known as the *Musta'liyan*—whereas others remained faithful to the Imam Nizar, who was assassinated, together with his son, in Cairo in 489/1096. The latter are known as *nizari*, and are the 'Oriental' Ismailis of Iran. Here again, beneath external history and the concern with personages, lie the essential themes and the spiritual issues. Ultimately, the political triumph represented by the coming of the Fatimid dynasty of Cairo seems something of a paradox. To what degree was an esoteric fellowship compatible with the official organization of a state? The same issue which had divided the Qarmatis from the beginning reappears in the promulgation of the reform of Alamut. As far as we can judge from the texts available to us, this reform was inspired by the spirit of primitive Ismailism after the Fatimid political interlude.

There was, on the other hand, the powerful personality of al-Hasan ibn al-Sabbah (d. 518/1124), knowledge of which must be acquired through the Ismaili texts themselves, since it has been so distorted elsewhere. He played a leading part in the organization of the Ismaili 'commands' in Iran. We are not attempting here to resolve the question as to whether or not some devoted disciples succeeded in leading the Imam Nizar's grandson to safety in the fortress of Alamut (in the mountains south-west of the Caspian Sea). For whatever may have occurred, one fact remains, and it is of great spiritual significance.

3. This all-important fact was the initiative taken by the Imam Hasan '*ala dhikrihi al-salam* (distinguished by having this greeting after his name), the new grand master (*khudavand*) of Alamut (b. 520/1126, grand master in 557/1162, d. 561/1166). On the 17th day of Ramadan in 559/8th August 1164, the Imam proclaimed the Great Resurrection (*qiyamat al-qiyamat*) before all the initiates assembled on the high terrace of Alamut. The protocol of the occasion has been preserved. What the proclamation implied was nothing less than the coming of a pure spiritual Islam, freed from all spirit of legalism and of all enslavement to the Law, a personal religion of the Resurrection which is spiritual birth, in that it makes possible the discovery and the living realization of the spiritual meaning of the prophetic Revelations.

The fortress of Alamut, like the other Ismaili command-posts in Iran, was destroyed by the Mongols in 654/1256. In no sense did this event mark the end of the reformed Ismailism of Alamut, which simply retreated into hiding by donning the mantle (the *khirqah*) of Sufism. Its effect on Sufism and on Iranian spirituality in general presupposes some fundamental affinities which throw new light on the problem of the meaning and even the origins of Sufism. Furthermore, the Ismailis regard a good number of Sufi masters as their own, beginning with al-Sana'i (d. ca. 545/1151) and 'Attar (d. ca. 627/1230); Jalal al-Din al-Rumi (d. 672/1273), in relation to whom Shams al-Din al-Tabrizi assumed the role of *hujjah*; 'Aziz al-Nasafi (seventh/twelfth century), Qasim al-AnWari (d. 837/1434), and so on. One hesitates at times in deciding whether a text is written by a Sufi steeped in Ismailism, or by an Ismaili steeped in Sufism. Even this is not going far enough, for the famous Persian poem by Mahmud Shabistari (d. 720/1320), the 'Rosary of Mystery' (*gulshan-i raz*), the vade-mecum of Iranian Sufism, was commentated and expanded by Ismaili teaching.

The questions thus propounded are very recent, and are a consequence of the bringing to light, thanks mainly to the labours of W. Ivanow, of what has survived of Alamuti literature, all of which is in Persian. (We know that Alamut's library was completely destroyed by the Mongols.) We should, however, add to this literature the Arabic literature of the Ismailis of Syria, who under the powerful personality of their head, Rashid al-Din Sinan (1140-92 AD), had a direct link with Alamut. (We also know that a tragic misunderstanding on the part of the Templars wrecked an agreement that had already been



concluded between these 'Templars of Islam' and the King of Jerusalem.) Of the Persian works of Alamut, mention should principally be made of the great book of the *Tasawwurat*, attributed to Nasir al-Din Tusi (d. 672/1273)—an attribution which there is no good reason to contest; the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century works by Sayyid Suhrab Wali al-Badakhshani, Abu Ishaq al-Quhistani, and the prolific author Khayr-Khwah al-Hirati. All of them have preserved much older fragments, most notably the 'Four Chapters' by al-Hasan ibn al-Sabbah himself. Equally, they testify to a renaissance of Ismaili thought, concomitant to the renaissance of Shiite thought in general and possibly one of its contributing factors. Indeed, it was during the same period that Twelver Shiism {principally with Haydar Amuli and Ibn Abi Jumhur}, having assimilated the work of Ibn al-'Arabi, was induced to 'rethink' its relation to Sufism and thus to Ismailism also.

4. It is extraordinary to observe how a Twelver Shiite author of the stature of Haydar Amuli {eighth/fourteenth century} realizes, with no polemical bias, the essential difference separating him from the Ismailis. He formulates this difference in terms which do no less than explain the consequences of the Great Resurrection proclaimed at Alamut. Whereas Twelver Shiite gnosis tries to preserve the simultaneity and equilibrium of *zahir* and *batin*, Ismaili gnosis, by contrast, sees all exterior appearance, all exoteric aspect (*zahir*) as having a hidden inner meaning, an esoteric reality (*batin*). This esoteric reality is superior to the exterior appearance, for the initiate's spiritual progress depends upon the degree to which he understands it, and hence the exoteric aspect is a shell which must be shattered once and for all. This is achieved by the *ta'wil*, the Ismaili exegesis which 'redirects' the factual realities of the *shari'ah* to their gnostic truth (*haqiqah*), the understanding of the true meaning of the literal revelation or *tanzil*, positive religion. If the faithful initiate acts in accordance with the spiritual meaning, the obligations imposed by the *shari'ah* are abolished for him. This accords profoundly with the meaning of the philosophy explained above in the exegesis of the '*hadith* of the tomb'.

The Guide to this spiritual meaning—he whose very person *is* this meaning, since it is the earthly manifestation of a primordial Theophany—is the Imam. Consequently, the Imam and the Imamate, which is eternal, take precedence over the prophet and the prophetic mission,

which is temporary. As we have seen, Twelver Shiism declares that the supremacy of *walayah* over *nubuwah* must be contemplated in the person of the Prophet; it does not mean that the person of the *wali* is superior to that of the nabi-Messenger. By contrast, Ismailism derives a radical conclusion from this. Since the *walayah* is superior to the prophecy of which it is the source, it follows that the person of the *wali*—that is to say the Imam—takes precedence over that of the Prophet, and the Imamate always has and always will take precedence over the prophetic mission. What Twelver Shiism sees as being at the end of an eschatological perspective, is realized 'in the present' by the Ismailism of Alamut, through an anticipation of eschatology which is a revolt of the Spirit against all enslavement. The philosophical, theological and sociological consequences and implications of this in relation to the rest of Islam are more than we can speak of here. Taking the recently published texts as our guide, we can do no more than indicate their essential presupposition: an anthropology on which the philosophy of the resurrection depends, and which finds expression in the concept of the Imam.

## 2. The concept of the Imam

1. Ismaili Adamology was briefly delineated above (B, 1,3). On the one hand, the partial Adam who inaugurated our cycle was the first prophet of this cycle of occultation; on the other hand, the initial Adam or *pananthropos*, the earthly image of the celestial Anthropos, in inaugurating *ab origine* the first cycle of epiphany, became the First Imam and the founder of the Imamate, the permanent religion of humanity. On this intuition is based the Ismaili insistence on the theme of the Imam as the 'man of God' (*mard-i Khuda* in Persian, *cf.* the *anthropos tou Theou* in Philo), as the Face of God, Perfect Man (*anthropos teleios*). 'Whoever in his time has failed to understand *who* the Perfect Man was, will remain a stranger. In this sense has it been said: He who has seen me, has seen God.' We have already observed that a similar echo from the Gospel of John (14:9), confirmed by others, fits excellently into the structure which gives Imamology in relation to Shiite theology a position similar to that of Christology in relation to Christian theology. One divines, along with the secret of Ismaili Imamology—thus vindicating a number of traditions going back to the holy Imam—that which constitutes the essence of this Imamology: the

exaltation of the Imam as the Perfect Man to the supreme rank and, as a corollary to this, the decisive and definitive supremacy of the *ta'wil*—of, that is to say, esoteric Islam over exoteric Islam, of the religion of the Resurrection over the religion of the Law.

This concept of the Imam is integral to the entire philosophy of mankind. Because the human Form is 'the image of the divine Form', it is *par excellence* invested with the theophanic function. It thereby assumes the function of cosmic salvation, because the return to the World beyond—the world of spiritual entities—is the transition to a state of existence in which everything takes the form of human reality, since it is the human being alone who possesses speech, the *logos*. Thus, it is through the instrumentality of Man that things rediscover the way back to the Origin. But this perfect human Form—this theophany disclosed in pre-eternity—is that of the Imam. To say that the Imam is the Man of God, Perfect Man, is to acknowledge him as the supreme instrument of soteriology. Likewise, soteriology is in itself conditioned by the *tahqiq*, the realization of the *true meaning* of all exoteric forms, just as this realization is conditioned by the *ta'wil*, the function of the Imam. Once more, what this Imamology envisages essentially is not the empirical figure of any particular Imam, but the reality and the essence of an eternal Imam, of whom each Imam individually is the earthly exemplification. This is the eternal Imam to whom reference is made in the Quranic expression *mawlana*, 'our lord', or whom it is said that he always existed, exists and will exist. All the various versions of his Coming are relative to men's perception. In the divine pleroma {'*alam-iKhuda*) these mutations have no place.

2. An immediate consequence of this is that knowledge of the Imam, of the Perfect Man, *is* the only knowledge of God possible to man, since the Imam is the initial theophany. In the phrase quoted above, as in all similar phrases, the speaker is the eternal Imam. 'Prophets pass and change. We are eternal Men.' 'I knew God before Heaven and Earth were created.' 'The light cast by the lamp is not the lamp itself; but if this light did not exist, how would one know what the lamp is, or even whether or not there is a lamp and where it is?' 'The Men of God are not God himself; nevertheless, they are inseparable from God.' Because the Imamate is the primordial theophany, the revelation of the divine Abyss and the *guide* towards this Revelation, the Imam is the supreme *hujjah*, the guarantor who *answers for* the

unknowable divinity. This is stated in the great sermon preached by the Imam Hasan 'a/a *dhikrihi al-salam*, on the 8th August 1164 CE, when he proclaimed the Great Resurrection at Alamut: '*Mawlana* (our lord) is the Resurrector (*qa'im al-qiyama*); he is the lord of beings; he is the lord who is the absolute act of being [*al-wujud al-mutlaq*]; he excludes all existential determination, for he transcends them all; he opens up the threshold of his Mercy, and through the light of his Knowledge he causes all beings to see, hear and speak for all eternity'. Only the eternal Imam, as a theophany, makes possible an ontology: since he is *the* revealed one, he is *being* as such. He is the absolute Person, the eternal divine Face (*chahrah-i Khuda* in Persian), the supreme divine Attribute and supreme Name of God. In his earthly form he is the epiphany of the supreme Word (*mazhar-i kalimah-i a 'la*), the Bringer of Truth in every age (*muhiqq-i vaqt*), the manifestation of Eternal Man who manifests the Face of God.

A second consequence is that for man, knowledge of self presupposes knowledge of the Imam. On the basis of the statement of the fourth Imam that 'Knowledge of God is knowledge of the Imam', our texts repeat: 'He who dies without having known his Imam, dies the death of the oblivious'. The reason for this may be sought in the specific interpretation given to the maxim repeated by all Islamic spirituals: 'He who knows himself knows his Lord, *that is to say*, he knows his Imam.' this is the knowledge that was promised by the first Imam: 'Be faithful to me, and I will make you as similar to myself as Salman.' It emerges from these texts that knowledge of God, of the Imam and of the self are aspects of one and the same fundamental, liberating knowledge, of the same gnosis.

This is the reason why the Persian texts of the tradition of Alamut emphasize the four possible ways of knowing the Imam. 'One may possess knowledge of his person in its physical form—a knowledge of which even animals are capable. One may possess knowledge of his official name and of his earthly genealogy—a knowledge to which even his enemies have access. There is the knowledge which recognizes his Imamate—a knowledge shared by all the members of the *da'wah*. Finally, there is the knowledge of his Essence according to the eternal reality of his attributes—a knowledge, that is, which presupposes a transcendence of all other modes of knowing. Such knowledge dazzles the soul, and is the privilege of the *hujjah*.' Likewise, there is a

quadruple line of descent relative to the Imam, as follows: according to the flesh; in the spiritual sense; according both to the flesh and in the spiritual sense; and, lastly, according to the flesh, the spiritual sense and the eternal reality of his essence. The Imam's purely spiritual descendant (*farzand-i ma'nawi*) is the *hujjah*—a status which has its archetype in Salman the Persian, and which, according to the promise of the Imam, is exemplified in every faithful initiate. With the promotion of the *hujjah* to the highest rank, the entire traditional hierarchy is modified.

### 3. Imamology and the philosophy of resurrection

1. One can speak here of a radical shift. It is always the case that the hierarchy of the *hudud* denotes their respective degree of proximity to the Imam. But now the meaning of this hierarchy tends to become more interior, and 'the limits' indicate rather the degrees of 'conformity with the Imam' that correspond to stages in the progress of one's inner consciousness. The *ta'wil* makes the hierocosmos {the esoteric hierarchical brotherhood} symbolize with the microcosm. The consequence of this is a fall in the rank assigned to the *natiq*, the prophet who proclaims a Law, and a different appreciation of the cycle of prophecy. Both these are corollaries of the elevation of the rank of *hujjah*. The predominance of the syzygy Prophet-Imam is replaced by that of the Imam and his *hujjah*.

In Twelver Shiite theosophy, the mission of the prophet of Islam marked the full noonday hour {the equilibrium between *zahir* and *batin*). Shortly after began the decline towards evening, the return into the night of esotericism, the cycle of the pure *walayah*. In Ismaili theosophy, the entry of the *haqiqah*—the pure spiritual religion—into the night of esotericism began not with Muhammad, Seal of prophets, but with the very first prophet, Adam, who initiated our present cycle of occultation—that is to say, it began with the beginnings of present humanity. Ismaili pessimism confronts this radical disaster with its entire philosophy of Resurrection, with its revolt, even, against the *shari'ah*.

The six great periods of 'legislative prophecy' are always seen as the *hexaameron*, the 'six days' of the creation of the religious cosmos or hierocosmos, each 'day' being counted as a 'millennium'. But in point of fact, the six 'days' are the night of divine religion (*shab-i din*),

the night of the Imam, because during these six days the literal Law or *shari'ah* of the legislative prophets is the veil hiding the reality, hiding the sun of the Imam. Just as the sun is replaced by the moon in illuminating the night, the Imam is replaced by him who is his *hujjah*, his proof or guarantor (his 'Salman'). Knowledge of the Imam in his true Essence will only become manifest on the *seventh day*, that is, on the day after the still-continuing *hexaameron*. Only the seventh day will truly partake of the nature of day, that on which the sun shines forth {the *yawm al-qiyamah* or day of the Resurrection).

2. Within the context of this vision of things, the drop in rank of the prophet-legislator needs no explanation. Whereas in Twelver Imamism, as in Fatimid Ismailism, he ranked first (being the earthly homologue of the First Intelligence), in the Ismailism of Alamut he ranks third. It seems, indeed, that in this the Imamology of Alamut merely reproduces an order of precedence that existed in pre-Fatimid Ismailism, one represented by the order of succession of the three symbolic letters *'ayn* {'Ali, the Imam), *sin* (Salman, Gabriel, the *hujjah*), and *man* (Muhammad, the Prophet). The Prophet, in fact, in his capacity as a *natiq*—the annunciator of a *shari'ah*—has the rank and function of a *da'i* who 'convokes' men *towards* the Imam who is the secret meaning of the *shari'ah* he announces. This is why each prophet, at the beginning of his vocation as *da'i*, has gone to meet the *hujjah* of the Imam of his time, who stands in the same relation to him as Khidr-Elijah, Moses' prophet-initiator, stood to Moses. (In the Ismaili exegesis of the history of the prophets, Paradise for Adam, the ark for Noah, the Burning Bush for Moses, Mary for Jesus, and Salman for Muhammad are all interpreted as figurations of the meeting with the *hujjah*.) Every initiate in his turn follows the example of the prophet-*da'i* and advances towards the same encounter, towards spiritual union with the *hujjah*: they become gnostics (*arif*) who share in the same gnosis. This is the meaning of the Imam's promise to his disciple when he tells him that he will make him as similar to himself M Salman. The diminution in the number of 'grades' in the hierarchy of Alamut in no way corresponds to a 'loss of man-power'; it corresponds to a metaphysical deepening of the concept of the Imamate, with the result that prophetic philosophy culminates in a philosophy of resurrection.

The Imam stands in the same relation to his *hujjah* as the creative

*Esto* to the first Intelligence. Such is the privileged situation of the *hujjah*, of all those whose archetype is Salman: those of whom it is said that from the very beginning the spiritual essence [*ma'na*] of each of their persons is the same as the Imam's (whence comes the fourth of the modes of knowledge and filiation described above). 'To be promoted to the rank of *hujjah*' is to exemplify in one's own person the case of Salman, to attain to the 'Salman of your being'—the 'Salman of the microcosm', as it is called in the ancient treatise *Umm al-Kitab*, which we cited above. With regard to the secret of such an attainment, the following few lines may perhaps yield the supreme message of Ismaili philosophy: 'The Imam has said: I am with my friends wherever they seek me, on the mountain, in the plain and in the desert. The man to whom I have revealed my Essence, that is to say the mystical knowledge of myself, has no further need of my physical proximity. And this is the Great Resurrection.'

#### 4. *Ismailism and Sufism*

1. The texts of the Ismaili tradition of Alamut show us both the way in which Imamology fructifies in mystical experience, and how it presupposes such an experience. The conjunction of Ismailism and Sufism, which took place after the time of Alamut, refers us to the as yet unsolved problem of origins. If we agree with the Shiite spirituals that Sunni Sufism is something which, by endowing the Prophet alone with the attributes of the Imam and thereby making the *walayah* into an Imamology without an Imam, parted company with Shiism at a given moment, then the Ismailism of Alamut does no more than restore the old order of things. Hence its importance for all Shiite Sufism after this period, as well as for the entire cultural field whose language was Persian.

2. We have just seen how the replacement of the pair *Nabi-Imam* by the pair Imam-hujjah reflects the process of mystical interiorization. In a commentary on Mahmud al-Shabistari's 'Rosary of Mystery' by an anonymous Ismaili writer, the *unio mystica* of the Imam and the *hujjah* is mediated in the magnificent symbol of the olive tree growing at the top of Mount Sinai (Quran 95:1-2). There are two mountains, the mountain of intelligence and the mountain of love. In his meditation on the secret of the earthly human Form, in which is concealed the

love of the 'hidden Treasure which longed to be known', the mystical pilgrim discovers that his own person, like that of Moses, is the Sinai at the summit (or the heart) of which is revealed the theophanic Form of the eternal Imam. Upon this summit, or within this sanctuary, the 'Soul of the soul' is revealed to the soul as the mystical olive tree which stands on the invisible heights of the Sinai of love. The pilgrim must climb the Sinai of love, which is higher than the mountain of Intelligence; for although the intellect is the guide leading to the secret of the theophany, it is also the guide who ultimately steps aside, like Virgil in the presence of Beatrice.

As we have seen, in performing this inner pilgrimage the disciple does no more than repeat the initial step of each prophet in search of the Imam. To reach the summit of the Sinai of his soul is, for the mystic, to realize the state of Salman the Pure, of the *hujjah*: it is to attain to the Soul of the soul (*jan-i-jan*). This Soul is the Imam, the olive tree growing on the top of the Sinai of love; and the soul of the mystic is this very love, since the Sinai is the Sinai of his being. Thus, what the soul discovers at the summit, or the heart, of her being is the Imam as the eternal beloved. The syzygy of the Imam and his *hujjah* becomes the inner dialogue between the Beloved and the Lover. The Soul of his soul is her to whom he is able to say *thou*, it is his 'I' in the second person. As it was for Moses on Sinai, in the presence of the Soul of his soul, the 'Moses of his being', his 'I' in the first person, is obliterated. In contemplating herself in the Soul of the soul, the soul becomes the object of contemplation of the Soul of the soul, and this latter, in its place and time, utters the words: *Ego sum Deus*. In this manner the famous pronouncement of al-Hallaj (*ana al-haqq*), repeated over the centuries by the Sufis, acquires a truly Shiite flavour. Imamology frees it from the trap of transcendental monism, which created so many problems for reflexive thought.

3. Ultimately, the mystical experience of the Sufis encompasses a metaphysic which baffles both the dialectic of philosophers pure and simple, and that of the theologians of the *kalam*. It will be clear, from what has been said here, that there is yet another form of metaphysics in Islam, without which it may be impossible to explain the beginnings and the development of Sufism. This other form is essentially the Shiite gnosis which goes back to the Imams themselves. Our endeavour here—the first, as we believe, of its kind—has been to show the unique

originality of this form, insofar as it represents the response of prophetic philosophy to the demands of a prophetic religion. Because it is essentially the explanation of the hidden spiritual meaning, this form of metaphysics is eschatological; and being eschatological, it remains open to the future.

With the dialectical theologians of the Sunni *kalian* we enter an altogether different 'clime'.

## . The Sunni *Kalam*

### A. THE MU'TAZILITES

#### 1. *The origins*

1. The Arabic word *kalam* signifies word or speech. The word *mutakallim* designates him who speaks, the orator (in grammar, the first person). It is not possible here to trace the evolution whereby the word *kalam* came to mean simply theology, and the word *mutakallimun* (those engaged in the science of the *kalam*, '*ilm al-kalam*') came to mean the 'theologians'. This would involve a more detailed analysis of the genesis of the problem, touched on below, of the Quran as *kalam Allah*, the 'Word of God'. Furthermore, the science of the *kalam*, as the scholastic theology of Islam, came to mean more particularly a theology professing atomism, an atomism which, while it is reminiscent of the atomism of Democritus and Epicurus, is entirely different in context.

As the scholasticism of Islam, the *kalam* manifests itself as pure rational *dialectic* which operates upon the concepts of theology. We are dealing neither with mystical gnosis (*'irfan*), nor with the 'science of the heart' of which the Shiite Imams were the first to speak. Moreover, as the philosophers al-Farabi and Averroes, as well as Mulla .Sadra al-Shirazi, have emphasized, the *mutakallimun* are above all apologists, devoted not so much to a demonstrated or demonstrable truth as to upholding, with the aid of all the resources of their theological dialectic, the articles of their traditional religious credo. Such a task is doubtless inescapable where a religious community is concerned: there was also a Shiite *kalam*. But the Imams were already warning their followers against any exclusive attachment to the problems and method of the *kalam*. This is because mystical theosophy—*'irfan*—functions in a manner which is hermeneutical rather than dialectic, and keeps itself as aloof as possible from all 'intellectualism'.

those known as *Mu'tazilites* are considered to be the earliest

*mutakallimun*. They form, without any doubt, a school of speculative religious thought which is of prime importance, their labours being based on the fundamental religious facts of Islam. But what we have already explained in chapter II absolves us from subscribing to a current point of view which regards this situation as the privilege of this school. Rather this school does no more than develop one aspect of these facts, the totality of whose aspects demands, if it is to be fully grasped, no longer a conceptual dialectic but a 'prophetic philosophy'. We must confine ourselves here to a brief description of the Mu'tazilites and their doctrine, following this with an account of the life and work of the great figure of Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari.

2. The name *Mu'tazilites* designates a group of Muslim thinkers which was formed in the town of Basrah during the first half of the second century AH. Their movement expanded so rapidly that the name came to designate a considerable proportion of the cultured Muslim elite. Baghdad, the capital of the 'Abbasid empire, was during the reign of several caliphs the centre of their school, and for a time their doctrine was even adopted as the official doctrine of Sunni Islam.

Several explanations have been given of their name. The heresiographer al-Baghdadi, for example, believes that the name *Mu'tazilite* derives from the fact that the sect was 'separate' from the Muslim community because of its conception of 'sin' and of the 'sinner'. (Of course, the use of these two words bears no relation here to the specifically Christian notion of sin with all that it implies.) In fact, the Mu'tazilites consider sin to be an intermediate state between faith (*Iman*) and unbelief (*kufur*). Al-Shahrastani voices another opinion: Wasil ibn 'Ata' (d. 131/748), founder of the Mu'tazilite school, was opposed to his teacher Hasan al-Basri (d. 110/728) on the question of grave sins. Having given public expression to his point of view, he left Hasan al-Basri's circle, and his followers formed, around the pillar of the Great Mosque, a new group to which Wasil ibn 'Ata' expounded his doctrine. Thereupon Hasan al-Basri cried, 'Wasil has *separated* himself from us (*i'tazala 'anna*)'. From that time onwards Wasil and his followers were known by the name of *Mu'tazilites*, the 'separate', the 'secessionists'. Al-Nawbakhti (in his *Firaq al-Shi'ah*), however, expresses a Shiite point of view: 'Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas, 'Abd Allah ibn 'Umar, Muhammad ibn Maslamah, Usamah ibn Zayd—they all separated themselves from 'Ali (the first Imam); they abstained from

fighting either for or against him. Hence they were named *Mu'tazilites*. They are the ancestors of all the later Mu'tazilites.'

3. Two ideas emerge from these different opinions. (1) The term *Mu'tazilite* must have been applied to the followers of this doctrine by their enemies. The name is therefore in itself a term of disapproval: those who separated themselves, who seceded. (2) The initial cause of Mu'tazilism must have been a 'political' choice. In fact, if one gives serious consideration both to the Mu'tazilite doctrine and to the choice in question, one is bound to conclude that 'politics' is not a sufficient reason for either.

As regards the name *Mu'tazilites*, it is inconceivable that it should have been applied to them solely by their enemies. Throughout their history they have borne their name with pride, not as an implied condemnation. Surely, therefore, it had another meaning for them. Two principles are at the heart of their doctrine: with regard to God, the principle of transcendence and of absolute Unity; with regard to man, the principle of individual liberty involving direct responsibility for our actions. Rightly or wrongly, they believed that they were alone in upholding and developing these principles. (As a matter of fact, the Shiites are in complete agreement with them about the principle of human responsibility.) We should observe that the Quran, representing the Seven Sleepers as models of faith and loyalty, actually defines their attitude by the word *i'tizal* (18:16), because in their worship of the One they had *separated* themselves from a community which had fallen into unbelief. As the Mu'tazilites understand it, the qualification does not denigrate them; if they 'separated' themselves, it was in order to preserve the purity of the *tawhid* and to defend justice and human liberty.

On the other hand, the political events which took place in the Muslim community, however important these might have been, cannot be considered sufficient reason for the appearance of Mu'tazilism. Of course, the investiture of Abu Bakr as caliph of the Muslim community, instead and in place of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib; the assassination of 'Uthman, the third caliph; the splitting up of the Muslim community into various camps after the bloody struggle between Mu'awiyah and 'Ali—all these events forced the Muslims, including the thinkers, to take a stand in the face of the problems confronting them.

Yet here again, what was at stake in these struggles infinitely

surpasses what we normally think of as 'politics'. Is the investiture of the lawful Imam of the community a purely *social* question, with the Imam subject to the vote of the Muslim community and answerable to it? Or does his function possess a *metaphysical* significance, a significance which is intimately bound up with the destiny of the community beyond this world, and unable, for this very reason, to depend upon a majority vote? What is at issue is the essence of Shiite Islam (see above, ch. II). And—quite independently of their concern for justice—what is the actual theological and legal status of those who have rebelled against the invested Imam? We are not concerned with theory, but with a reality which is concrete and existential. The Mu'tazilites had to find a solution which accorded with their thought.

4. Other factors, too, enter into the elaboration of this thought. There is their reaction and their general attitude with regard to the non-Muslim groups established at the centre of Muslim society: the Mazdeans in Iraq, the Christians and Jews in Syria. H. S. Nyberg considers, rightly, that one of the determining factors of Mu'tazilite thought was their opposition to the dualism of certain Iranian sects which had spread into Kufah and Basrah. This is corroborated by other evidence, mainly from the *Kitab al-Aghani*: Wasil ibn 'Ata' and 'Amr ibn 'Ubayd, the two great figures of Mu'tazilism in its infancy, often took part in meetings organized in the house of a nobleman of Azd, in which those present explained and defended the dualistic doctrine of ancient Iran.

The Mu'tazilites paid equal attention to certain Jewish and Christian ideas, the incidence of which might have a bearing on dogmatic and moral theology as well as on the very concept of Islam and the person of him who founded it. It could justifiably be said that the Mu'tazilite conception of the divine Unity was motivated in part by reaction against certain aspects of the Christian dogma of the Trinity. In fact, the Mu'tazilites deny that the divine Essence possesses any attributes. They deny, too, that attributes possess any positive reality distinct from the single Essence: if one were to affirm the contrary, one would find oneself, they maintain, in the presence of a divinity which was no longer just triune but multiple, because the divine attributes are unlimited.

Similarly, their doctrine affirming that the Quran is *created* can be viewed as being in opposition to the Christian dogma of the Incarnation. In fact, according to them, to say that the Quran *is the* divine uncreated Word which manifests itself in time in the form of Arabic speech, is

equivalent to saying what Christians say about the Incarnation: that Christ *is* the divine uncreated Word, who manifests himself in time in the form of a human being. This is so because the difference between the dogma of the *uncreated* Quran and the dogma of the Incarnation lies not so much in the nature of the divine Word itself as in the modality of its manifestation: whereas, for Christianity, the Word was made flesh in Christ, the same Word was here made announcement in the Quran. {We saw above in I, 1 how the *'irfani* philosophers viewed this stormy dispute. Shiite Imamology does not separate the problem of the Quranic Revelation from the problem of its spiritual exegesis [see above, ch. II]. Hence, comparisons of Imamology with the problems of Christology possess a significance even more specific than that of the relationship mentioned here, in that Imamology always opts for exactly the type of solution which official Christian dogma rejects.}

## 2. *The doctrine*

It is difficult to start by speaking of a single Mu'tazilite doctrine if one wishes to do justice to the richness and diversity of its many forms, and to preserve what is peculiar to each of its thinkers. Nevertheless, there are five principles which are accepted by all Mu'tazilites, and no one could be a member of their school who did not accept them. Of these five principles, the first two are concerned with divinity; the third possesses an eschatological aspect; and the fourth and fifth are concerned with moral theology. What follows is a brief description of them.

(1) The *tawhid* {the divine Unity). This is the fundamental dogma of Islam. The Mu'tazilites did not, therefore, 'invent' it, but can be distinguished by the interpretations they give of it and by the way in which they apply these interpretations to other areas of theology. The Mu'tazilites liked to call themselves the 'men of the *tawhid*' (*ahl al-tawhid*). In *Maqalat al-Islamiyin*, al-Ash'ari describes the Mu'tazilite conception of the *tawhid* as follows: 'God is unique, nothing is like him; he is neither body, nor individual, nor substance, nor accident. He is beyond time. He cannot dwell in a place or within a being; he is not the object of any creatural attribute or qualification. He is neither conditioned nor determined, neither engendered nor engendering. He is beyond the perception of the senses. The eyes cannot see him, observation cannot attain him, the imagination cannot comprehend

him. He is a thing, but he is not like other things; he is omniscient, all-powerful, but his omniscience and his all-mightiness cannot be compared to anything created. He created the world without any pre-established archetype and without an auxiliary.'

This conception of the divine Being and of his unity is static, not dynamic. Ontologically, it is limited to the plane of unconditioned being, and does not extend to the plane of non-unconditioned being. The result is the negation of the divine attributes, the affirmation of the created Quran, and the denial of all possibility of the vision of God in the world beyond (*cf.* above, II, A, 3). These serious consequences have played a considerable role in the dogmatic thought of Islam, and have brought the community to an awareness of fundamental religious values.

(2) Divine justice (*al-'adl*). In their consideration of divine-justice, the Mu'tazilites take into account human responsibility and human liberty. {We have already noted their accord with the Shiites on this point.) In so doing they affirm that the principle of divine justice involves the liberty and responsibility of man, or rather, that our freedom and responsibility proceed from the principle itself of divine justice. If it were otherwise, the idea of reward or punishment in the hereafter would be meaningless, and the idea of divine justice deprived of its foundation. Yet how is it possible to reconcile the idea of human liberty and the fact of man as master of his destiny with certain passages in the Quran which affirm the opposite—as, for example, when it is expressly stated that everything that happens to us happens according to the divine *mashi'ah*, or that everything we do is written in a celestial register? The Mu'tazilites' answer to this is that the divine *mashi'ah* (it could be translated as 'innate divine Will') which encompasses all things, denotes neither God's acts of volition (*iradah*) nor his acts of command (*amr*), but his eternal design and his creative genius, these being two aspects of his infinite knowledge. Similarly, the Quranic statement that 'everything is written in a celestial register' expresses metaphysically divine knowledge itself. This knowledge is not opposed to human liberty, because its object is not the *act*, as in the case of volition and command, but *being*.

Moreover, in affirming human freedom, the Mu'tazilites maintain that this principle does not proceed simply from our idea of divine justice, but is, over and above all, fully in agreement with the Quran

itself when it states expressly that each soul is responsible for what it acquires: 'Whoever does what is just and right, does so for his own good; and whoever does evil, does so to his own hurt' (41.46 and 45.16). This verse and many others affirm human freedom. Finally, all Muslims admit that God has imposed obligations on them, cultural, social, moral, etc. How is one to conceive of the idea of obligation without admitting that man is free and the master of his actions?

(3) Things promised in the hereafter (*wa'd* and *wa'id*). All Muslim sects and doctrines accept that God has promised to reward his faithful and has threatened unbelievers with punishment. The Mu'tazilites link this article of faith with their concepts of divine justice and of human liberty. Divine justice stipulates that he who remains faithful should not receive the same treatment as he who is guilty of unbelief. And, granted that man is free, it follows that he is responsible for his actions, whether good or bad. Thus the idea of divine grace plays a very unobtrusive part in Mu'tazilite teaching: what predominates is the idea of justice.

(4) The intermediary situation (*al-manzilah bayn al-manzilatayn*). As we saw above, this thesis was responsible for the break—the 'separation'—between Wasil ibn 'Ata', founder of the Mu'tazilite school, and his teacher Hasan al-Basri. Their disagreement turned on the concept of 'sin'. The Mu'tazilites view sin in relation to faith and to unbelief, and theologically and legally regard the situation of the 'sinner' as different both from that of the Muslim and from that of the non-Muslim. The Mu'tazilites, in common with all the theologians and lawgivers of Islam, distinguish between two types of sin: *sagha'ir*, or mild faults, and *kaba'ir*, grave faults. The faults in the first category do not merit expulsion from the circle of believers, so long as the sinner does not repeat his offence. The faults in the second category are also divided into two types: *kufir* (unbelief), and the rest. The latter, according to the Mu'tazilites, exclude the Muslim from the community, even though he is not necessarily considered a *kafir* (an unbeliever in the absolute sense). The sinner is thus in an intermediary situation, neither a believer nor an unbeliever. This 'in-between' view also had its problems.

(5) The moral imperative (*al-amr bi-al-ma'ruf*). The last of the five essential Mu'tazilite theses is concerned with the life of the community;



it envisages the putting into practice of the principles of justice and liberty in social behaviour. For the Mu'tazilites, justice does not merely consist in the personal avoidance of evil and injustice; it is also an act in which the whole community co-operates in order to create an atmosphere of equality and social harmony, thanks to which each individual is able to realize his potentialities. Similarly, liberty and human responsibility are not confined simply to the exercise of the individual's various faculties, but extend, or should extend, to the entire community. This is also a principle which is often expressed in the holy Book of Islam. But the ingenuity of the Mu'tazilite school lay in basing the principle of moral and social action on the theological principle of justice and human liberty.

#### B. ABU AL-HASAN AL-ASH'ARI

##### 1. *The life and works of al-Ash'ari*

1. Abu al-Hasan 'Ali ibn Isma'il al-Ash'ari was born at Basrah in the year 260/873. From his youth he was an adherent of the Mu'tazilite school, whose doctrines he studied under one of the most representative teachers of the sect at that time, al-Jubba'i (d. 303/915). Till the age of forty he followed the teaching of the school, and throughout this period he undertook the defence of the Mu'tazilite doctrines, to which end he himself wrote a fair number of books. Then, on the evidence of his biographers, when he had reached the age of forty, al-Ash'ari shut himself up in his house for a retreat lasting at least two weeks. On emerging from this retreat, he burst into the Great Mosque at Basrah at the hour of the meeting for prayer. Here he announced in a loud voice: 'He who knows me, knows me. To him who knows me not, I will make myself known. I am 'Ali ibn Isma'il al-Ash'ari. Formerly I professed the Mu'tazilite doctrine, believing in the created Quran, denying the divine vision in the hereafter, denying God all attributes and all positive qualifications—Let all bear witness that I now renounce this doctrine and abandon it forever.'

The biographers have found many reasons to explain this astonishing reversal. It seems that the main reason must be sought both in himself and in the external situation—that is, in the division of the Sunni Muslim community, then split into two extremes. Where the personal inner reason is concerned, Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari was profoundly opposed to the excessive rationalism of the Mu'tazilite teachers in their con-

ception of God and of human salvation. Had not the divinity, the object of their speculations, become a pure abstraction, bearing no relation either to the world or to man? What meaning and metaphysical implication can knowledge and worship have for man if everything is determined by the simple fact of causality in creation? It pained Abu al-Hasan to see the point to which Sunni Muslim opinion was dominated by extremist tendencies. On the one hand, there were the Mu'tazilites with their abstract speculations, and on the other hand there were the literalists, who, in reaction to Mu'tazilite rationalism, had stiffened their attitude still further. Thus, al-Ash'ari's 'conversion'—the radical reversal that he underwent—must be explained both by his intention to resolve his own problem, and by his determination to offer the divided community a way out of the impasse.

2. Al-Ash'ari wrote a large number of works, both during his Mu'tazilite period and after his conversion. He says himself that he must have written at least ninety books, encompassing almost the entire body of theological knowledge of the period. He wrote a commentary on the Quran. He composed an anthology on the *shari'ah*, an anthology of *hadith* and anecdotes, treatises against the materialists, the *kharijites*, and, after his conversion, works in which he criticized the Mu'tazilites. Among those of his works which have come down to us, two are of particular importance.

In the first of these, *Maqalat al-Islamiyin*, al-Ash'ari gives a precise and objective description of all the doctrines known in his time. This treatise can be considered one of the most important *summae* in the history of dogma, and as possibly the best in the history of doctrine and dogma in Islam. It is divided into three parts. The first contains a detailed description of the different Islamic sects and doctrines; the second describes the attitudes and practices of the 'men of the *hadith*', the literalists; and the final section deals with the different branches of the *kalam*.

The second work, *Kitab al-Ibanah*, is strictly devoted to a description of the doctrine of Sunni Islam. It begins by praising Ahmad ibn Hanbal, founder of the Hanbalite juridical rite, who died in 241/855. It then goes on to deal, in no particular order, with different theological themes, all of them developed in the light of the writer's new orientation. Although we can say definitely that this second work was written during

the second period of al-Ash'ari's life, we cannot risk saying the same of the first.

Al-Ash'ari died in Baghdad in 324/935, having lived a full and admirable life.

## 2. *The doctrine of al-Ash'ari*

1. *The tendencies of the system.* Al-Ash'ari's system is dominated by two tendencies which, though apparently contradictory, are actually complementary. On the one hand, he appears to approximate so closely to one or another juridical school of Islam that he has sometimes been called Shafi'ite, sometimes Malikite and sometimes Hanbalite. On the other hand, he manifests an obvious reserve, for his dearest wish was above all to reconcile the different schools of Sunnism, all of which, in his view, agreed with regard to their principles, and only differed in the matter of their application. Ibn' Asakir gives the following account of his point of view: 'Every *mujtahid* is right, and all the *mujtahids* are established on a solid ground of truth. Their differences are not to do with principles, but are the result of their application.' In the domain of dogma or, more specifically, in the domain of the proofs adduced to support dogma, al-Ash'ari is in no way contemptuous of the value of rational demonstration as used by the literalists. But although he does not accept, on the grounds that it was practised neither by the Prophet nor by his Companions, that the use of rational demonstration is a heresy, he does not go so far as to regard reason as an absolute criterion where either faith or the fundamental facts of religion are concerned.

Al-Ash'ari thus takes a stand that is opposed to the Mu'tazilites, for two essential reasons.

(a) To attribute an absolute value to reason amounts not to upholding religion, as the Mu'tazilites say, but to suppressing it by substituting reason pure and simple for faith. Why should I have faith in God and in his revelations if the rational faculty within me is superior to the actual facts of religion? (b) In the Quran it is often said that faith in the *ghayb*—the invisible, the supra-sensible, the mystery—is an essential principle of the religious life, without which faith can have no foundation. But the *ghayb* is that which surpasses rational demonstration. Therefore, to adopt reason as the absolute criterion in the domain of dogma is incompatible with the principle of faith in the *ghayb*.

Al-Ash'ari's system of thought is thus distinguished by the wish to reconcile two extremes. This tendency appears in almost all the solutions he proposed, and it is the reason why his thought and doctrine had such a large following in Sunni Islam for several centuries. By way of example, we will look at the position adopted by al-Ash'ari before three great theological problems: the divine Attributes, the Quran, and human freedom.

2. *The divine Attributes.* As we saw, the Mu'tazilites believed that God is deprived of all positive attributes, in the sense that all divine qualifications must be understood as being the essence itself. The literalists, on the other hand, by reason of their naive conception of the divine Attributes, came to represent the divinity as a complex of names and qualifications alongside the divine essence itself. The Mu'tazilite attitude is known in the history of dogma by the name of *ta'til*, that is to say, it consists in depriving God of all operative action and ends finally in agnosticism. (It should be noted that the meaning of the root word % from which *ta'til* is derived, was applied in ancient Arabic usage to the well without water and to the childless woman.) In contrast with this, the attitude of the extreme literalists is known by the name *tashbih* (anthropomorphism). We have already encountered these two terms in another context (see above ch. II).

The solution proposed by al-Ash'ari concedes that the divine Being possesses in a real sense the Attributes and Names mentioned in the Quran. Insofar as these Names and Attributes have a positive reality, they are distinct from the essence, but nevertheless they do not have either existence or reality apart from it. The happy inspiration of al-Ash'ari in this matter was on the one hand to distinguish essence and attribute as concepts, and on the other hand to see that the duality between essence and attribute should be situated not on the quantitative but on the qualitative level—something which Mu'tazilite thinking had failed to grasp.

When, therefore, the Quran and certain *hadith* represent the divinity in anthropomorphic form (God as possessing hands and face, as seated on a Throne, etc.), the Mu'tazilites saw it all as metaphor. The hand is the metaphorical designation of power; the face signifies the essence; the fact that God is seated on the Throne is a metaphorical image of the divine reign, and so on. For the literalists, these are all real phenomena about God, which must be seen and understood as such.

Al-Ash'ari is in agreement with the literalists regarding the reality of these phenomena assigned to God, but he warns against imparting any physical material sense to them when attributing them to God. In his view, the Muslim must believe that God really does possess hands, face and so on, but without 'asking how'. This is the famous *bi-lakayfa*, in which faith attests that it can dispense with reason. In short, the Mu'tazilites were reduced to speaking about metaphors; al-Ash'ari's great labour ended by leaving faith and reason face to face, unmediated.

3. *The dogma of the uncreated Quran.* The Mu'tazilites believe that the Quran is the *created* divine Word, without distinguishing between the word as an eternal divine attribute and the Arabic annunciation by which this is represented in Quran. The literalists respond to this way of seeing things with categorical rejection, but they on the other hand confuse the divine Word with its human annunciation in "time. Even more serious is the fact that certain of them consider the Quran to be eternal not only as regards its content and the words of which it is composed, but also as regards everything which goes into its material constitution—for example, the pages, the ink, the binding, and so on.

Al-Ash'ari's solution lies between these two extremes. He considers that the nature of the word, whether human or divine, is not limited, as the Mu'tazilites believe, to what is pronounced and composed of sounds and articulated words; it is also the soul's discourse (*hadith nafsi*), and as such is independent of verbal manifestation (*hadith lafzi*). When he affirms that the Quran is eternal, he means the divine attribute of the *kalam* subsisting eternally in God and, as such, exempt from all verbal and phonetic articulation. But the Quran is also composed of words; it is written. In this form, it is a created and temporal fact, contrary to what the literalists believe. But how can these two contradictory aspects, created and uncreated, come together in a single fact such as the Quran? Here again al-Ash'ari counsels the believer to practise his famous principle: 'Have faith without asking *how*.'

4. *Human liberty.* In resolving this problem, al-Ash'ari has recourse not to the notion of *qudrah* (creative power) in the Mu'tazilite sense, but to the notion of *kasb* (acquisition). Once more he has to find a solution between two extremes: the Mu'tazilites, upholders of the *qudrah*, and the fatalists, upholders of the *kasb*. Al-Ash'ari believes,

not without reason, that the Mu'tazilite view introduces a kind of dualism as regards divine action. In effect, according to the Mu'tazilites, man is not only free and responsible, but also possesses *qudrah*, that is to say, creative power, the ability to create his own works. In order to avoid the risk of setting up another creative power alongside the divine power, while at the same time conferring on man the freedom which makes him responsible for his actions, al-Ash'ari attributes to him not *qudrah*, the creation of his works, but *kasb*, the 'acquisition' of his works. He accepts the distinction made by the Mu'tazilites between the two types of action possible to man: action which is done under compulsion, and action which is free. He also accepts their thesis that man is perfectly aware of this difference. But he considers the *qudrah*—the creative power of human actions—as exterior to man, not immanent in him. He also distinguishes, in every free action on the part of man, the act of creation which is God's part in it, and the act of acquisition which is man's. All man's freedom consists in this *co-Incidence* between God the 'creator' and man the 'acquirer'.

In all the solutions that he proposes, al-Ash'ari's involvement is not so much with speculative and rational concerns as with spiritual and religious themes. He is seeking above all to give a meaning to faith in God, in a God whose qualifications are not illusory, because he is both essence and attribute, and can consequently be the object of the believer's worship and love. Whether his attempt be regarded as a success or, for lack of sufficient metaphysical arguments, as a failure, what al-Ash'ari once again is seeking with complete probity when he affirms the simultaneity of the created and uncreated aspects of the Quran, is the mysterious and miraculous union of the eternal and the ephemeral.

### C. ASH'ARISM

#### I. *The vicissitudes of the Ash'arite school*

1. The Ash'arite school, which was founded in the middle of the fourth/tenth century by the direct disciples of al-Ash'ari, derives its name from that of its teacher (in Arabic one speaks of the *Ash'ariyah* or *Asha'irah*). Over several centuries this school almost completely dominated Sunni Islam, while at certain times and in certain regions Ash'arism was actually identified with Sunnism.

Towards the end of his life, a group had formed around Abu al-Hasan

al-Ash'ari, made up of many followers who admired his exemplary life, his thinking steeped in religious values, and his concern to protect these values. His followers found in him a refuge both against the narrow literalism of the men of the *hadith*, and against the excessive rationalism of the Mu'tazilites. In this way, Ash'arism began to take shape in the lifetime of the master.

Scarcely, however, had Ash'arism affirmed its existence and assumed a definite form alongside other schools of the period, when it became a target against which every attack was directed. First and foremost, the Mu'tazilites had taken to heart the volte-face of their former adherent, al-Ash'ari; they accused the Ash'arite school of pandering to the masses through its opportunism, and launched against it the ever-facile reproach of 'syncretism'. Similarly, the literalists, with the Hanbalites at their head, expressed amazement at the advent of this newcomer who, while claiming to avoid the trap of *i'tizal*, had not the courage simply to return to the sources—that is to say, to the literal revealed text and the primitive tradition, as this is recognized by Sunni Islam.

There was yet another complicating factor. At the very moment when al-Ash'ari became aware, in Basrah and Baghdad, of the problems facing Islam, and set out to look for a solution to them, another thinker, likewise trained in Sunnism, became aware of the same problems and conceived the same aim. This was Abu Mansural-Maturidi (d. 333/944 in Samarqand, in the East of the Islamic world); and his followers saw the endeavours of the Ash'arite school as a reform which failed, and they criticized its conservatism and conformism. Since the labours of Ash'arism had stopped half-way, the followers of al-Maturidi attempted to bring about the renewal themselves, and to restore true Sunnism.

2. In spite of all the criticisms levelled at it in its infancy, the Ash'arite school developed and expanded until with time it became the mouth-piece of orthodox Sunnism over a large part of the Islamic universe. But in the middle of the fifth/eleventh century, the movement was checked and went through a difficult period. The Iranian princes of the Buyid dynasty were the true masters of the 'Abbasid empire. They were Shiites, and they favoured a kind of synthesis between Mu'tazilite thought and certain aspects of Shiite thought. But as soon as the Turkish Saljuq princes, who were of Sunni persuasion, took power, the situation

changed. Ash'arism regained its privileged position in Muslim society, and the school even received the support of official authorities, in particular that of the famous Saljuq vizir Nizam al-Mulk (d. 485/1093: this state of affairs makes it clear what it was that the Ismailis of Alamut were fighting against so desperately).

Nizam al-Mulk founded the two great universities of Baghdad and Nishapur. What was taught there was Ash'arism, which then became the official doctrine of the 'Abbasid empire. It was during this period that its representatives became the mouthpieces of the Sunni doctrine itself. From this strong position the Ash'arites went on to attack the sects and doctrines which did not conform to their 'orthodoxy', not only on the purely ideological level but on the political level as well, insofar as their adversaries represented an opinion which favoured a state or a government hostile to the 'Abbasid caliphate. The offensive launched by al-Ghazali against the 'Batinians' (that is, against Ismaili esotericism) and against the philosophers (see below, V, 7), was aimed also at the Fatimid power of Cairo, because the latter protected the philosophers and adopted the Batinian doctrine as its own.

3. In the seventh/thirteenth century, Ash'arism came up against adversaries of considerable stature in the persons of Taql al-Din Ahmad ibn Taymiyah and his follower Muhammad ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyah, both of whom were from Damascus. In fact, Ibn Taymiyah, who over the centuries became the father of the *Salafiyya* movement, denied that Ash'arism had accomplished a valid Sunni reform. He proclaimed an integral reform of Sunnism, based principally on the absolute value of the literal text of the Revelation and of the Tradition of the Companions of the Prophet. (Obviously, this 'Tradition' excludes the body of theological traditions going back to the Imams of Shiism.) Despite the courage of Ibn Taymiyah and the incisive force of his critique, Ash'arism has retained its dominant position in Sunni Islam down to the present day. The renaissance of Sunni Islam, no matter what the diverse elements (Mu'tazilism and Salafism, for example) which merge in the Muslim consciousness, cannot but be partial to the preponderance of Ash'arism.

4. Of the great figures whom the Ash'arite school produced in the course of time, the following deserve mention: Abu Bakr al-Baqillani (d. 403/1013), author of the *Kitab al-Tamhid*, the first attempt to

provide Ash'arism with a real doctrinal system; Ibn Turaki Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn al-Hasan ibn Turaki (d. 406/1015); Abu Ishaq al-Isfara'ini (d. 418/1027); 'Abd al-Qahir ibn Tahir al-Baghdadi (d. 429/1037); Abu Ja'far Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Simnani (d. 444/1052); Imam al-Haramayn (al-Juwayni, d. 478/1085), whose *Kitab al-Irshad* is regarded as the consummation of Ash'arism; the famous al-Ghazali (d. 505/1111; cf. below, V, 7); Muhammad ibn Tumart (d. ca. 524/1130); Abu al-Fath al-Shahrastani (d. 548/1153); Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 606/1210); 'Adud al-Din al-Iji (d. ca. 756/1355); Sharif al-Jurjani (d. 816/1413); Abu'Ali al-Sanusi (d. 895/1490).

We have just stressed the fact that Ash'arism not only survived all criticism levelled at it, but succeeded in attaining a key position in Sunni Islam, particularly in the Near East. This achievement was not fortuitous; even though external circumstances, political and other, were favourable to it at a given moment, its success was essentially due to the fact that it provided solutions, seemingly definitive, to two great problems. Unlike the problems that we have already described, these two problems are of the kind which concern the specifically 'exoteric' awareness. The first lies in the sphere of cosmology, in relation to which the Ash'arites school formulated its now classic *atomism*. The second concerns religious psychology and the individual.

## 2. *Atomism*

1. We saw above (II, B) how Ismaili gnosis gave expression to the concept of Emanation with the principle of the creative Origination (*ibda'*). Properly speaking, Emanationism in Islam is represented par excellence by the Hellenizing philosophers (see below, ch. V). They understand the fact of creation, such as they study it in the Quranic Revelation, in the light of this fundamental idea. They regard the multiplicity of worlds and of phenomena as proceeding from the absolute One. God is at the summit of Manifestation, and all the beings who constitute this Manifestation are organically linked, from the First Intelligence down to inanimate matter.

Other schools of thought, notably the Mu'tazilites, in explaining creation and the relationship between God and the world, make use of the idea of a universal causality. As they see it, the phenomena of creation are subject to a whole structure of causes rising level by

level from the secondary causes—those which govern the world of matter—to the primal causes and the Cause of causes.

The Ash'arites were not satisfied either with the philosophers' idea of Emanation or with the idea of universal causality accepted by the Mu'tazilites. As the Ash'arites understand it, the Emanationist view leaves no room for their idea that liberty and will characterize the essence of the divine Being. In their eyes, Emanationism ends by identifying the primary cause with the manifestation, whether on the level of essence or that of existence. In emanated beings, they can see neither created beings as they understand the word 'created' in the Quran, nor the multiple states of a single being, but a multitude of beings so closely and intrinsically linked to their primary cause that they are identified with it.

In the Mu'tazilite idea of eternal causality, the Ash'arites perceive a kind of determinism (because the cause is ontologically linked to its effect and vice versa); and this determinism they see as incompatible with the fundamental idea of the Quran, which affirms the coexistence of absolute divine freedom with absolute divine power. In vain, they think, the Mu'tazilites have tried to justify causality by relating it to the principle of divine wisdom, claiming that wisdom lies at the origin of causality. For the Ash'arites, divine wisdom, like divine power and divine will, are absolute, above any condition or determination.

2. As for a basis and a justification for the idea of the creation of the world, and consequently for the way in which one should envisage the relationship between God and the world, the Ash'arites thought they had found this in their theory of the indivisibility of matter, or *atomism*. Of course, the theory behind this was already familiar to the thinkers of Greece and India; but the Ash'arites developed it in accordance with their own concern to deduce from it consequences which would preserve their conception of God's omnipotence and their idea of creation.

The Ash'arite argument, very briefly, is as follows. Once one admits that matter is indivisible, one ends up by affirming a transcendent primary cause that bestows on matter and on all composite beings their determination and specification. In fact, if matter is divisible in itself, it possesses in itself the possibility and the cause of its determination. The idea of a primary cause then becomes superfluous. If, on the other hand, one accepts the theory that matter in itself (the *atom*) is indivis-

ible, then the intervention of a transcendent primary cause is necessary if this matter is to be determined, specified and quantified in such or such a being. The idea of a creative God is thus seen to be obvious and well-founded.

Correspondingly, implicit in the idea of the indivisibility of matter is another consequence, namely that of the recurrence of creation. If matter does not possess in itself the cause of its own differentiations and combinations, then any conglomeration of atoms which defines a certain being must be purely accidental. Because these accidents are in a state of continual change, they require the intervention of a transcendent primary cause to create and sustain them. The conclusion is evident: matter and accident must be created *at every instant*. The entire universe is maintained from instant to instant by the all-powerful divine Hand. In the Ash'arite conception of things, the universe is continually expanding, and only the divine Hand is able to preserve its unity, its cohesion and its duration, even though our senses and our reason are too feeble to perceive that this is so.

### 3. Reason and faith

1. Apart from the problem resolved by its atomic cosmology, Ash'arism was faced with another problem which presented itself, characteristically, as the problem of the relationship between reason and faith. Here again Ash'arism confirms its determination to avoid extremes. On the one hand, there were the Mu'tazilites, who desired to acknowledge only reason and the rational, and on the other there were the literalists, who did not wish even to hear these categories spoken of. If one accepts the Mu'tazilite position, and acknowledges human reason as the absolute arbiter in both temporal and spiritual matters, the simple believer may well ask: why is it necessary to agree to a religious Law? The Mu'tazilite will doubtless reply that religion is an ethical and social necessity for the masses, because not everyone is capable of leading a life in truth and goodness. Well and good. But when the self-aware individual reaches maturity, why should he continue any subscription to religion, when he judges himself able, through his personal experience, to attain to the truth and to act accordingly?

Both those who regard human reason as all in all, and those for whom it counts for nothing, end up by separating reason from faith. The Mu'tazilites banish religious faith because the self-aware individual

no longer needs it; at the opposite extreme, the literalists banish reason on the pretext that it is of no use in religious matters, where faith alone is necessary. Yet why, then, does the Quran encourage reasoning and speculation? Why does it invite us to exercise our intelligence on purely religious themes, such as divine existence, divine providence, revelation and so on?

Ash'arism attempted to steer a middle course between the two extremes, endeavouring to define the domain proper to the rational intelligence and that which belonged to faith. Even if it is true that the same spiritual reality may be grasped both by reason and by faith, nevertheless the mode of perception in each case operates under such different conditions that the one mode should not be confused with the other, nor substituted for it, nor be rejected in favour of the other.

2. There is something distressing in the struggle thus engaged in by Ash'arism, for it raises the question of whether it had sufficient means at its disposal to resolve it. If one compares it to the prophetic philosophy of Shiite gnosis described above (ch. II), the two situations are in powerful contrast. In confronting both Mu'tazilites and literalists simultaneously, Ash'arism in fact remains in their sphere. In this sphere it would be difficult to envisage the ascending perspectives of the *ta'wil* and to open a path leading from the *zahir* to the *batin*, the contrast is between the rational dialectic of the *kalam*, and what we have learned to know as *hikmat ilahyah* (*theosophia*), *'irfan* (mystical gnosis), *ma'rifah qalbiyah* (the heart's knowledge)—in short, that form of awareness in which all knowledge leads back to the act of knowing oneself. Reflection on the solution of al-Ash'ari to the dilemma of the created or uncreated Quran leaves the impression that his quest was arrested prematurely. But could it have been otherwise? An entire prophetology was lacking, together with a deeper understanding of the concepts of *time* and *event* on their different levels of meaning. But, as certain Shiite authors have already shown us, Ash'arite atomism and the denial of intermediary causes actually make it impossible for a prophetology to exist.

If Ash'arism has survived so many attacks and criticisms, we must accept that it reflects the awareness of Sunni Islam. And that is the direst symptom of a situation which makes one wonder whether philosophy was ever to be 'at home' there, or whether it would always remain out of place. Mu'tazilism is contemporary with the Imams of

Shiism (whose adherents had more than one argument with Mu'tazilite masters). Al-Ash'ari was born in the very year which saw the commencement of the 'lesser occultation' of the twelfth Imam (260/873). He died at Baghdad only a few years before al-Kulayni, the great Shiite theologian, who actually worked in Baghdad for twenty years. The names of the two masters could be taken as symbols of the very different conditions which the future held in store for philosophy, in Shiite and Sunni Islam respectively.

## IV. Philosophy and the Natural Sciences

### 1. HERMETICISM

1. We saw above (I, 2) that the Sabians of Harran traced their descent back to Hermes and to Agathodaimon. Thabit'ibn Qurrah (d. 288/901), their most famous teacher, had written a book in Syriac on the 'Institutions of Hermes' and had himself translated it into Arabic. For the Manichaeans, Hermes was one of the five great prophets who preceded Mani. The person of Hermes passed from Manichaean prophetology into Islamic prophetology, in which he is identified with Idris and Enoch (Ukhnukh).

It is scarcely surprising that the first 'hermeticizing' Muslims were Shiite. On the one hand, Shiite prophetology (see above, n, A, 2) already in itself subsumed the prophetic category proper to Hermes. He is not a legislative prophet, charged with revealing a *shari'ah* to mankind. In prophetic hierohistory, his rank is that of a *nabi* who was sent to organize the life of the first city-settlements and to teach men the technical sciences. On the other hand, Shiite gnosiology also subsumed in itself the mode of knowledge that was common to the ordinary *nabis* prior to Islam (such as Hermes), to the Imams, and to the *awliya'* in general during the cycle of the *walayah* which succeeds the cycle of legislative prophecy. This is what we saw described as direct divine inspiration (see above, n, A, 5), superior even to the legislative mission. Hermetic philosophy does in fact call itself a *hikmah laduniyah*, an inspired wisdom, which is to say a prophetic philosophy.

In contrast to this, the Sunnis (according to the evidence of al-Shahra-Rtani) condemned the hermeticism of the Sabians as a religion incompatible with Islam, because it can dispense with the prophet (the prophet-legislator of a *shari'ah*, that is): the *ascent* of the spirit to Heaven, into which Hermes initiated his disciples, made it unnecessary to believe in the *descent* of an Angel who reveals the divine text to the prophet. This flat incompatibility ceases to exist when the

question is viewed in the context of Shiite prophetology and gnosiology, with far-reaching consequences. One can see how and why hermeticism, introduced through Shiism, was able to achieve recognition in Islam before Aristotle's syllogistics and metaphysics had made their appearance. In addition one can see more clearly the reasons for the Shiite attitude and its consequences for the future of philosophy in Islam, and why, on the Sunni side, there was indiscriminate condemnation of the Shiite attitude, as well as the Ismaili and hermeticist position, as fundamentally hostile to prophecy and destructive of the legalistic Islam of the *shari'ah*.

2. Like many 'strong personalities' of the time, the Iranian philosopher al-Sarakhsi (d. 286/899), a pupil of the philosopher al-Kindi (see below, V, 1), was a Shiite, or was thought to be one. He had written a book, now lost, on the religion of the Sabians. His teacher al-Kindi had also read what Hermes had to say to his son (no doubt an implicit reference to the *Pimander*) concerning the mystery of divine transcendence, and he stated that a Muslim philosopher like himself could not have put it better. Unfortunately, the Sabians did not possess a 'Book' brought to them by a prophet-legislator, a Book which might have won them official recognition as *ahl al-kitab*. Little by little, they had to convert to Islam. Their last known leader, Hukaym ibn Isa ibn Marwan, died in 333/944. Their influence has nonetheless left ineradicable traces. Their conviction that syllogism was inadequate to distinguish the divine attributes is reminiscent of the reservations expressed by the Imam Ja'far with regard to dialectic (the science of the *kalam*). Something of their terminology, allied to that of Manichaeism, appears in the work of al-Shalmaghani (d. 322/934), the moving figure of a personal tragedy fitting for an ultra-Shiite. Something of it enters Sufism (al-Kharraz, d. 286/899; al-Hallaj, d. 309/922) through the intermediary of Dhu al-Nun al-Misri (d. 245/859), an Egyptian who was both alchemist and mystic. The neo-Platonists of Islam who effected the synthesis between philosophical speculation and mystical experience, such as al-Suhrawardi (d. 587/1191) and Ibn Sab'in (d. 669/1270), expressly claimed to be part of a chain of initiation (*isnad*) which goes back to Hermes. In the seventh/thirteenth century, Afdal al-Din al-Kashani, a Shiite Iranian philosopher, translated a hermetic treatise into Persian (see below). Hermes never ceases

to figure in prophetic hierohistory (*cf.* in Iran, al-Majlisi and Ashkivari in the seventeenth century).

3. In order to characterize hermetic thinking and all that came under its influence in Islam, we have to bear in mind, following Louis Massignon (see Bibliography), the following factors. There was the firm belief, in theology, that although the ineffable divinity is not susceptible to syllogism, Emanations proceed from it, and that it may be attained through prayer, by means of asceticism and invocation. There was the idea of cyclical time allied to a hermetic astrology. (This is the fundamental idea of time in Ismaili Shiism; for the Nusayris, Hermes is the theophany of the second 'dome'; for the Druze, Ukhnuh is identified with Eve as the second Emanation, the Soul of the world.) 'There is a synthetic physics which, far from opposing the sublunary world to the empyrean Heaven (and the four corruptible Elements to the quintessence), affirms the unity of the universe.' This gives rise to the principle and the science of *correspondences*, based on the *sympathy* which exists between all things. There is the use of what L. Massignon calls the 'anomalous causal series', that is to say, the tendency to consider not the general law but the individual case, even when it is abnormal. It is this which distinguishes hermeticism from the logical tendencies of Aristotelianism, and allies it to the empirical and concrete dialectic of the Stoic schools. This Stoic or Stoicizing influence may be perceived not only in relation to the school of Arabic grammarians at Kufah (see below, IV, 5), but also in relation to a type of Shiite science which is devoted to the consideration of the causes of what is individual (as in Ibn Babuyah). We can detect the same affinity at the highest point of Twelver Shiite thought, in the metaphysics of *existing* which Mulla Sadra al-Shirazi opposes to the metaphysics of essences.

4. It is impossible here to list the titles of the works which figure in the Islamic hermetic tradition: treatises attributed to Hermes, to his followers (Ostanes, Zosimus and so on), translations (the *Book of Krates*, the *Book of the Beloved*), the works of Ibn Wahshiyah or those attributed to him, among others the famous *Nabataan Agriculture*, which was actually written by a Shiite of viziral family, Abu Talib Ahmad ibn al-Zayyat, who died around 340/951. Nevertheless, special mention must be made of two great Arabic hermetic works: (a)



The *Book of the Secret of Creation and the Workings of Nature* (*Sirr al-khaliqah*), written in the time of the caliph Ma'mun (d. 218/833) by an anonymous Muslim, who put it in the name of Apollonius of Tyana. This treatise ends with the famous 'Emerald Tablet', *Tabula smaragdina*. (It should be compared to the *Book of Treasures*, an encyclopaedia of natural sciences, written at the same period by Job of Edessa, a Nestorian physician at the 'Abbasid court), (b) The *Aim of the Sage*, (*Ghayyat al-Hakim*), wrongly attributed to Maslamah al-Majriti, who died in 398/1007. This treatise contains, apart from valuable information about the astral liturgies of the Sabians, an entire teaching on 'Perfect Nature' attributed to Socrates.

5. The theme of 'Perfect Nature' (*al-tiba' al-tamm*) is one of the most fascinating in this entire body of literature. Perfect Nature is the 'spiritual entity' (*ruhaniyah*), the 'Angel of the philosopher', his personal guide who initiates him personally into wisdom. It is, in short, another name for Daena, the celestial *alter ego*, the figure of light in the likeness of the soul which, in Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism, appears to the elect at the moment of their *exitus*. Hermes' vision of his Perfect Nature was commented by al-Suhrawardi and after him by the entire Ishraqi school {see below, VI}, down to Mulla Sadra and his pupils' pupils. As we shall see {below, V, 6}, it is by way of the theme of Perfect Nature that Abu al-Barakat al-Baghdadi, proceeding in a highly individual fashion, elucidates the implications of Avicenna's doctrine of the Active Intelligence. We can find semblances of 'Perfect Nature' under other names. It is in quest of her that the pilgrim goes in the mystical Persian epics of Attar. She is to be found in the school of Najm al-Din al-Kubra, where she is known as the 'Witness in Heaven', the 'invisible guide'. She is also the daimon of Socrates and Plotinus' personal daimon. There is no doubt that this line of Islamic sages is indebted to hermeticism for its awareness of the 'celestial I', the 'I in the second person', which is the goal of the sage's inner pilgrimage, that is to say of his personal realization.

## 2. JABIR IBN HAYYAN AND ALCHEMY

1. The vast body of writings attributed to Jabir ibn Hayyan is likewise hermetic, by reason of certain of its sources. We can only refer in passing here to the monumental work which the late Paul Kraus devoted

to it, and which will long serve as the basis for Jabirian studies. It is a formidable task to decide on the authorship of the Jabirian *corpus*. Berthelot, who was concerned above all with the Latin Jabir (*Geber*)—and documents were then inaccessible—arrived at summary and baseless negations. Holmyard, on the other hand, had accumulated a mass of relevant documents in favour of the tradition: Jabir *had* lived in the second/eighth century, he *had* been the pupil of the sixth Imam, Ja'far, and he *was* the author of the enormous collection of around three thousand treatises attributed to him {something which is not totally unthinkable if one compares it with the *oeuvre* of an Ibn al-Arabi or an al-Majlisi}. Ruska tried to find a middle way, ruling out the Imam's influence {an exclusion which is in somewhat arbitrary defiance of an enduring Shiite tradition}, but admitting a tradition whose centres were in Iran. Paul Kraus, after careful and critical research, concluded that there had been a number of authors, and that several collections had accrued around a primary central work in an order which can be approximately reconstructed. He dated the start of this process to around the third or fourth/ ninth or tenth century, not to the second/eighth.

We should, however, point out that notwithstanding the contrast between the so-called 'technical' collections and the others, all of them are organically connected and possess an inspiration which is constant. If it is true that one collection in the *corpus* refers to *The Secret of the Creation* attributed to Apollonius of Tyana {see above, IV, 1} but actually dating from the third/ninth century, none the less we have no assurance whatsoever that the latter created its own vocabulary and subject-matter, and did not receive them from a predecessor. The anti-Jabirian testimony of the philosopher Muhammad Abu Sulayman al-Mantiqial-Sijistani {d. ca. 371/981} is self-contradictory. Frankly, we believe that in this sphere, in which a large number of the books of the period are lost, it is more fruitful to direct one's attention to what explains and is explained by a tradition, than to engage in a historical hypercriticism which is based on extremely shaky foundations. If we wish neither to belittle nor systematically to ignore everything that we are told concerning the Shiite Imams {and here the backwardness of Shiite studies makes itself particularly felt}, and if we recall that Ismailism first came into being among the followers of the Imam Isma'il, son of the Imam Ja'far, then the relationship of

Jabir to Ismailism and to the Imam appears in its true light. If the perfectly coherent biography, derived later from the *corpus* by the alchemist Aydamur al-Jildaki, states that there was an alchemist called Jabir ibn Hayyan, a follower of the sixth Imam and an initiate of the eighth Imam, al-Rida, and that ultimately he died at Tus in Khurasan, in the year 200/815, there is absolutely no good reason to contest it. There would then not even be any contradiction in admitting that certain of the collections in the *corpus* postulate more than one author, for we will perceive that the concept of Jabir, the figure of him as a person, assumes ultimately a significance which goes beyond the limits of a chronologically fixed and immobilized *situs*.

2. The researches of Paul Kraus went some way towards showing that Jabir's theory of the Balance (*mizan*) 'represented the most rigorous attempt in the Middle Ages to found a quantitative system for the natural sciences'. The justness of this statement would have appeared in its full light if the tragic death of Paul Kraus had not prevented him from concluding his work. There remained to be completed the task of showing the link between Jabir's alchemy and the religious philosophy of Ismailism. Jabirian 'quantitative' science is not merely a chapter in the early history of science, as the word 'science' is understood in our day, but an entire *Weltanschauung*. The science of the Balance aims at encompassing all the fundamental concepts of human knowledge. It applies not only to the three kingdoms of the 'sublunary world', but also to the movements of the stars and to the hypostases of the spiritual world. As the 'Book of the Fifty' puts it, there are Balances to measure 'the Intelligence, the Soul of the world, Nature, Forms, the Spheres, the stars, the four natural Qualities, the animal, the vegetable, the mineral, and finally the Balance of letters, which is the most perfect of all.' There is a danger, therefore, that the term 'quantitative', applied to Jabirian science, may give rise to ambiguity or misapprehension.

The purpose of the 'science of the Balance' is the discover in each body the relationship which exists between the manifest and the hidden (*zahir* and *batin*, exoteric and esoteric). As we said, the alchemical operation can thus be considered the example *par excellence* of *ta'wil* or spiritual exegesis: occulting the visible and causing what is occulted to become visible. As the 'Book of the Arena of the Intelligence' (*Kitab maydan al-'aql*) explains at length, to measure the properties of an

object {heat, cold, moisture, dryness) is to measure the quantities to which the Soul of the world has adapted itself—to measure, that is, the intensity of the Soul's desire in its descent into matter: it is from the desire for the Elements aroused in the Soul that the originative principle of the Balances (*mawazin*) is derived. One could therefore say that the transmutation of the Soul when it returns to itself will condition the transmutation of bodies, the Soul being the very place where this transmutation occurs. The alchemical operation is thus seen to be a psycho-spiritual *operation par excellence*—not that the alchemical texts are in any way an 'allegory of the Soul', but because the stages of the operation, actually performed on actual matter, *symbolize with* the stages of the Soul's return to itself.

The incredibly complex measurements and the sometimes colossal figures, so minutely established by Jabir, have no meaning for today's laboratories. It is hard to see the science of the Balance, whose principle and purpose is to measure the desire of the Soul of the world incorporate in every substance, as anticipating modern quantitative science. On the other hand, it could be seen as anticipating the 'energizing of the soul' which is nowadays the object of so much research. Jabir's Balance was thus the only 'algebra' capable of recording the degree of 'spiritual energy' in the Soul incorporate in the Properties, then freeing itself from them through the ministry of the alchemist who, in setting the Properties free, liberates his own soul.

3. We have just seen that Jabir considered the 'Balance of letters' as the most perfect of all {see below, IV, 5). The Islamic gnostics developed a theory which existed in ancient gnosis, according to which the letters of the alphabet, being the ground-work of Creation, represent the materialization of the divine Word (*cf.* Mark the Gnostic; *cf.* also below, the Shiite gnostic Mughirah). The Imam Ja'far is unanimously regarded as the originator of the 'science of letters'. The Sunni mystics themselves borrowed it from the Shiites after the second half of the third/ninth century. Ibn al-'Arabi and his school made extensive use of it. On the Ismaili side, speculation on the divine Name corresponds to the speculation in Jewish gnosis on the tetragrammaton.

Jabir devotes particular attention to this 'Balance of letters' in his treatise entitled the 'Book of the Glorious One' (*Kitab al-Majid*, see bibliography)—a treatise which, abstruse as it is, is nevertheless the

best illustration of the link between his alchemical doctrine and Ismaili gnosis, and which may even permit us to glimpse the secret of his person. The treatise provides a lengthy analysis of the value and meaning of the three symbolical letters 'ayn, symbolizing the Imam, the Silent One, *samit*, 'Ali; *mim*, symbolizing the Prophet, *natiq*, the annunciator of the *shari'ah*, Muhammad; *sin*, calling to mind Salman, the *hujjah*. It has already been said (p. 101) that according to how one ranks these letters in order of precedence, one obtains the symbolic order typifying Twelver Shiism and Fatimid Ismailism (*mim*, 'ayn, *sin*), or else proto-Ismailism (such as that of the *Seven Combats of Salman* in the treatise *Umm al-Kitab*) and the Ismailism of Alamut ('ayn, *sin*, *mim*). In the case of the latter, Salman, the *hujjah*, takes precedence over the *mim*. Jabir justifies this order of precedence by a rigorous application of the value disclosed by the Balance of the three letters in question.

Who is the *sin*, the Glorious One? At no time does Jabir say that he is the awaited Imam, the Elixir (*al-iksir*) who emanates from the divine Spirit and will transfigure the city here below (an idea that corresponds to the eschatology of all Shiism, which Western interpreters have too often tended to 'politicize'). The *sin* is the Stranger, the Expatriate (*gharib*), the *yatim* (the orphan, the solitary one, the peerless), he who through his own efforts has found the way and has been adopted by the Imam; he who shows the pure light of the 'ayn (the Imam) to all who like himself are strangers—the pure Light which abolishes the Law that 'gehennas' bodies and souls, the Light handed down from Seth, Adam's son, to Christ, and from Christ to Muhammad in the person of Salman. The 'Book of the Glorious One' says that to understand it—to understand, that is, the book itself—and thereby to understand the order of the entire *corpus*, is to be like Jabir himself. Elsewhere, using the symbol of the *Himyarite* language (southern Arabic) and of a mysterious shaykh who taught it to him, he says to his reader: 'When you read the Book of Morphology, you will become aware of the precedence of this shaykh, and also of *your own precedence*, O reader. God knows that *you are he*.' Jabir the person is neither myth nor legend, but he is more than his historical person. The Glorious One is the archetype; even if several writers were responsible for the *corpus*, each of them had authentically to reassume the *geste* of the archetype in the name of Jabir.

This *geste* is the *geste* of alchemy, though we cannot follow its progress here save through a few names: Mu'ayyad al-Din Husayn al-Tughra'i, the famous poet and alchemical writer of Isfahan, executed in 515/1121; Muhyi al-Din Ahmad al-Buni (d. 622/1225) who had studied two hundred of Jabir's works; the Egyptian amir Aydamur al-Jildaki (d. 743/1342 or 762/1360), who makes frequent reference to Jabir. One of his many works, the 'Book of Evidence concerning the Secrets of the Balance', comprises four enormous volumes. This work pays particular attention to the spiritual transmutation which 'symbolizes with' the alchemical operation. The final chapter of the book *Nata'ij al-Fikar*, whose title is the 'Priest's Dream', celebrates the union of Hermes with his Perfect Nature. In fifteenth-century Iran, a Sufi master at Kirman, Shah Ni'mat Allah al-Wali, himself annotated his own copy of a book by al-Jildaki (*Nihayat al-talab*). At the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries, the masters of the Iranian Sufi renaissance, Nur 'Ali-Shah and Muzaffar 'Ali-Shah, gave expression in their turn, using alchemical annotations, to the stages of the mystical union. Finally, in the Shaykhi school, alchemical descriptions are linked to the theosophical doctrine of the 'body of resurrection'.

### 3. THE ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF THE KHWAN AL-SAFA'

1. It has become traditional to translate the name by which this society of thinkers based in Basrah calls itself as 'the Brothers of Purity and Lovers of Fidelity'. (Objection has been made to the term 'purity', but this is what the word actually means; it does not signify 'chastity', but purity as opposed to *kadurah*, impurity or opacity. When one reads their text, one realizes that they are 'the Brothers of the pure heart and the Faithful in every trial'.) In their encyclopaedia, they profess themselves to be a confraternity whose members do not reveal their names. It is agreed that the state of the text, as it has come down to us, dates from the fourth/tenth century. In addition, certain philosophers and historians (al-Tawhidi, al-Qifti, al-Shahrazuri) have given us the names of some of those who collaborated in the work: Abu Sulayman al-Busti, al-Muqaddasi, 'Ali ibn Harun al-Zanjani, Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Nahrajuri (or Mihrajani), and al-'Awfi.

We are not concerned simply with a group of Shiite sympathizers, but with a definite society of Ismaili thought, although the discreet

nature of the writing reveals this only to 'him who knows'. It is true that the work was a work of propaganda, but the word 'popular' would be out of place here, for its content is not popular. If copies of the book were cautiously distributed at the time in mosques, this is because, according to Ismaili teaching, one should try to awaken whoever is capable of being awoken to the knowledge that there is something superior to the literal legalistic religion, or *shari'ah*, this latter being an effective medicine only for souls that are weak and ill. One should try to guide whoever is called to it to the pure gnostic spiritual religion. It would likewise be inaccurate here to speak, as we tend to, of a 'reconciliation' between religion and philosophy. In esotericism there are *levels of meaning* which correspond to the respective aptitudes of souls. The ideal organization of the Brothers was based precisely on this. It was, to be sure, an enterprise of spiritual liberation—which is not to say of rationalism or agnosticism, for our thinkers would not consider these a 'liberation'. Their concern was to guide the adept to a life in the divine likeness by means of an initiatic philosophy which is in the tradition of prophetic philosophy.

2. The Encyclopaedia of the Brothers of Basrah thus aspires to encompass all knowledge and to give meaning to the struggles of the human race. It is made up of fifty-one treatises. (Current editions include a fifty-second treatise which appears to have been added after the original compilation. The real fifty-second treatise is described below.) The treatises are grouped in four lengthy sections. Fourteen are concerned with propaedeutics, mathematics and logic, seventeen with natural philosophy, including psychology, ten with metaphysics, and ten (eleven counting the additional treatise) with mysticism and astrological matters.

Certain notions deriving from Islamic sources are grafted onto the Greek ideas concerning the properties of each number. It is no accident that the encyclopaedia, in which Pythagorean arithmology plays a significant role, contains fifty-one treatises, and that seventeen of these ( $17 \times 3 = 51$ ) should be concerned with physics. (The number 17 is important in Jewish gnosis as well. Furthermore, 17 is the number of persons who, according to the Shiite gnostic Mughirah, will be resurrected on the day of the coming of the Imam-Mahdi; each of these 17 persons will be given one of the 17 letters which make up the supreme Name of God. 51 mystical **elect**, who drink of **the** sea of

the '*ayn-mfm-sin*, keep watch at the gates of the Sabian city of Harran, the Oriental centre of the Pythagorean school.)

The Brothers evince a tendency, already pronounced in Jabir ibn Hayyan, to elevate the principle of the Balance to the rank of a metaphysical principle. Jabir had already said that every philosophy and every science is a Balance; consequently the Balance (the contemplation of number-ideas) is in a class superior to that of philosophy and all that it comprises. Similarly, in the case of the Brothers of Basrah, each discipline and technique has its own balances (*mawazin*), and the 'supreme Balance' is the Balance mentioned in the Quran (21:47, on the Day of Resurrection). The term *Balance* here assumes its specifically Shiite and Ismaili overtones. What is at issue is the 'right Balance' (Quran 17:35 and 26:182)—that equilibrium and justice connoted by the word '*adl*, with all its philosophical and religious implications—which will be the work of the Imam of the Resurrection (the fidelity of the *Ikhwan* having reference to their anticipation of this Imam).

3. The Brothers speak of the ideal constitution of their Order. It contains four grades, corresponding to the spiritual aptitudes which develop with increasing age (the idea of the pilgrimage to Mecca is transformed into a symbol of the pilgrimage of life), (a) Young people aged from fifteen to thirty, trained according to the natural law. (b) Men aged from thirty to forty, who are instructed in profane wisdom and in the analogical knowledge of things, (c) Only after the age of forty is the initiate capable of being initiated into the spiritual reality hidden beneath **the** exoteric aspect of the *shari'ah*. At this stage, his mode of knowledge is that of the prophets (*cf.* above, n, A, 5). (d) After the age of fifty, he is in a position to perceive this esoteric spiritual reality in all things. His mode of knowledge is now that of the angels, and comprehends both the letter of the *Liber mundi* and that of the revealed Book. The organization of the hierarchy is founded solely on inner aptitude and spiritual rank, in a context within which 'the ritual and the calendar of the philosophers' are explained. This is a combination typical of Sabian and Ismaili ideas. We learn that the Brothers, like their predecessors, were subjected to the vicissitudes and persecutions which are directed against men of God during a 'cycle of occultation' (*dawr al-satr*).

4. Moreover, one can no longer entertain any doubt about the Brothers' links with Ismailism if one reads the great 'Recapitulatory Treatise' (*al-Risalat al-jami'ah*) which is the true fifty-second treatise of the Encyclopaedia. This Treatise discloses the background to the questions with which the Encyclopaedia is concerned; it begins with a history of Adam {the esoteric meaning of his departure from Paradise} which is exactly the same as the one we summarized above (p.85). Uniform Ismaili tradition attributes this treatise to the second of the three 'secret Imams' (or *Imam mastur*, clandestine Imams), who came between Muhammad ibn Isma'il (son of the Imam Isma'il who gave his name to the Ismailis), and 'Ubayd Allah, who founded the Fatimid dynasty (b. 260/874. Cf. above, p.76: as we know, it was after the seventh Imam that Shiism was split into the Twelver and Ismaili branches. We must remember not to confuse the 'clandestinity' in which these intermediary Imams lived with the notion of the *ghaybah*, the occultation of the twelfth Imam in Imamism). The Imam Ahmad, great-grandson of the Imam Isma'il, came of age at the end of the second/eighth century-beginning of the third/ninth century. The Ismaili tradition also regards him as the author (or director) of the Encyclopaedia of the *Ikhwan*. In order to resolve the chronological difficulty, we could recognize, with W. Ivanow, that the nucleus of the work which through successive amplifications was to become the encyclopaedia of the *Rasa'il Ikhwan al-Safa'* was in existence from the time of the Imam.

The orthodox Sunni attitude towards the Brothers and their encyclopaedia can be deduced from the fact that in 555/1160 the caliph al-Mustanjid ordered the burning of all copies of the encyclopaedia to be found in public and private libraries (together with the works of Avicenna!). Nevertheless, the work survived, and was translated into Persian and Turkish. It has exercised an enormous influence on all the thinkers and mystics of Islam.

#### 4. RHAZES (AL-RAZI), PHYSICIAN AND PHILOSOPHER

1. Muhammad ibn Zakariya' al-Razi, powerful Iranian personality, famous physician, and highly individual philosopher, was born around 250/864 at Rayy (about twelve kilometres south of present-day Tehran). He travelled extensively: we know that he was head of the hospital at Rayy and held the same post in Baghdad. He died at Rayy

in 313/925 or 320/932. Both as a reminder of his origin (Rayy is the Raghha of the Avesta and the Raghos, or Rhages, of the Greeks), and in order to distinguish him from many other Razi's (natives of Rayy), we will call him here by the name *Rhazes*, derived from the medieval Latin translations of his medical works—the name by which he was known throughout the West during the Middle Ages. For a long time only his scientific works were known, and they are concerned mainly with medicine and alchemy. His philosophical work (he passed for a Pythagorean) was long thought to be completely lost. In fact, it is owing to our increased acquaintance with Ismaili works that Paul Kraus was able to undertake its reconstruction (eleven extracts from the works of Rhazes, collected by P. Kraus in one volume, Cairo, 1939).

2. It is indeed remarkable that the Ismaili writers, starting with his contemporary and fellow-national Abu Hatim al-Razi, should all have waged apolemic against him. There were also the posthumous critiques by Muhammad ibn Surkh al-Nisahari (in his commentary on the *qasidah* by his teacher Abu al-Haytham al-Jurjani), by Hamid al-Din al-Kirmanl, and by Nasir-i Khusraw. These have provided us with long and valuable quotations from works which are otherwise lost. One might have thought, *a priori*, that these highly cultured Iranians had every reason to be in agreement with each other, seeing that they possessed a common enemy in the scholastics and the literalists of 'orthodox' Islam, as well as in all the pietists opposed to philosophical research. Nevertheless, they do not make common cause, and all we can say is that the antagonists are worthy of each other. In confronting the Ismailis, Rhazes confronts neither pious literalists nor fanatical antagonists of philosophy. Far from it: the Ismailis were men who themselves upheld the rights of philosophical thought with all the ardour and spirit of, say, Nasir-i Khusraw.

In seeking the reasons for this opposition, we may discern a first symptom of it in the conception of alchemy developed by Rhazes. Whether or not he knew Jabir, his conception is certainly different. Hearing in mind the connection of Jabirian alchemy with Ismaili gnosis, we may guess that Rhazes' ignorance of the 'science of the Balance' implies ignorance of, if not hostility towards, the fundamental principle of *ta'wil*, one of whose main applications was, as we saw, the alchemical operation. This may explain Rhazes' general tendency to reject esoteric

and symbolic explanations of natural phenomena. Two opposing world views confront one another. But so true is it that a writer can never exhaust the meaning of his own work that attempts were made (for example, by pseudo-Majriti in his book *Rutbat al-hakim*) to bring Jabir's alchemy into conjunction with that of Rhazes.

3. The Ismailis attacked the views held by Rhazes on the following principal themes: Time, Nature, the Soul, and Prophecy. The first objective of their attack was the most characteristic thesis of Rhazes' philosophy, namely the affirmation of five eternal Principles: the Demiurge, the universal Soul, the *Materia prima*, Space, and Time. Abu Hatim al-Razi, in one of his books, has given us the draft of a discussion which was intended to clear up one first point: is there not a contradiction in making Time an eternal principle? The great interest of this discussion is that it allows us to understand the distinction made by Rhazes between a *time measured* by the movement of the Heavens, and an *unmeasured time*, independent of heaven and even of the Soul, for it relates to a level of the universe which is above the Soul. (Nasir-i Khusraw also said: time is eternity measured by the motions of the Heavens; eternity is time which is unmeasured, and therefore without beginning or end.)

The discussion is not concluded, because the two speakers are not talking about the same time. The distinction made by Rhazes between *absolute time* and *limited time* corresponds, in the terminology of the neo-Platonist Proclus, to the distinction between *separated* and *non-separated* time, and it echoes the differentiation made in the Zervanite cosmology of ancient Iran between 'the time without a shore' and 'the time of long dominion'. In connection with this, al-Biruni tells us that Rhazes was descended from a philosopher of ancient Iran, al-Iranshahri, who belonged to the third/ninth century and of whose work only a few quotations remain. He too was a 'powerful personality' since, according to al-Biruni, he wished to reject all the existing religions in order to create a personal one for himself. Nasir-i Khusraw, too, sings his praises in the most vivid terms.

4. With respect to the philosophy of Nature, or more accurately to the science traditionally known as 'the science of the natural properties of things', Rhazes states in the introduction to his book that the physician-philosophers have said excellent things: 'Nevertheless, they

have said nothing about the natural property itself; they have simply concluded that it exists. No one has written about the causal agency, or set forth the reason, the wherefore. This is because the cause is not an object that can be known.' This admission of impotence draws a heated reaction from the Ismaili theosopher Muhammad ibn Surkh al-Nisahari: 'One can have confidence in Rhazes as far as medicine is concerned', he writes, 'but beyond that it is impossible to go along with him'. The view that he holds in opposition to Rhazes coheres with that of Nasir-i Khusraw, and expresses the entire Ismaili theosophy of Nature. Nature is born in Matter through a contemplation which the Soul projects into this Matter, just as the Soul comes to be through a contemplation of the Intelligence directed upon itself. In this sense the Soul is the child of the Intelligence, and in the same way Nature is the child of the Soul, the Soul's pupil and disciple. This is why it is able to act, to produce acts which are imitations of the acts of the Soul; consequently it can be a principle of movement (which Rhazes denied). Nature is the *speculum Animae*. Hence natural beauty is itself spiritual beauty, and the science of the natural properties of things can be practised as a science of the Soul. We come round again in this way to the science of Jabir, and Rhazes is left far behind.

5. What is fundamental here, then, is two different conceptions of the Soul and of the Soul's gnostic history. Rhazes' pessimism differs from Ismaili pessimism. He represented the drama of the Soul in a symbolic narrative which established his reputation as a crypto-Manichaeism, and which undeniably possesses gnostic overtones. The Soul ardently desired to penetrate this world, without foreseeing that she would agitate Matter with tumultuous and disordered motion and would be frustrated in her aim. In this way the Soul of the world became the miserable prisoner of this world. Then out of the substance of his own divinity the Creator sent the Intelligence (*'aql*, the *nous*) to awaken the soul from her lethargy and show her that this world is not her homeland. Hence the mission of the philosophers and the deliverance of souls through philosophy, for it is by means of philosophy that the Soul learns to know her own world.

To understand why the Ismailis reacted in a frequently violent manner to Rhazes' gnosis, we must bear in mind their own gnosis (see above, II, B), which 'recounts' the victory over himself achieved by the third Angel of the Pleroma, the Angel of humanity, who because of his

mistake became the tenth Angel and the demiurge of this physical world in order to help his followers gain their liberty. Similarly, Nasir-i Khusraw's reply to Rhazes is that the second hypostasis of the Pleroma, the Soul, did not 'fall' into Nature in order to produce the Forms in it. All she needed to do was to project her contemplation into this Nature, and the *active physis* was made manifest in it. It is the individual, partial souls who were the victims of this fall, souls who were, to be sure, *members* of the Soul's Pleroma, but different from the Soul itself. Moreover, does not Aristotle, at the end of his *Liber de Pomo*, commit his soul to her 'as to the lord of the souls of philosophers'? How can the *Anima mundi* be reduced to the collectivity of the partial souls? For the Ismaili, Nature is the *speculum Animae*. The Soul has need of Nature as of her own organ, so that she may know herself and attain to herself. A being who is in a position to know and attain to himself postulates a duality in his being. But this duality is not Evil. Nature is not Evil; it is the instrument which renders it possible to lessen an Evil which made its appearance prior to Nature, in pre-eternity (the difference between the gnosis of the Ismailis and that of Rhazes being quite unambiguous). This law of being is that which governs the rhythm of the cycles and periods of the world; it is the secret of eschatology, and hence the secret of the periods of prophethood.

6. We have struck the basic reason for the antagonism with which we are concerned: the anti-prophethood of Rhazes. He affirms that the mission of the philosophers is to awaken the souls who are plunged in lethargy. The Ismailis reply that the awakening of these souls is beyond the power of philosophers. It requires the word of the prophets. Was not the clan of the philosophers mostly ignored by the masses and ridiculed by the authorities? According to Rhazes, the souls who have not been redeemed by philosophy wander after their death up and down the world; they are the demons who seduce men through pride and make them occasionally into prophets. Rhazes expressed himself with extraordinary violence on the subject of the 'demonic' imposture of the prophets (and possibly influenced thereby the famous pamphlet *On the Three Impostors*, so favoured by Western rationalists since the time of Frederick II of Hohenstaufen). But if this is so, asks the Ismaili, why was each Prophet plagued, tormented and persecuted by the brood of Iblis, by the demons with human faces against whom all the prophets waged war?

Rhazes is the ardent proclaimer of an irreducible 'egalitarianism'. All men are equal; it is unthinkable that God should have singled out a few of them in order to bestow on them the prophetic mission. This mission, therefore, can only result in disaster: the wars and the slaughter unleashed in the name of dogmas and vain beliefs. The Ismailis reply that the whole point is actually to guide men beyond the letter of dogma. If men were capable of accepting and understanding the esoteric spiritual exegesis (*ta'wil*), they would see that the religions each stand on their own level, without conflicting. In any case, does not Rhazes himself, egalitarian though he is, claim to be a teacher and a guide? Does he not claim to have discovered what his predecessors did not know? And do not the philosophers, too, disagree amongst themselves? Have they never committed either a falsehood or a mistake? Rhazes' reply is superb: 'It is not a question of falsehood or of error. Each of them has made an attempt, and this very attempt, has set him on the road to truth.' (Lessing was to say later that the quest for truth is more precious than truth.)

The intense interest of this *disputatio* lies in the fact that the opposition in question is not a banal opposition between rationalism, philosophy and theology in the current or confessional sense of the word. It is a far more radical opposition between an esoteric and initiatic religious spirit, and a will which is hostile to all that such a spirit implies. The egalitarian fury of Rhazes is all the more stubborn in that it rebounds on himself, for he is supremely aware of his own superiority. The antagonists confronting him are not theologians or doctors of the Law; they are not even pious philosophers who have made their peace with the latter. They are men with an initiatic sense, aware that spiritual truth can be wholly understood and assumed only by an elite which alone has the requisite capacity. The Ismaili emissary (the *da'i*) does not preach in the public square; he chooses and summons men individually. There are in existence spiritual truths which impel an elite towards its *resurrections* (*qiyamat*). The majority of men, for reasons which go beyond their condition in the present world, are capable of grasping only the verbal utterance of these truths, and find in them a pretext for *insurrections* which give rise to tyrannies far worse than all the *shari'ahs* of all the Prophets.

At the same time, this *disputatio* also manifests the whole consciousness of the Islam that we call 'esoteric' as the latter was posited at

the beginning of this study, embracing as it does the 'prophetic philosophy' which it alone was able to develop through Shiism. The opposition between Rhazes and the Ismailis is one of the great moments in Islamic thought.

##### 5. THE PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE

1. Within the totality of Islamic thought, we come now to an area both original and fascinating, where the main lines of thought that we have been studying manifest themselves in pragmatic terms. Before the time of the Hijrah, Syrians and Persians had studied Aristotle's hermeneutics (*peri hermeneias*), revised by the Stoics and the neo-Platonists. The friendship of Ibn al-Muqaffa', the famous convert from Mazdeism, for the grammarian Khalil ibn Ahmed (d. 791 CE), had given the latter access to everything that existed in Pahlavi (Middle Iranian) relating to grammar and logic. However, the structure of the Semitic languages provided philosophical meditation with new and inexhaustible themes. Arabic tradition attributes the science of grammar to the first Imam of Shiism, 'All ibn Abi Talib. In fact the work of Sibuyah (which the Arabs vocalize as Sibawayh), a pupil of Khalil, provides a grammatical system which is whole and complete and which has been compared to Avicenna's Canon for medicine. It is remarkable that an Iranian should have been responsible for this monumental work on Arabic grammar. {Sibuyah, who died in 169/786, has his memorial at Shiraz in Fars, that is to say in Persia.)

The first developments are obscure. What is important for the history of philosophy is to know how the work of the schools of Basrah and Kufah would develop on this basis throughout the third/ninth century. In the antagonism between these schools, there are actually two philosophies, two world views, in profound opposition to each other.

2. For the school of Basrah, language is a mirror which faithfully reflects phenomena, objects and concepts. The same laws must therefore be observed with regard to language as with regard to thought, nature and life. Hence it is important that each sound, each word and each phrase should be strictly grounded with respect to the variety of their forms and of the positions that they occupy. The main task, and the most difficult, for the school of grammarians at Basrah was to show the reciprocal relationship between language and the intellect. They

had to make the whole language conform to rational and logical categories, demonstrate its rules, and prove that all departures and lapses from it were only apparent and had a rational motive. Without separating morphology from syntax, the Arabic grammarians subjected all language, as well as nature, logic and society, to laws which were universally valid. In all cases, the same laws were in operation.

Needless to say, the living, spoken language, with its plentiful diversity, defies this universal teleology and is guilty of discrepancies. For this reason, the reconstruction of a grammatical schema was a task of great complexity: one had to take into account the irregularity of things. First and foremost, one had to distinguish the fundamental forms (paradigm, schema, *asl*). The grammarians of Basrah considered themselves entitled to stick to these forms and to reject all those which could not be justified by a rational explanation. Even if an exception is made in the case of certain forms, one still has no right to create by analogy other forms based on these isolated deviations.

3. In direct contrast to this remarkable strictness of approach, the school of Kufah was to develop a science of language of a type which conformed to the type of Shiite science analysed above (see above, IV, 1), demonstrating a marked taste for 'anomalistic' series. At that time, moreover, Kufah was the place *par excellence* where the Shiite influence was making itself felt. For the school of Kufah, tradition, with all its richness and its abundant diversity, was the first and principal source of grammar. It too accepted the law of analogy, but on condition that this did not require the sacrifice of forms sanctioned by tradition. On this account it has been said that, compared to the rigid system of the school of Basrah, the Kufah grammarians did not possess a system at all. What they had was rather a sum of particular decisions each taken with regard to a particular case, because each case is specific. At the same time, they had a horror of general laws and uniform motivations, and a leaning towards a diversity which warranted the individual, the exceptional, the unique form. Because they, too, were concerned with establishing the paradigms and the primary schemas, they multiplied these indefinitely. The grammarians of Basrah rejected all forms whose anomaly was not susceptible to rational justification. The grammarians of Kufah had no need to make such a choice in the tradition which they accepted as being the source of grammar. All forms encountered in the ancient pre-Islamic Arabic language and in litera-



ture, by the simple fact that they attest their own existence, could be regarded as well-grounded and as possessing a normative value. Each exception becomes an asl or, rather, the notion itself of exception is rendered meaningless.

Gotthold Weil, whose apposite observations we have just summarized, suggested that one might compare the opposition between the schools of Basrah and Kufah with the opposition between the schools of Alexandria and Pergamo, the conflict between the 'analogists' and the 'anomalists'. Admittedly this parallelism applies only to attitudes of mind, for the linguistic material is fundamentally different in each case. Moreover, the conflict between the Greek grammarians was a matter that concerned only scholars. In Islam, there was something far more serious at stake in the struggle, for not only did it affect legal and canonical decisions, but on it might depend the interpretation of a passage of the Quran or of a religious tradition. We have just noted the relationship between the spirit of the Kufah school and a certain type of Shiite science; and we should also note, as we have already done, its affinity with a type of Stoic science as 'the hermeneutic of the individual'. The fact that it was the spirit of the Basrah school which finally prevailed is symptomatic of something that goes far beyond the simple domain of mere linguistic philosophy.

4. It would, moreover, be inadequate to study the philosophy of language in the Islam of that time only as it is manifested in these two schools. Jabir's 'Balance of letters', the principle of which we described above (IV, 2), represents, under a different aspect and through the influence that it exerted, an essential element of this linguistic philosophy. This different aspect is that through which Jabir's theory demonstrates its affiliation to the gnostic tradition of Islam, which is itself an offshoot both of ancient gnosis and of the neo-Pythagorean tradition. We have already observed how closely related the theory of the Shiite gnostic Mughirah is to that of Mark the Gnostic (the body of *Aletheia* made up of the letters of the alphabet). In the old Persian treatise *Umm al-Kitab* (see above, p. 75), the figures and the order of the letters indicate the hierarchy of the celestial beings and of the Shiite Imams. (The same significance was attributed to the enigmatic letters which appear as the key signature at the beginning of certain Surahs in the Quran.) Also, this entire tradition regards the Imam Ja'far as the initiator of the science of letters, or *jafr*. Much later, al-Buni

(d. 622/1225) made the following observations: 'Know that the secrets of God and the objects of his knowledge, the subtle realities and the dense realities, the things above and the things below, fall into two categories: there are numbers, and there are letters. The secrets of the letters lie in the numbers, and the epiphanies of the numbers are in the letters. The numbers are the realities above, which pertain to spiritual entities. The letters pertain to the circle of material realities and of becoming.'

The science of letters, or *jafr*, is based essentially on *permutation*. To be precise, the permutation of the Arabic radicals was practised in the first gnostic Shiite circles, and it is their teaching which the doctrine of the Balance continues. We saw above (IV, 2) an example of its operation in the 'Book of the Glorious One' by Jabir. The validity of this treatment of the Arabic radicals rests on the Jabirian principle explained above, and which is generally speaking an Ismaili principle: by uniting herself to Nature (which for Nasir-i Khusraw is the *speculum Animae*), the soul of the world communicates her own harmony to this Nature, and creates bodies which are subject to number and quantity (this theme receives equally clear treatment at the hands of Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani). In the same way, the Soul gives expression to her own harmony both in *language* and in *music*. This postulates a close relationship between the structure of bodies and the structure of language (similarly, music is the concordance between the harmonious sound and the touch or pluck on the string). This is why Jabir rejects the idea that language may originate in an institution or a convention: language is not an accident. An institution cannot account for it, because it derives from a deliberate act on the part of the Soul of the world.

5. Thus, even in its gnostic aspect, the Jabirian Balance of letters, as a philosophy of language, leads back to the preoccupations of the philosopher-grammarians discussed above. Once again, this has been admirably demonstrated by the late Paul Kraus, in considerations of which we give a summary here. All that we know about the transmission of Greek philosophy to the Islamic thinkers enables us to make a direct connection on this point between the speculations of Jabir and those of Plato. Paul Kraus has shown what was common both to the Jabirian Balance, with its analysis of the words of the language, and to the *Cratylus*, in which the philosophy of language that Plato makes Socrates

express is based on principles similar to those of Jabir, as well as to the *Timaeus*, in which the physical elements are compared to the syllables of letters. On both sides there is the same concern to restore the primitive word (*asl*, the archetype, the *Urwort*), whose structure would exactly reproduce the structure of the thing designated. Although Jabir borrowed almost all his material from the Arabic grammarians, what he intends goes beyond the limited sphere of grammar. {The same is true of the antagonism between Basrah and Kufah.} It was this which made him focus his attention on the permutations of the consonants which make up the radicals (biliteral, trilateral, quadrilateral, quinquilateral).

It must be understood that, given the state of the 'rigid and abstract radicals' in Semitic, the dissection of words is easier in that language than in Greek. (Because Arabic writing specifies only consonants, the syllable no longer has an intermediary role between letter and word, as is the case in Greek, where the syllable is closely allied to the expression of the vowel.) As a result, most of the radicals obtained by permutation really exist, and in this manner Jabir's speculations link up with those of the Arabic grammarians who attempted 'to elevate the principle of the permutation of letters to the status of a new linguistic discipline, the sole such discipline capable of elucidating the etymological parenthood of words'. This attempt resulted in what is known as 'superior etymology' (*ishtiqaq akbar*), that is to say, 'the theory which brings together in one and the same meaning all the possible permutations of a single radical'. This was effected by Ibn Jinni (d. 392/1001) a philologist as well as a theologian and philosopher, who was responsible for a profound transformation in the structure of the Arabic language.

6. Such speculations themselves, made easier by the structure of the Semitic languages, were so important for the theosophical and mystical thought of the following centuries, that it is worth recalling here when and how their foundations were laid. Also, the problems relating to writing and language attracted the attention of distinguished philosophers. Ahmad ibn Tayyib al-Sarakhsi, a follower of the al-Kindi mentioned above, invented a phonetic alphabet of forty letters designed for the transcription of foreign languages (Persian, Syriac, Greek). Al-Farabi (see below, V, 2), who studied grammar under the philologist Ibn al-Sarraj, to whom in return he taught logic and musical theory,

expounded the laws which rule 'the languages of all nations', and established the link between linguistics (*'ilm al-lisan*) and logic. Abu Hamza al-Isfahani introduces the term 'philosopher-grammarians' (*al-falasifah al-nahwiyin*), a term meant to describe those philosophers for whom logic was a sort of international grammar. All these labours, prompted by the linguistic complexity of Muslim civilization, represent an original and essential aspect of Islamic philosophy, and one that is too often ignored.

#### 6. AL-BIRUNI

1. In the course of the fourth/tenth-fifth/eleventh centuries, which proved a golden age for mathematics and natural sciences in Islam, one of the outstanding figures is that of Abu al-Rayhan Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Biruni (or Beruni, in the ancient vocalization). His invaluable works, on history as well as on comparative religion, chronology, mathematics and astronomy, were famous in both East and West. He belonged to what has been called 'outer Iran'; he was born in 362/973 near the town of Khwarizm (Khorasmia), where he spent the first part of his life studying the different sciences, especially mathematics, under the tutorship of Abu Nasr al-Mansur. Later on, his travels took him to Gurgan and to other Iranian cities. After the conquest of Khwarizm by Mahmud of Ghaznah, al-Biruni was attached to the latter's entourage and accompanied him in his conquest of India. Afterwards he returned to Ghaznah, where he dedicated the rest of his life to study. He died in 448/1048.

2. Mahmud's bloody invasion of India had one compensation, if one may so put it, in the fact that it was there that the scholar in his entourage collected the material for his masterpiece. Al-Biruni's great book on India is unrivalled in the Islam of that time. Written at first hand, it remained the source of all that was written later on the religions and philosophies of India. In it, the author testifies to the harmony that he perceives to exist between Platonic-Pythagorean philosophy, Indian wisdom, and certain Sufi concepts in Islam.

Other writings of capital importance are the *Chronology of Ancient Peoples*, which was and still is a unique work, and the vast treatise on mathematics, astronomy and astrology, written by him in Arabic and Persian at the end of his life (*Kitab al-Tafhim*, ed. Humayi, Tehran,

1940), which for several centuries remained the standard work in these subjects. His *Kitab al-Jamahir* is the most ancient treatise on mineralogy written in Arabic; and here again the scope of al-Biruni's research is extraordinary, including as it does the mineralogical literature of Greece and India as well as that of Iran and Islam. His geographical work *Kitab al-tahdid* should be mentioned in connection with the monumental *Qanun al-mas'udi*, which does for cosmography and chronology what Avicenna's *Qanun* does for medicine, and which, had it been translated into Latin, would have attained equal fame. We should also mention a treatise on pharmacology (*Kitab al-Saydah*), a few shorter treatises, and an exchange of questions and answers with Avicenna on the principles of natural philosophy among the Peripatetics. Several other works, including some philosophical treatises, are unfortunately lost.

3. The correspondence with Avicenna shows that al-Biruni was not only the founder of geodesy, an accomplished mathematician and astronomer, a geographer, and a linguist, but a philosopher as well. His deepest leanings were rather towards observation and induction in natural philosophy, and he was inclined to oppose several of the theses of Aristotelian philosophy and to adopt some of Rhazes' views. He even set about composing a catalogue of Rhazes' works, for he admired his doctrine in natural philosophy in spite of being opposed to his religious conceptions {see above, IV, 4).

One should also note that al-Biruni possessed a 'philosophy of history', evident in the background of several of his works. Having understood the nature of certain fossils and the sedimentary nature of the rocky terrains he had observed, he became convinced that in former times great cataclysms had taken place which left seas and lakes where once there had been dry land. When he transposed this observation to the sphere of human history, he arrived at the conception of periods analogous to the Indian *Yugas*. He felt convinced that in the course of each period, humanity is carried away by an ever-increasing corruption and materialism, until a tremendous disaster destroys civilization and God sends a new prophet, who will inaugurate a new period of history. Between this conception and the conception professed by Ismaili gnosis at the same period, there is an obvious relationship which it remains to explore.

## 7. AL-KHWARIZMI

Mention should at least be made here of one of al-Biruni's compatriots and contemporaries, Muhammad ibn Yusuf Katib al-Khwarizmi (d. 387/997), famous for his vast encyclopaedia entitled *Mafatih al-'ulum* (the 'Keys of the Sciences', ed. van Vloten, Leiden, 1895). It is divided into two large parts, the first of which deals with the Islamic sciences (canon law, the *kalam* or dialectic, grammar, writing, prosody, the traditions). The second deals consecutively with logic, philosophy, medicine, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, music and chemistry.

## 8. IBN AL-HAYTHAM

1. At the beginning of the fifth/eleventh century we encounter one of the greatest mathematicians and physicians of the Middle Ages: Abu<sup>4</sup> All Muhammad ibn al-Hasan ibn al-Haytham (the *Alhazen* of the Latin scholastics), who was nicknamed *Ptolemaeus secundus*. He was born at Basrah, spent most of his life in Cairo, and died in 430/1038 at the age of seventy-six. In his over-confidence about the practical application of his mathematical knowledge, he assumed that he could regulate the floods caused by the overflow of the Nile. Ordered by the sixth Fatimid caliph, al-Hakim (386/996-411/1021) to carry out this operation, he quickly perceived the inanity of what he was attempting to do. He retired in disgrace, and devoted himself to his scientific work until his death.

He was an important influence in the fields of celestial physics, astronomy, optics, and the science of perspective. His philosophical presuppositions are still to be systematically examined; he was deeply learned in philosophical culture, for he had read Galen and Aristotle carefully, but his own philosophical work is unfortunately lost, or else remains unedited, like the *Kitab Thamarat al-hikmah*, 'the fruits of philosophy'.

2. His innovation in astronomical theory may be described as follows. For a long time, oriental astronomers had not troubled, any more than Ptolemy in his *Almagest*, to define the concept of the celestial Spheres. This was true of both Abu al-'Abbas Ahmad (or Muhammad) al-Purghatni (the *Alfraganus* of the Latins during the Middle Ages), an Iranian astronomer from Transoxiana in the ninth century [*cf.* above,

I, 2), and of Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Jabir al-Battani (*Albategnius*), a native of Harran whose family had professed the Sabian religion. They confined their attention to the mathematical aspect of the Spheres, as ideal circles representing the movement of the celestial bodies.

The learned Sabian astronomer Thabit ibn Qurrah, however, wrote a treatise in which he attributed to the heavens a physical constitution that could be made to accord with Ptolemy's system. After this, Ibn al-Haytham for the first time introduced the Aristotelian concept of the celestial Spheres into purely astronomical considerations. This situation is of great interest because, on the one hand, Ibn al-Haytham saw the problem in terms of celestial physics (as an essentially qualitative physics), following here Ptolemy in his *Hypotheses Planetarum*; for Ptolemy had also had recourse to a celestial physics deduced from the nature of the substance of which heaven is formed, and had simply substituted his own physics for that of Aristotle's *De Caelo*. But, on the other hand, a Ptolemaic celestial physics which accorded with the theory of epicycles and concentrics quite simply spelled the ruin of Aristotle's celestial physics. What the latter postulated was a system of homocentric Spheres whose common centre is the centre of the Earth.

Wherever, in Islam, one encounters the claim of strict adherence to, or the call for, the restoration of pure Peripateticism, there of necessity one also encounters a fierce antagonism towards Ptolemaic doctrines. This was the case in Andalusia, where the conflict resulted in the system of Nur al-Din Abu Ishaq al-Bitruji (the *Alpetragius* of the Latins) which fulfilled the aspirations of Averroes, and which up to the sixteenth century was promoted as an alternative to Ptolemy's system (*cf.* also below, VIII, 3). At bottom, the problem belongs essentially to the domain of philosophy (and is one of the philosophical problems of the *Weltanschauungen*), for it is above all concerned with two ways of perceiving the world, two different senses of the universe and of the *situs* within it. Since both sides fixed the number of the angelic Intelligences that move the Heavens in relation to the number of the Spheres, in whose motion one had to isolate the total motion of each planet, the 'decentralization' effected by Ptolemy's system also had repercussions on angelology. The same repercussion resulted from acknowledging the existence of a Ninth Sphere, as did Ibn

al-Haytham, following here the Alexandrians and the neo-Platonist Simplicius. The existence of the Ninth Sphere was seen to be essential from the time that the precession of the equinoxes was recognized; it is the Sphere of Spheres (*falak al-aflak*), the all-encompassing Sphere, deprived of stars, and moved by the diurnal motion from east to west which it communicates to the whole of our universe.

The Peripatetics as well as the strict orthodox Muslims in Andalusia accorded an equally hostile reception to this celestial physics, for different reasons. A follower of Maimonides, who was present in 1192 at the burning of the library of a doctor who was thought to be atheist, saw a copy of Ibn al-Haytham's astronomy thrown into the flames by the hands of a pious *faqih*. On the other hand, the *ishraqiyun* of Iran (see below, VII) were not content with one single Sphere (the Eighth) for the multitude of fixed stars. However, in this case, far from angelology curbing their astronomy, it was the very 'dimensions' of their angelology which enabled them to sense the unlimited spaces of an astronomy which, while exploding the traditional schemas, nevertheless does not unpeople the infinite spaces of their spiritual 'presences'.

3. This same connection with the theory of spiritual beings may be perceived in the part played by Ibn al-Haytham's treatise on optics, known to the whole of the Latin Middle Ages as 'Alhazen's *Perspective*' (*Opticae Thesaurus* in seven books, plus the treatise *De crepusculis* on atmospherical refractions, first edition, 1542). Ibn al-Haytham is regarded as having been the originator of the solution to the problem of finding the point of reflection on a spherical mirror, given the position of the object and that of the eye. At any rate, his theory of optical perception, which implied a process that cannot be attributed simply to the action of the faculties of sense, had a considerable influence. It has been said that in the West the hierarchies of Dionysius the Areopagite and the optics of Ibn al-Haytham, the theory of hierarchical illuminations and the metaphysics of light, are connected (E. Gilson). One could make the same observation with respect to al-Suhrawardi's 'oriental theosophy' (see below, VII), which is essentially based on a metaphysics of light and a system of angelic hierarchies deriving both from late neo-Platonism and from the Mazdean philosophy of ancient Persia. The concept of light in al-Suhrawardi and in Robert Grosseteste have something in common. This common element is also evident when

Roger Bacon—who on this point owes everything to Alhazen—makes the *Perspective* the fundamental science among the sciences of Nature and, applying geometrical examples of this perspective to light, turns them into symbols. Both sides, we may say, possess an esoteric method of spiritual interpretation of the laws of optics and perspective, an interpretation which is based on the same cosmogony of light. We can thus acknowledge the validity of those diagrams which point to something resembling a topography of the spiritual universe.

#### 9. SHAHMARDAN AL-RAZI

At the end of the fifth/eleventh century and the beginning of the sixth/twelfth, Shahrastani ibn Abi al-Khayr al-Razi (meaning a native of Ray) was one of Iran's greatest astronomers and physicians. He lived mainly in the north-east, in Gorgan and Astarabad. Attention should be drawn to two of his works: the *Garden of the Astronomers* (*Rawdat al-munajjim*), and, in Persian, an interesting encyclopaedia of natural sciences (*Nuzhat-namah 'Ala'i*, which contains, among other things, a lengthy biography of Jabir ibn Hayyan.

## V. The Hellenizing Philosophers

#### FOREWORD

We are concerned with the group of *falasifah* (the plural form of *faylasuf*, which is the Arabic transcription of the Greek *philosophos*), a group to which, it has been claimed, the role of philosophy in Islam is confined. What we have already said makes it unnecessary for us to emphasize the total misconception of such a claim and what a prejudice it represents. It is difficult to trace the exact boundaries between the use of the terms *falsafah* (philosophy) and *hikmat ilahyah* (*theosophia*). But it appears that after al-Suhrawardi the latter term has been used more and more to designate the doctrine of the complete sage, who is both philosopher and mystic.

With regard to the *falasifah*, it will be recalled that they possessed a body of works by Aristotle and his commentators, and texts by Plato and Galen, in Arabic translation. However, in the case of works such as the *Theology* attributed to Aristotle, or the 'Book on the Pure Good' (see above, I, 2), our thinkers found themselves in the presence of an Aristotle who was actually a neo-Platonist. Even though the term *mashsha'un* (the literal equivalent of the word 'peripatetics') is used commonly in Arabic, and contrasts with *ishraqiyun* (the 'Platonists'; see below, VII), those designated by this term are none the less to some degree 'Islamic neo-Platonists'. There was, it is true, a 'peripatetic' reaction in Andalusia, led by Averroes, which had simultaneously to confront both Avicennan neo-Platonism and al-Ghazali's theological critique. But this peripateticism itself was not absolutely pure. In any case, Averroism flourished in the West, whereas in the East, and particularly in Iran, the neo-Platonic inspiration was always fundamental. With the aid of this inspiration al-Suhrawardi was able to realize his project of restoring the theosophy of ancient pre-Islamic Persia; and it formed a spontaneous bond with the gnosis of Ibn al-'Arabi and the metaphysics of Sufism, as well as with the traditional

teaching of the Shiite Imams (in the work of Haydar Amuli and Ibn Abi Jumhur in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries). All this body of teaching was fully developed in the school of Isfahan at the time of the Safavid Renaissance in the sixteenth century, in the monumental works of Mir Damad, Mulla Sadra and Qadi Sa'id Qummi—also in the sixteenth century—and in the works of their pupils and their pupils' pupils down to the Shaykhi school. A single guiding thought governs the formation of a solid structure. Nothing justifies the use of the facile term 'syncretism', a term only too often employed either in order to discredit a doctrine or else to disguise the maladroitness of an unacknowledged dogmatism.

#### 1. AL-KINDI AND HIS PUPILS

1. Abu Yusuf ibn Ishaq al-Kindi is the first in this group of philosophers whose works have survived, in part at least. He was born in Kufah around 185/801 into an aristocratic Arabic family of the Kindah tribe, from the south of Arabia, which earned him the honorific title of 'Philosopher of the Arabs'. His father was governor of Basrah, where al-Kindi himself spent his childhood and received his primary education. He then went to Baghdad, where he enjoyed the patronage of the Abbasid caliphs al-Ma'mun and al-Mu'tasim (218/833-227/842). The latter's son, Prince Ahmad, was the friend and mentor of al-Kindi, who dedicated several of his treatises to him. But during the caliphate of al-Mutawakkil (232/847-247/861) al-Kindi, like his Mu'tazilite friends, fell out of favour. He died, a lonely man, in Baghdad in about 260/873 (the year of al-Ash'ari's birth, and also the year in which in Shiism the 'lesser occultation' of the twelfth Imam begins).

In Baghdad our philosopher was involved in the scientific movement stimulated by the translation of Greek texts into Arabic. He himself cannot be considered a translator of ancient texts, but, being a well-to-do aristocrat, he had a large number of Christian collaborators and translators working for him, though he often 'touched up' the translations with respect to Arabic terms that the latter found difficult. Thus the famous *Theology* attributed to Aristotle was translated for him by 'Abd al-Masih al-Himsi (meaning from Emesa; see above, I, 2); and this work had a profound influence on his thought. Ptolemy's *Geography* and part of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* were also translated for him by Eustathios. The Catalogue (*Fihrist*) of Ibn al-Nadim lists more than

260 works under the name of al-Kindi, most of which have unfortunately been lost.

2. He was known in the West principally for some treatises which were translated into Latin in the Middle Ages: *Tractates de erroribus philosophorum*, *De quinque essentiis* (matter, form, motion, space and time), *De somno et visione*, *De intellectu*. A few years ago, about thirty treatises by him were discovered by chance in Istanbul, and a number of these have since been edited, most notably the treatise *On the First Philosophy*, the treatise *On the Classification of Aristotle's Works*, and the Arabic original of the treatise *On the Intellect*, a work particularly important for the gnosiology of his successors.

The existing works of al-Kindi thus show him to have been not just a mathematician and a geometer, as certain of his Islamic biographers, such as al-Shahrazuri, have maintained, but a philosopher in the full sense of the word as it was then understood. Al-Kindi took an interest in metaphysics as well as in astronomy and astrology, in music, arithmetic and geometry. We know that he wrote a treatise about the 'five Platonic bodies', with the title 'On the reason why the Ancients related the five figures to the Elements'. He took an interest in the different branches of the natural sciences, such as pharmacology. His treatise 'On the knowledge of the powers of compound medicine' shows an affinity with the ideas of Jabir about degrees of intensity in Nature (see above, IV, 2). In short, he is a fair illustration of the type of philosopher whose scope is universal, as was that of al-Farabi, Avicenna, Nasir Tusi and many others.

3. Although he was closely in touch with the Mu'tazilites (see above, IE, 1) who, prior to the reign of al-Mutawakkil, were in favour at the 'Abbasid court, al-Kindi was not part of their group—he aimed at something quite different from the dialecticians of the *kalam*. He was guided by the sense of a fundamental harmony between philosophical research and prophetic revelation. His aim accords with that of the prophetic philosophy outlined above (ch. II), a philosophy which we described as being the authentic expression of a prophetic religion such as Islam. Al-Kindi was convinced that doctrines such as the creation of the world *ex nihilo*, corporeal resurrection, and prophecy, have neither origin nor warranty in rational dialectic. This is why his gnosiology distinguishes between a human knowledge (*'ilm insani*)

which comprises logic, the *quadrivium* and philosophy, and a divine knowledge (*'ilm ilahi*) which is revealed only to the prophets. Nevertheless, it is always a question of two forms or degrees of knowledge which, far from being in opposition, are in perfect harmony. In his treatise on the duration of the Arab empire, too, our philosopher foresees that it will endure for 693 years, led to this conclusion by calculations derived from Greek sciences, particularly astrology, as well as from the interpretation of the Quranic text.

In accepting the idea of creation *ex nihilo*, al-Kindi regards the foundation (*ibda'*) of the world as an act of God rather than as an emanation. Only after establishing that the First Intelligence depends on the act of the divine will does he accept the idea of the emanation of the hierarchical Intelligences, in the manner of the neo-Platonists—a schema which entirely corresponds to that of Ismaili cosmogony. Similarly, he makes a distinction between the world of divine activity and the world of the activity of Nature, which is the activity of becoming and of change.

4. Some aspects of the philosophical doctrine of al-Kindi go back to John Philoponus, just as others go back to the school of the neo-Platonists at Athens. The distinction that he draws between primary and secondary substances, his faith in the validity of astrology, his interest in the occult sciences, his distinction between rational philosophical truth and revealed truth, which he understands to be something like the *ars hieratica* of the last neo-Platonists—these are all features common both to the 'Philosopher of the Arabs' and to neo-Platonists such as Proclus, and in some respects they also echo the Sabians of Harran.

If al-Kindi was influenced by the *Theology* attributed to Aristotle, he was also influenced by Alexander of Aphrodisias, whose commentary on the *De anima* inspired him, in his own treatise *De intellectu* [*Fil al-'Aql*], to make the quadruple division of the intellect which was later to exert considerable influence, present many problems, and receive various solutions among both Muslim and Christian philosophers. He was also influenced to a certain extent by the neo-Pythagoreans in the importance which he attached to mathematics. The *Fihrist* lists a treatise by him on the necessity of studying mathematics in order to master philosophy. These influences merge with the general Islamic perspective, whose truths are regarded by al-Kindi as so many lamps

lighting the way of the philosopher. He is rightly considered to be a pioneer, the first of the 'peripatetics' in the special sense that this word, as we saw, possesses in Islamic philosophy. If he was known to the Latin West as a philosopher through the few treatises mentioned above, he was also known as a mathematician and a master of astrology. Jerome Cardan, in his book *De subtilitate* {lib. XVI), says of him that he was one of the twelve most influential figures in human history.

S. As we mentioned above, he had his collaborators, and he also had his followers. Two of these were Bactrians: Abu Ma'shar al-Balkhi, the well-known astrologer, and Abu Zayd al-Balkhi, a free-thinking philosopher who was not afraid of scandal when he maintained that the divine Names which occur in the Quran are borrowed from the Syriac!

The most famous of his philosopher-pupils was Ahmad ibn Tayyib al-Sarakhsi (meaning a native of Sarakhs in Khurasan, on the present-day frontier between Iran and Russian Turkistan). Al-Sarakhsi, who was born in 218/833 and died in 286/899, is an arresting figure, whose works, which are lost, are known to us through the many quotations from them which appear here and there [*cf.* above, IV, 1). We have already mentioned {IV, 5)his invention of a phonetic alphabet, recounted at length by Abu Hamza al-Isfahani. With regard to the appellations by which the Stoics are designated in Arabic, he presents us with information which is all the more valuable in that Islamic tradition is somewhat unclear on the subject of the Stoics. As we have observed more than once, this did not prevent a good number of Stoic-inspired ideas from being introduced early on, ideas which played a very important part in all the anti-Peripatetic movements. The Stoics are sometimes designated as *ashab al-riwaq* or *riwaqiyyun* (the word *riwaq* meaning gallery or peristyle); sometimes as *ashab al-ustuwan* (the word *ustuwan* meaning gallery or stoa), and sometimes as *ashab al-mazall* (plural of *mazallah*, meaning tent; this was rendered in the medieval Latin translations as *philosophi tabernaculorum*!). Al-Sarakhsi diversifies these three designations on the basis of a tradition according to which the three terms refer to three schools, those of Alexandria, Baalbek and Antioch respectively. The subject requires an entire monograph to itself. The theory of the Elements in Jabir presupposes a Stoicizing interpretation of Peripatetic data. Al-Suhrawardi is sometimes regarded as a *riwaq*. Finally, as we saw above

(I, 1), Ja'far al-Kashfi demonstrated the homology of the Stoic position and that of the spiritual exegetes of the Quran.

## 2. AL-FARABI

1. Abu Nasr Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Tarkhan ibn Uzalagh al-Farabi was born at Wasij, near Farab in Transoxiana, in 259/872—about a year, therefore, before al-Kindi's death in Baghdad. He came from a noble family, and his father had held a military post at the Samanid court. But as was the case with his predecessor, al-Kindi, whose example he followed, few details about his life are known. When he was still young he went to Baghdad, where his first teacher was a Christian by the name of Yuhanna ibn Haylam. Then he went on to study logic, grammar, philosophy, music, mathematics and science. It is apparent from his works that he understood Turkish and Persian (and legend has it that apart from Arabic he was able to understand seventy languages!). Progressively he acquired the mastery which earned him the title of *Magister secundus* (Aristotle was the *Magister primus*), and which led to him being viewed as the first great Muslim philosopher. All the evidence supports an opinion current in Iran to the effect that this great philosopher was a Shi'ite. In 330/941, he did in fact leave Baghdad for Aleppo, where he enjoyed the protection of the Hamdanid Shi'ite dynasty—Sayf al-Dawlah al-Hamdani had a profound veneration for him. It was not by chance that he received this special Shi'ite protection. Its meaning becomes fully evident when we are made aware of the affinities between al-Farabi's 'prophetic philosophy' and the prophetic philosophy based on the teaching of the Shi'ite Imams, described above (ch. II). After his sojourn in Aleppo, al-Farabi made some further journeys, going as far as Cairo, and he died at Damascus in 339/950, at the age of eighty.

This great philosopher was profoundly religious in spirit, and a mystic. He lived extremely simply, and he even wore the garb of the Sufis. By nature he was essentially contemplative, and held himself apart from worldly things. On the other hand, he liked taking part in musical gatherings, and was himself a remarkable performer. He wrote a long book 'on music' which demonstrates his knowledge of mathematics, and which is without doubt the most important account of the theory of music in the Middle Ages. Moreover, it was not superficial optimism that led this philosopher-musician to seek and perceive the

harmony between Plato and Aristotle (the Aristotle of the *Theology*), as he perceived the harmony between philosophy and prophetic religion. It seems that the *Magister secundus*'s profound sense of things derived from the idea that wisdom had begun with the Chaldeans in Mesopotamia; that from there it had passed to Egypt, then to Greece, where it had entered history through being written down; and that he thought that to him fell the task of bringing back this wisdom to the country where it had originated.

2. His many works comprise (or comprised) commentaries on the Aristotelian *corpus*: on the *Organon*, the *Physics*, the *Meteorology*, the *Metaphysics*, the *Nicomachean Ethics*. All these commentaries are now lost. We can only mention here some of his main works (cf. Bibliography): the great treatise on the *Harmony between the doctrines of the two Sages, Plato and Aristotle*; the treatise on '*The object of the different books of Aristotle's Metaphysics*'; the analysis of Plato's *Dialogues*; the treatise *What one must know before learning philosophy*, an introduction to the philosophy of Aristotle; the treatise *De scientiis (Ihsa' al-'ulum)*, which had an enormous influence on the theory of the classification of the sciences in Western scholasticism; the treatise *De intellectu et intellecto*, mentioned above; the *Gems of Wisdom (Fusus al-hikam)*, the work most studied in the East. Finally there is the group of treatises concerning what is commonly called the 'political philosophy' of al-Farabi, the most important of which are the *Treatise on the Opinions of the Members of the Perfect City (or the Ideal City)*, the *Book of the Government of the City*, the *Book of the Attainment of Happiness*, and a commentary on Plato's *Laws*.

We have just mentioned the *Gems of Wisdom*. There is no good reason to doubt the authenticity of this Treatise. The blunder committed in an anthology once published in Cairo, when part of this treatise was printed under the name of Avicenna and with another title, is of no critical consequence. Paul Kraus' opinion was that al-Farabi's attitude was basically anti-mystical, that neither the style nor the content of the *Gems* accorded with the rest of his work, and that his theory of prophecy was exclusively 'political'.

We can attest that the terminology of Sufism occurs practically everywhere in al-Farabi's work; that elsewhere than in the *Gems* there is a text which echoes the famous recital of Plotinian ecstasy in the *Book of the Theology* ('Often, awakening to myself...'); that al-



Farabi's theory of illumination conceals an element which is undeniably mystical, if it is admitted that mysticism does not necessarily postulate *ittihad* (unitive fusion) between the human intellect and the active Intelligence, because *ittisal* (attainment, conjunction without identification) is itself also a mystical experience. Avicenna and al-Suhrawardi are, furthermore, in agreement with al-Farabi in their rejection of *ittihad*, because it entails contradictory consequences. We may further attest that it is not hard to grasp the link between al-Farabi's 'mysticism' and the rest of his doctrine: there is no hiatus or dissonance. If one notes that in the *Gems* he uses terms deriving from Ismailism (which in any case are common to all gnosis or '*irfan*'), this fact, far from invalidating its authenticity, is simply evidence of one of his sources of inspiration—the very source which establishes the accord between his philosophy of prophetism and the prophetology of Shiism. Finally, it is wrong to 'politicize', in the modern sense of the word, his doctrine of the ideal City; it has nothing to do with what we call a 'political programme'. On this point we fully support the excellent overall account of al-Farabi's philosophical doctrine propounded some time ago by Ibrahim Madkour.

3. We can here do no more than draw attention to three aspects of this philosophical doctrine. In the first place, we are indebted to him for the thesis which draws a distinction not only logical but metaphysical between essence and existence in created beings. Existence is not an inherent quality of essence, but only a predicate or an accident of essence. It has been said that this thesis marked a turning-point in the history of metaphysics. Avicenna, al-Suhrawardi and many others in their turn all professed a metaphysics of essences. It was only with Mulla Sadra Shirazi in the sixteenth century that the situation was decisively reversed. Mulla Sadra affirmed the predominance of *existing* and gave an 'existential' version of the metaphysics of the *Ishraq*. This perspective on the question of being gave rise to the distinction between Being that is necessary in itself, and contingent being that cannot exist by itself (because its existence or non-existence lack determination) but which is transformed into necessary being through the fact that its existence is established by another—i.e. by the Necessary Being itself. This thesis, which was to be so important for Avicenna, was first expounded, albeit more concisely, by al-Farabi.

4. The same can be said of the second distinctive doctrine, that of the theory of the Intelligence and of the procession of Intelligences, enjoined in al-Farabi by the principle *ex uno non fit nisi unum* (a principle that was to be called into question by Nasir Thusi, whose unacknowledged inspiration in so doing was the schema of the procession of the pure Lights in al-Suhrawardi). The emanation of the First Intelligence from the first Being, its three acts of contemplation which are repeated in turn by each of the hierarchical Intelligences, and which engender each time a triad composed of a new Intelligence, a new Soul and a new Heaven, down to the Tenth Intelligence—this same cosmogonic process was later described and expanded by Avicenna. The first divine Essences, Aristotle's star-gods, become 'separate Intelligences' in al-Farabi. Was it Avicenna who first gave them the name of 'Angels', thus arousing the suspicions of al-Ghazali who failed to find in them the exact image of the angel of the Quran? Did these creative archangelic forms spell the ruin of monotheism? Yes indeed, if what is in question is the *exoteric* version of monotheism and of the dogma which supports it. On the other hand, esoteric and mystical thinkers have never ceased to demonstrate that in its exoteric form monotheism falls into the very idolatry that it is attempting the escape. Al-Farabi was contemporary with the first great Ismaili thinkers. His theory of the Ten Intelligences, when compared with that of Ismaili esotericism, may be seen in a new light. In our brief analysis (see above, II, B, 1,2) of the structure of the pleroma of the Ten among the Ismailis of the Fatimid tradition, we noted that it differs from the schema of the emanationist philosophers in that as principle it postulates a Supra-Being beyond both being and non-being, and sees Emanation as starting only with the First Intelligence. Moreover, Ismaili cosmogony contains a dramatic element which is lacking in the schema of al-Farabi and Avicenna.

Nevertheless, the Ismaili figure of the Tenth Angel (the celestial Adam) corresponds perfectly to the Tenth Intelligence which our philosophers here call the active Intelligence (*al-'aql al-fa' 'al*). This correspondence makes us finally able to understand better the role of the active Intelligence in the prophetology of al-Farabi, because in his whole theory of the Intelligence, as well as in his theory of the Sage-Prophet, al-Farabi is something more than a 'Hellenizing philosopher'. He made a comparison which became popular, and which

everyone repeated after him: 'The active Intelligence is to the possible intellect of man what the sun is to the eye, which is potential vision so long as it is in darkness.' This Intelligence, which in the hierarchy of being is the spiritual being next above man and the world of men, is always in act. It is called the 'Giver of Forms' (*wahib al-suwar, dator formarum*), because it radiates forms into matter, and radiates into the human potential intellect the knowledge of these forms.

This human intellect is subdivided into the theoretical or contemplative intellect, and the practical intellect. The theoretical intellect goes through three states: it is possible or potential intellect in relation to knowledge; it is intellect in act while it is acquiring knowledge; it is acquired intellect when it has acquired knowledge. Here precisely is something new in al-Farabi's gnosiology. In spite of its name, the acquired intellect (*'aql mustafad, intellectus adeptus*) cannot be confused with the *nous epiktetos* of Alexander of Aphrodisias, for whom it is an intermediary state between the potential intellect and the intellect in act. For al-Farabi, it is the human intellect in a higher state, a state in which it is able to receive, through intuition and illumination, the Forms which are irradiated into it by the active Intelligence without passing through the intermediary of the senses. In short, the idea of the active Intelligence, like that of the acquired intellect, is evidence in al-Farabi of something other than pure Aristotelianism: it denotes the influence of the Book of the *Theology*, with all the neo-Platonic elements that it brings in its train.

5. The same is true of this Hellenizing philosopher with respect to a third point: the theory of prophetism which is the crowning glory of his work. His theory of the 'perfect City' bears a Greek stamp in virtue of its Platonic inspiration, but it fulfils the philosophical and mystical aspirations of a philosopher of Islam. It is often spoken of as al-Farabi's 'politics'. In fact, al-Farabi was not at all what we call today a 'man of action'; he had no knowledge of public affairs at first hand. His 'politics' depends on his whole cosmology and psychology, and is inseparable from them. Thus his concept of the 'perfect City' encompasses all the earth inhabited by man, the *oikoumen*. It is not a 'functional' political programme. His so-called political philosophy could be better designated as a prophetic philosophy.

Both its dominating figure—the head of the ideal City: the prophet, the *Imam*—and the denouement of the theory in the world beyond

reveal al-Farabi's mystical inspiration; yet, more than this, his prophetology shares certain essential features with the prophetic philosophy of Shiism (see above, II). Unfortunately this observation and its consequences cannot be expanded on here. The arguments on which al-Farabi bases the necessity of the existence of prophets, the features defining the inner being of the prophet, the guide or Imam, correspond to the arguments which in Shiite prophetology are based, as we saw, on the teaching of the holy Imams. The prophet-legislator during his lifetime is also the Imam. After the prophet begins the cycle of the Imamate (or the cycle of the *walayah*, the name denoting in the Islamic period the *nubuwah* or prophecy pure and simple, which does not involve the *shari'ah*). It al-Farabi's sage-prophet establishes 'laws' (*nawamis*), this does not actually imply a *shari'ah* the strict theological sense of the word. The conjunction of the two prophetologies throws new light on the idea which makes the Platonic sage, the philosopher-ruler of the ideal City, into an *Imam*.

6. Furthermore, we saw how Shiite prophetology culminates in a gnosiology which distinguishes the mode of knowledge of the Prophet from that of the Imam. Similarly, for al-Farabi the prophet-Imam, the head of the perfect City, must have attained the highest degree of human happiness, namely that which consists in union with active Intelligence. This union is in fact the source of all prophetic revelation and all inspiration. As we have already noted, this is not a unitive fusion or an identification (*ittihad*), but an attainment and a reunion (*ittisal*). It is therefore important to remember that in contrast to Plato's Sage, who must descend from the contemplation of the Intelligibles to the domain of public affairs, al-Farabi's Sage must unite himself with the spiritual beings; his main function is in fact to lead the citizens towards this goal, for absolute happiness depends on such a union. The ideal City described by al-Farabi is more the city of the 'latter-day saints'; it corresponds to a state of things which, in Shiite eschatology, will be realized on earth at the coming of the hidden Imam in preparation for the Resurrection. Is it then possible to apply to al-Farabi's 'politics' the same meaning that the word has today?

On the other hand, with regard to the 'prince' on whom al-Farabi confers all the human and philosophical virtues, he may rightly be said to be a 'Plato clothed in the prophetic mantle of Muhammad'. More accurately, we must agree with al-Farabi that union with the active

Intelligence can be effected by the intellect. This is what happens in the case of the philosopher, because this union is the source of all philosophical knowledge. The union can also be effected by the imagination, in which case it is the source of revelation, inspiration and prophetic dreams. We saw above how Shiite prophetic philosophy gave rise to an entire theory of the Imagination, which vindicated imaginative knowledge and the world perceived by such knowledge. It is significant that in al-Farabi the theory of the imagination likewise plays a crucial role. If one refers to the work of Mulla Sadra al-Shirazi which comments upon the teaching of the Imams, one is no longer entitled to say that al-Farabi's theory of prophetism was taken seriously only by Jewish scholasticism (Maimonides), for it was an immensely fruitful one for Shiite prophetic philosophy.

7. The gnosiology which derives from this prophetic philosophy {see above, n, A, 5} is established essentially as a function of the degrees of vision or audition of the Angel, whether in dream, in a state of waking, or in the intermediary state. For al-Farabi, the Sage is united with the active Intelligence through speculative meditation; the prophet is united with it through the Imagination, and it is the source of prophetism and of prophetic revelation. This conception is only possible because the Muhammadan archangel—Gabriel, the Holy Spirit—is identified with the active Intelligence. As we have already observed here, this is in no way rationalization of the Holy Spirit—rather, the contrary is the case. The identification of the Angel of Knowledge with the Angel of Revelation is actually demanded by a prophetic philosophy: this is the orientation of all al-Farabi's doctrine. For this reason it would be inadequate to say that he provided Revelation with a philosophical basis, as it would be inaccurate to say that he placed the philosopher above the prophet. Such a manner of speaking denotes ignorance of the nature of prophetic philosophy. Philosopher and prophet are united with the same Intelligence-Holy Spirit. The case of al-Farabi is an excellent illustration of the situation we have already described. The relationship between legalistic Islam and philosophy is possibly one of irreconcilable opposition. The fundamental relationship is that between esoteric Islam (in the broad sense of the Greek *ta eso*), and exoteric, literalist religion. One judges the fate and role of philosophy in Islam according to whether one affirms or rejects its esoteric aspect.

Having said this, we should note that the ideal City, perfect as it

is, does not constitute an end in itself for al-Farabi. It is a way of bringing men closer to supra-terrestrial happiness. When they pass the doors of death, the troops of the living rejoin the troops of those who went before them into the beyond, 'and they unite themselves with them intelligibly, each one being united with his likeness'. Through this union of soul with soul, the sweetness and delight of those who went first are ceaselessly and indefinitely increased and multiplied. Here again a vision such as this is very close to the anticipations of Ismaili eschatology, when it describes the reunion of the Forms of light which constitute the Temple of Light of the Imamate.

8. We know of only a small number of al-Farabi's pupils. Prominent among them was Abu Zakariya' Yahya ibn 'Adi (d. 374/984), a Jacobite Christian philosopher already mentioned here in connection with his translation of Aristotle. There is an interesting philosophical correspondence between Yahya ibn 'Adi and Jewish philosopher from Mosul, Ibn Abi Sa'id al-Mawsili. A pupil of Yahya ibn 'Adi, Muhammad Abu Sulayman al-Sijistani {d. 371/981, not to be confused with the Ismaili Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani), during the second half of the tenth century brought together a circle of cultured men in Baghdad who held brilliant 'cultural' meetings. We owe our knowledge of the essentials of these meetings to a book by Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi (d. 399/1009), a follower of Abu Sulayman—a unique book which is packed with interesting information {*Kitab al-Muqabasah*). However, this was not a circle of philosophers in the strict sense. Their discussions on al-Farabi's logic appear to have degenerated into a purely verbal philosophy. And many things were said which are not to be taken too seriously (for example, Abu Sulayman's boasting remark that he knew the true author of the writings attributed to Jabir ibn Hayyan, which we mentioned above). In fact, al-Farabi's true spiritual posterity is found in Avicenna, who acknowledged him as his master. He was influential in Andalusia (especially for Ibn Bajjah; see below, VIII, 3) and for al-Suhrawardi. This influence can also be perceived, as we saw, in Mulla Sadra al-Shirazi.

### 3. ABU AL-HASAN AL-'AMDU

1. Abu al-Hasan Muhammad ibn Yusuf al-'Amiri has been little known in the West up till now. Yet in the tradition of philosophers studied

in this chapter, this Iranian from Khurasan was an important figure between al-Farabi and Avicenna. He was born at Nishapur. His teacher was another great Khurasanian, Abu Zayd Ahmad ibn Sahl al-Balkhi. He received a complete education in philosophy and metaphysics, commented some texts by Aristotle, and conducted a whole philosophical correspondence with Avicenna. (This constitutes the *Book of the Fourteen Questions*, with Avicenna's answers.) He made two journeys to Baghdad, one before 360/970 and one in 364/974, where it seems that he was alarmed by the customs of the inhabitants. He returned to Iran and spent five years in Rayy under the protection of the vizir Ibn al-'Amid, entirely occupied with his teaching. He then returned to his native Khurasan, where he died in 381/991.

He had many followers and friends, such as Abu al-Qasim al-Katib, who was closely allied with Ibn Hindu; Ibn Maskuyah {see below, V, 5}, who quotes him in *Jawidan Kharad*, and in particular Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi {see above, V, 2}, who quotes him frequently. He is also quoted by Avicenna in his *Kitab al-Najat al-nafs*, albeit with certain reservations about his philosophical abilities. Nevertheless, those of his works which have survived, together with his appraisals of other philosophers, show him to have been not devoid of originality: there is a treatise on happiness (*sa'adah*), chapters (*fusul*) on metaphysical questions (*ma'alim ilahiyah*), treatises on optical perception (*ibsar*), on the concept of eternity (*abad*), on the excellences of Islam, on predestination and free will (*jabr and qadar*), and a work in Persian (*Farrukh-Namah*). In the *Fusul* he speaks of the union of the intellect, intellection and the object of intellection in terms which were apparently to inspire Afdal al-Din al-Kashani {seventh/thirteenth century}, a follower of Nasir al-Din Tusi.

2. Al-Tawhidi acquaints us with a number of discussions and debates in which Abu al-Hasan took part. Worth mentioning here is a discussion with Mani the Mazdean {Mani al-Majusi, not to be confused, obviously, with the prophet of Manichaeism) in the course of which our philosopher reveals himself to be a good Platonist {Each sensible thing is a shadow of the intelligible— The Intelligence is the caliph of God in this world'}. Mulla Sadra al-Shirazi {d. 1050/1640} refers to his doctrines in his great Summa of philosophy (*Kitab al-Asfar-arba'ah*). Likewise one of the lessons by the same author on al-Suhrawardi's *Oriental Theosophy* (sect. 134, cf. below, VIII) makes an interesting

point in an *excursus*. He alludes to the book *On the Concept of Eternity* (*al-Amad 'ala al-Abad*), in which Abu al-Hasan al-'Amiri attributes to Empedocles the doctrine maintaining that if one says of the Creator, who is without attributes, that he *is* generosity, force, power, this does not mean that the faculties or powers which these Names designate really exist in him.

We will once more encounter the theories of the neo-Empedocles in the works of Ibn Masarrah in Andalusia (see below, VIII, 1). They had a certain influence on al-Suhrawardi (the polarity of *qahr* and *mahabbah*, domination and love)—it is worth noting here this other evidence of their influence in Iran. Finally, it appears that in 'political' philosophy, Abu al-Hasan al-'Amiri was especially influenced by the Iranian works translated from Pahlavi by Ibn al-Muqaffa', and professes a doctrine less under the influence of Platonic Hellenism than that of al-Farabi.

3. We must also mention here a philosopher who is known only for a short work on the soul, Bakr ibn al-Qasim al-Mawsili (meaning from Mosul). Although Bakr lived in the exciting times when the Christians were commenting Aristotle in Baghdad, when al-Farabi was elaborating a doctrine with enduring consequences, and Rhazes was causing a scandal with his doctrine, he seems none the less to have been unaffected by all these currents. Of the authors of the Islamic period he quotes only the Sabian philosopher Thabit ibn Qurrah, a choice whose exclusiveness is evidence of the considerable influence wielded by the Sabian philosopher from Harran (see above, IV, 1).

#### 4. AVICENNA AND AVICENNISM

1. Abu 'Ali al-Husayn ibn 'Abd Allah ibn Sina was born at Afshana in the neighbourhood of Bukhara, in the month of Safar 370/August 980. When some of his works were translated into Latin in the twelfth century, the Spanish pronunciation of his name, 'Aben' or 'Aven Sina' gave rise to the form *Avicenna*, by which he is universally known in the West. His father was a high functionary in the Samanid government. Thanks to his autobiography, which was completed by his *famulus* and faithful follower al-Juzjani, we know the most important details about his life.

He was an extraordinarily precocious child. His education was **encyclopaedic**, and **encompassed** grammar **and** geometry, physics and

medicine, law and theology. His reputation was such that at the age of seventeen he was summoned by the Samanid prince Nuh ibn Mansur and succeeded in curing him. Aristotle's *Metaphysics* presented him, however, with an insurmountable obstacle: he read it through forty times without understanding it. It was owing to a treatise by al-Farabi which he came across by chance that 'the scales fell from his eyes'. His avowal of gratitude is a pleasure to read. At the age of eighteen he was more or less familiar with all forms of knowledge, and it only remained for him to deepen his understanding. After his father's death, he began to travel through Khurasan, but this Iranian from Transoxiana was never to cross the borders of the Iranian world. He lived first at Gurgan (south-east of the Caspian Sea), where the friendship of the prince, Abu Muhammad al-Shirazi, enabled him to teach publicly, and where he began to write his great *Canon of medicine* (*al-Qanun fi al-Tibb*), which for several centuries formed the basis of medical studies in the West, and continues to do so in the Islamic East today.

After a sojourn at Rayy—a town mentioned frequently here, a few kilometres to the south of present-day Tehran—where the philosopher had taken service with the queen-regent Sayyidah and her young son Majd al-Dawlah, Avicenna went on to Qazwin and then to Hamadhan, in western Iran. The prince of Hamadhan, Shams al-Dawlah (*Sol regni* in the Latin translation) bestowed the vizirate on him, but the philosopher had terrible difficulties with the military and resigned from **the** post. He agreed to take it up a second time at the entreaties of the prince, whom he had treated and cured. His follower al-Juzjani chose this precise moment to ask him to compose a commentary on the works of Aristotle. They then embarked on a shattering programme of work at Hamadhan. The day was taken up with politics, so the night was devoted to serious matters. Al-Juzjani read over the pages on physics in the *Kitab al-Shifa'* (*The Book of Healing*, a great summa of philosophy), and another follower read over those of the *Qanun* (medicine). They went on late into the night, then took a break: conversation flowed, some wine was drunk, they played a little music\_\_\_

On the death of the prince, Avicenna corresponded in secret with the prince of Isfahan, 'Ala' al-Dawlah—an indiscretion which cost him a term of imprisonment during which he composed the first of his mystical romances, the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*. He managed to

escape, reached Isfahan, became intimate with the prince, and once more his 'team' took up the same exhausting regime of work as at Hamadhan. In 421/1030—seven years before Avicenna's death—Mas'ud, the son of Mahmud of Ghaznah, seized Isfahan. The shaykh's baggage was plundered. The result was the disappearance of the enormous encyclopaedia which he had entitled *Kitab al-Insaf* (*The Book of Impartial Judgment*, twenty-eight thousand questions in twenty volumes), in which he tackled the difficulties provoked in reading the philosophers by means of his own personal philosophy, known as 'Oriental philosophy' (*hikmah mashriqiyah*).

All that remains of this encyclopaedia are a few fragments, which either escaped plunder or were reconstructed by the author. Among them are part of the commentary on the *Book of Theology* attributed to Aristotle, the commentary on book *lambda* of the *Metaphysics*, the marginal Notes on the *De Anima*, and possibly the 'Notebooks' known as the *Logic of the Orientals*. On an expedition against Hamadhan in which Avicenna accompanied his prince, he fell ill, doctored himself too severely, and collapsed at the height of his powers at the age of fifty-seven, in 429/1037 near Hamadhan. He died in a most edifying fashion, as a pious Muslim. The formal commemoration of the millennium of his birth (in April 1954 at Tehran; there was a slight delay, as the year 1370 of the Hijrah actually corresponds to 1950 CE) saw the inauguration of the beautiful mausoleum raised on his tomb at Hamadhan through the efforts of the Society of Iranian National Monuments.

2. When one considers the degree to which Avicenna's life was burdened with events and encumbered by public responsibilities, one marvels at the scope of his work. The bibliography established by Yahya Mahdavi lists 242 titles. His work, which had made such a deep impression on the medieval West and on the Islamic East down to our day, covers the entire field of philosophy and the sciences studied at the time. Avicenna was the realization *par excellence* of the medieval type of the universal man. We owe to him a treatise on Prayer and a commentary on several Surahs of the Quran (see above, I, 1). His work, whose starting-point was the work of al-Farabi, ended by somewhat eclipsing the latter in scope (rather like Mulla Sadra al-Shirazi's work in relation to that of his master Mir Damad, *Magister tertius*, in the sixteenth **and** seventeenth centuries).

We must not forget that this work is contemporary with the great works of Ismaili esotericism (see above, II, B, 1) which are associated with some eminent Iranian names (Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani, d. ca. 360/972; Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani, d. 408/1017; Mu'ayyadfi al-Din al-Shirazi, d. 470/1077, etc.), and which, we hope, will gradually assume their rightful status in our histories of philosophy. Both Avicenna's father and his brother were Ismailis—he himself alludes in his autobiography to the efforts they made to win him over to the Ismaili *da'wah*. As in the case of al-Farabi, there is undoubtedly an analogy in structure between the Avicennan universe and Ismaili cosmology; yet the philosopher refused to join the brotherhood. Nevertheless, although he shied away from Ismaili Shiism, the reception he was accorded by the Shiite princes of Hamadhan and Isfahan allows us at any rate to infer that he subscribed to Twelver Shiism.

This synchronism enlarges the horizon against which his spiritual physiognomy is outlined. Moreover, in the totality of his work we may sense the complexity of a soul and a doctrine of which only a part was known to the Latin scholastics. This part was what emerged, of course, from his monumental work the *Shifa'*, which embraced Logic, metaphysics and physics. But the philosopher's personal undertaking was to culminate, as we saw above, in what he designated as being necessarily an 'Oriental philosophy'.

3. As we are obliged to limit ourselves here to the briefest of surveys, the centre of our perspective will be Avicenna's theory of knowledge. This theory, which derives from a general theory of the hierarchical Intelligences, takes the form of an angelology, which both lays the foundations of cosmology and defines the place of anthropology. We saw above (V, 2) that the metaphysics of essence originated in the work of al-Farabi and, with it, the division of being into being which is necessarily being of itself, and being which is necessarily so through another. The Avicennan universe in its turn does not contain what is known as the contingency of the possible. If the possible remains potential, it is because it is unable to be. If a possibility is actualized in being, it is because its existence is made necessary by its cause. Hence it cannot not be. Its cause in turn is necessitated by its own cause, and so on.

It follows that the 'orthodox' idea of the Creation is also obliged to undergo a fundamental change. There can be no question of a

voluntary *coup d'etat* in pre-eternity—there can only be a question of divine necessity. The Creation consists in the very act of divine thought thinking itself; and the knowledge that the divine Being has eternally of himself is no other than the First Emanation, the First *nous* or First Intelligence. This first, unique effect of creative energy, which is identified with divine thought, ensures the transition from Unity to Multiplicity, and also satisfies the principle that from the One only the One can proceed.

In the wake of this First Intelligence, the plurality of being proceeds—exactly as in al-Farabi's system—from a series of acts of contemplation which in some sense turn cosmology into a phenomenology of angelic awareness or consciousness. The First Intelligence contemplates its Principle; it contemplates its Principle which makes its own being necessary; it contemplates the pure possibility of its own being in itself, considered fictively as outside its Principle. From its first contemplation proceeds the Second Intelligence; from the second contemplation proceeds the moving soul of the first Heaven (the Sphere of Spheres); from the third contemplation proceeds the etheric, supra-elemental body of this first Heaven—a body which proceeds, therefore, from the inferior dimension, the dimension of *shadow* or non-being, of the First Intelligence. This triple contemplation, which is the origination of being, is repeated from Intelligence to Intelligence, until the double hierarchy is complete: that is to say, the hierarchy of the Ten Cherubic Intelligences (*karubiyun, angeli intellectuales*), and the hierarchy of the celestial Souls (*angeli caelestes*). These Souls do not possess any faculties of sense, but they do possess Imagination in its pure state, that is to say liberated from the senses; and their aspiring desire for the Intelligence from which they proceed communicates to each Heaven its own motion. The cosmic revolutions in which all motion originates are thus the result of an aspiration of love which remains forever unassuaged. It was this theory of the celestial Souls, and consequently the theory of an imagination which is independent of the corporeal senses, that Averroes (see below, VIII, 6) so vehemently rejected. On the other hand, it flourished among the Iranian followers of Avicenna; we explained earlier (II, 5) how and why prophetic gnosiology had postulated the idea of a purely spiritual Imagination.

4. The Tenth Intelligence no longer has the strength to produce in its

turn another unique Intelligence and another unique Soul. Following this Intelligence, Emanation explodes, as it were, into the multitude of human beings, while from its dimension of shadow proceeds sublunary matter. This Tenth Intelligence is designated the acting or active Intelligence (*al-'aql al-fa' 'al*); from it our souls emanate, and its illumination (*ishraq*) projects the ideas or forms of knowledge into those souls which have acquired the ability to turn towards it. The human intellect has neither the role nor the power to abstract the intelligible from the sensible. All knowledge and all recollection are an emanation and an illumination which come from the Angel. Moreover, the human intellect itself possesses the nature of the potential angel. It is dual in structure {practical intellect and contemplative intellect), and its two 'aspects' are known as 'terrestrial angels'. Herein lies the secret of the soul's destiny. Of the four states of the contemplative intellect, the one which corresponds to intimacy with the Angel who is the active or acting Intelligence is called the 'holy intellect' (*al-'aql al-qudsi*). At its height, it attains the privileged status of the spirit of prophecy.

We may guess from all this that when it comes to the question of the *nous poietikos* (*intelligentia agens*), on which the interpreters of Aristotle have been divided from the beginning, Avicenna, following al-Farabi {and at this point we should also recall the Tenth Intelligence of the Ismaili cosmogony) and contrary to Themistius and St. Thomas Aquinas, opted for an Intelligence which is separate from and extrinsic to the human intellect; yet at the same time he does not identify it with the concept of God, as did Alexander of Aphrodisias and the Augustinians. Al-Farabi and Avicenna regarded this Intelligence as a being in the Pleroma, and as linking man directly to the Pleroma. Hereby these philosophers demonstrated their gnostic originality. On the other hand, they were not content with the Peripatetic notion of the soul as the form (entelechy) of an organic body: this 'information' is only one of the soul's functions, and not even the most important of them. Their anthropology is neo-Platonic.

5. Given this basis, we can understand how the project of 'Oriental philosophy' is a harmonious articulation of the pre-established system. Unfortunately all that remains of this 'Oriental philosophy' are the outlines and hints mentioned above. {We will not go into the detail of certain controversies. The paper by S. Pines cited *in fine* in our

Bibliography has shown decisively that Avicenna's use of the word 'Orientals' always possesses the same meaning.) The most accurate idea one can form of it is to be gleaned, on the one hand, from the *Notes* written in the margin of the *Theology* attributed to Aristotle. Out of six references made by Avicenna to his 'Oriental philosophy', five relate to existence *post mortem*. This doctrine of survival would have been the most essential feature of 'Oriental philosophy'.

On the other hand, there is the trilogy of the Mystical Recitals or Romances to which Avicenna confided the secret of his personal experience. In so doing, he offers us the rare example of a philosopher taking perfect cognizance of himself and who—like al-Suhrawardi later—comes at length to fashion his own symbols. The theme of all three Recitals is the journey towards a mystical *Orient*, an Orient which is not to be found on our maps, but the idea of which is already present in gnosis. The *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan* (*Vivens filius Vigilantis*, he who keeps watch; *cf.* the *Egregoroi* in the books of Enoch) describes the invitation to travel in the company of the Angel who illuminates. The *Recital of the Bird* completes the journey, and inaugurates a cycle which reached its peak in the marvellous Persian mystical epic by Farid al-Din 'Attar in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Finally, *Salaman and Absal* are the two heroes of the Recital evoked in the last section of the *Book of Instructions* (*Isharat*). These are not allegories but symbolic recitals, and it is important not to confuse the two (*cf.* above, I, 1). They are not stories about theoretical truths which could always be expressed differently; they are figures which typify an intimate personal drama, the apprenticeship of an entire lifetime. The symbol is both key and silence; it speaks and it does not speak. It can never be explained once and for all. It expands to the degree that each consciousness is progressively summoned by it to unfold—that is to say, to the degree that each consciousness makes the symbol the key to its own transmutation.

6. The figure and role of the Angel who is the 'active Intelligence' enable us to understand the subsequent fate of Avicennism. It was because of this Intelligence that what has been called 'Latin Avicennism' was brought to a halt. Orthodox monotheism was alarmed by it, since it was fully aware that far from being immobilized and directed by this Angel to a metaphysically inferior goal, the philosopher would be carried away by it to an unforeseen beyond, and certainly beyond

established dogma; for an immediate and personal relationship with a spiritual being from the Pleroma was unlikely to predispose a philosopher to bow before the Magisterium here below. Avicennism flourished only at the price of a radical alteration in its structure and meaning (the 'Augustinian Avicennism' so well described and analysed by Etienne Gilson). The effects of Avicennism should be followed up in the direction of Albert the Great, of his follower Ulrich of Strasburg, and of the precursors of the Rhineland mystics.

Nevertheless, whereas the tide of Averroism was to submerge the effects of Avicennism in Christianity, quite a different fate awaited it in the East. There Averroism was unknown, and al-Ghazali's critique was not seen as having the same fatal significance often accorded to it by our historians of philosophy. Avicenna's immediate followers were of the highest standing. There was, first and foremost, the faithful al-Juzjani, who wrote a Persian version and commentary on the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*; Husayn ibn Zayla of Isfahan (d. 440/1048), who wrote a commentary on it in Arabic; a good Zoroastrian with a typically Iranian name, Bahmanyar ibn al-Marzuban, whose important work remains unedited. But it can be said without paradox that Avicenna's successor was al-Suhrawardi: not in the sense that his books incorporate certain elements of Avicenna's metaphysics, but in the sense that he in turn took upon himself the project of 'Oriental philosophy'—a project which, according to him, Avicenna could never have completed, because he was ignorant of the true 'oriental sources'. Al-Suhrawardi was able to complete it by reviving the philosophy or theosophy of Light of ancient Persia (see below, VII).

This Suhrawardian Avicennism flowered magnificently with the School of Isfahan after the sixteenth century, with results that are still alive in Shiite Iran today. At the beginning of this chapter we mentioned some of the great names which have been sadly absent from our histories of philosophy till now. We should add that Sayyid Ahmad al-'Alawi, the pupil and son-in-law of Mir Damad (d. 1040/1631) wrote a commentary on the *Shifa'*, which assumed the proportions of a personal work as vast as the *Shifa'* itself. He entitled it *The Key to the Shifa'*, and in it he makes express reference to the 'Oriental philosophy' mentioned by Avicenna at the start of his book.

While philosophical thought slumbered everywhere else in the Islamic world, these masters of Iranian Avicennism conducted Shiite

Islam to its highest point of philosophic awareness. In contrast to the fate of Latin Avicennism, the identification of the Angel of Revelation who is the Holy Spirit with the active Intelligence who is the Angel of Knowledge inspired a philosophy of the Spirit profoundly different from the philosophy which goes by the same name in the West. In order to grasp the significance of this difference we must go back to the options to which we drew attention earlier. The very last pages of the *Shifa'*—in which Avicenna, with a deliberate density of allusion, speaks of the concept of the Prophet and the Imam—did indeed arrest the attention of our thinkers; for these pages enabled them to conclude that Avicenna's gnosiology, his doctrine of the Intelligence, contained the premisses of their own prophetic philosophy.

##### 5. IBN MASKUYAH, IBN FATIK, IBN HINDU

1. Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Ya'qub Maskuyah, contemporary of al-Biruni and Avicenna, was born at Rayy and died in Isfahan in 421/1030. According to Mir Damad and Nur Allah al-Shushtari, it seems that the conversion of his family to Islam went back no further than his grandfather Maskuyah (the ending of this name, like that of Ibn Babuyah and Sibuyah, represents the Persian form of the middle-Iranian names ending in-oe. The Arabs vocalize it as Miskawayh). He is an example of the type of Iranian philosopher of Mazdean descent, with a particular leaning towards the study of customs and civilizations, sentences and maxims of wisdom—a literary genre which is so well-represented in Pahlavi. Ahmad-i Maskuyah, as he is commonly known in Persian, spent part of his youth as librarian to Ibn al-'Amid, the vizir to whom we have already alluded (see above, V, 3), and then became the *famulus* and treasurer of the Daylamid sovereign 'Ala al-Dawlah (for whom he wrote one of his Persian treatises). Everything points to his being Shiite: his admission into the Daylamid circle, Nasir Tusi's praise of him, and finally certain passage in his books.

Of the twenty or so works of his which have come down to us, we will name only the most famous. There is his treatise on moral philosophy, *On the Reforming of Customs (Tahdhib al-akhlaq)*, which has been through several editions in Cairo and Tehran; it is praised by Nasir Tusi in the introduction to his own work on moral philosophy in Persian (*Akhlaq-i Nasiri*). There is the work with characteristic Persian title of *Javidan Kharad* (eternal wisdom). A legend concerning



it has become traditional. A treatise with this title was said to have been written by king Hushang, one of the legendary kings of ancient Iranian history, or by some sage of his period. This work was discovered at the time of the 'Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mun, and partially translated into Arabic by Hasan ibn Sahl al-Nawbakhti. In his turn, Maskuyah revised and expanded the Arabic work, and also produced a Persian version. However that may be, it is his Arabic text, with the title *Eternal Wisdom* (*al-Hikmah al-khalidah*, ed. 'A. Badawi, Cairo) that Maskuyah uses as the introduction to his great work on the experience of nations, which encompasses the civilization of the Arabs, the Persians and the Indians.

2. This book of 'eternal wisdom', which recounts the sayings of many philosophers, is related to a whole body of contemporary literature to which we can only refer in passing. Abu al-Wafa' Mubashshir ibn Fatik (fifth/eleventh century), a follower of Ibn al-Haytham, (see above, IV, 8) was an Arab who, although originally from Damascus, settled in Egypt, compiled a very important anthology (*Mukhtar al-hikam*) of 'words of wisdom' attributed to the sages of antiquity, whose more or less legendary biographies he relates. According to his recent editor, 'A. Badawi, he may have had access to a source deriving from the *Lives of the Philosophers* by Diogenes Laertes. (Ibn Fatik's work was translated into Spanish and Latin, and into French by Guillaume de Thignonville, d. 1414 CE, who worked from the Latin version. There was also a partial translation of it into Provencal, and two versions in English.) At any rate, it was extensively used, first by al-Shahrastani (d. 547/1153) in his great history of religions and doctrines, in connection with the section on the ancient philosophers; and later by al-Shahrazuri (d. ca. 680/1281), the follower and commentator of al-Suhrawardi (see below, VII, 5), who quoted large excerpts from it. In this way we can trace the tradition of the Greek doxographers in Islam down to Qutb al-Din Ashkevari, a follower of Mr Damad in his *Mahbub al-qulub*.

3. Here mention should also be made of 'Ali ibn Hindu, also a native Rayy, who died in 420/1029, and was another contemporary and compatriot of Maskuyah. He too compiled an anthology of spiritual sentences by the Greek sages. In connection with this, it is worth mentioning, by way of anticipation, the great *History of the Philosophers* by Jamal al-Din ibn al-Qifti (d. 646/1248).

## 6. ABU AL-BARAKAT AL-BAGHDADI

1. Hibat Allah 'Ali ibn Malka Abu al-Barakat al-Baghdadi, an original and attractive personality whose work has been studied in detail by S. Pines, lived to an advanced age (eighty or ninety years), and died shortly after 560/1164. He was of Jewish origin, and converted late in life to Islam for reasons which are somewhat complex, seeing that Muslim biographers give four different versions of his conversion. He is also referred to in a Hebrew text by the name Nathanael, which etymologically is the exact equivalent of Hibat Allah, *Adeodatus*, God-given. His sobriquet *Awhad al-zaman*, 'the unique in his time', is sufficient evidence of his reputation. He is the *exemple par excellence* of the type of personal philosopher (he has more than one thing in common with Ibn Bajjah; see below, VIII, 3) for whom the idea of meddling in 'politics', in 'social' matters, contradicts the very concept of the philosopher. Official conflicts, such as that between religion and philosophy, as officially understood, interest him not at all. For if the philosopher were to get mixed up in them, how could he be a 'revolutionary'?

We are not, therefore, dealing with an occasional attitude—a withdrawal motivated, say, by the afflictions of the times—but with a fundamental attitude revealed clearly enough in Abu al-Barakat's concept of the history of philosophy. He stated that the philosopher-sages of antiquity only taught orally, for fear lest their doctrines should reach people incapable of understanding them. Only later were they written down, but in a cryptic and symbolic language (a similar idea is to be found in al-Suhrawardi). The history of philosophy is thus reduced to a process of corruption and misinterpretation of the ancient tradition, and this degradation has continued up to the time of Abu al-Barakat. Thus when he says—with some slight exaggeration—that he owes few things to his reading of the philosophers, and that he owes what is essential to his own personal meditations, his intention is not to devalue tradition, but on the contrary to restore its purity. For this reason, he says, although he has read the philosophers' books, he has also read the great 'book of being', and he has come to prefer the doctrines suggested by the latter to those of traditional philosophy.

Our philosopher is therefore perfectly aware that he is elaborating doctrines which are independent of the tradition of the philosophers, since they are the fruit of his own explorations. This is why S. Pines

has given so apt a translation of the title of his main philosophical work, *Kitab al-Mu'tabar*. 'The book of that which is established through personal reflection'. This great work originated in personal notes accumulated in the course of a long lifetime; the philosopher refused to turn them into a book for fear that unqualified readers would not understand them. In the end they came to constitute a veritable summa of scientific knowledge in three volumes, embracing Logic, Physics and Metaphysics (ed. Hyderabad 1357-58 AH). There is no doubt that the new and sometimes revolutionary ideas that it contains are the result of his meditations. The author does, however, speak of the meditations of others, such as those found in certain pages of Avicenna's *Shifa*, doubtless because he found them to be in accordance with what he had read in the 'book of being'.

2. It is because we have laid such emphasis on Avicenna's doctrine of the active Intelligence (see above) that we will now stress the attitude adopted by Abu al-Barakat towards this doctrine, for it is a reflection of his uncompromising 'personalism'. It also frees philosophy once and for all from the difficulties which arise both when one single Intelligence is postulated for humankind, and when a collective magisterium, whether sacred or profane, is substituted for each man's direct relationship with this transcendent but unique Intelligence. The roots of the problem, for Abu al-Barakat, go back to the question of knowing whether human souls together form a single identical species, or else whether every soul is essentially different in kind from every other, or whether souls are grouped together by spiritual families, which constitute so many different species in relation to a common genus. In opposition to philosophers who support the first hypothesis, and in the absence of a clearly attested opinion favouring the second, Abu al-Barakat opts for the third hypothesis. But how then is one to admit that one sole active Intelligence is the unique 'existentializing' cause of the multitude of souls? Since there are *several species* of human soul, the unfolding of this plurality postulates the cooperation of all the celestial hierarchies.

Furthermore, we must distinguish an *existentializing* cause and a *perfecting* cause which are different from each other, as the spiritual teacher (*mu'allim*) is different from the fleshly father. Because of their specific diversity, the spiritual teaching required by the souls cannot be limited to one single form or to one single active Intelligence. This

is why the ancient Sages affirmed that for each individual soul, or perhaps for several souls at once possessing the same nature and affinity, there is a being in the spiritual world who throughout then-existence evinces towards this soul or group of souls a special solicitude and tenderness, a being who initiates them into knowledge, who guides them and consoles them. This friend and guide was known as 'Perfect Nature' (*al-tiba' al-tamm*); in religious parlance, he is called the 'Angel'.

3. The appearance at this point of this figure from Hermeticism is extraordinarily interesting. We have already described {IV, 1} the role of Perfect Nature as the personal Angel and *Alter ego* of light, above all in the Sabian texts, and in al-Suhrawardi and the *ishraqiyun*, all meditating in turn on the ecstatic experience during which Hermes saw the vision of his 'Perfect Nature'. Our conclusion is that by means of this Perfect Nature Abu al-Barakat resolves the problems presented by Avicenna's doctrine of the active Intelligence in a manner which undoubtedly marks a turning-point in the history of philosophy; for as a 'personalist' philosopher he thus makes explicit the process of *individuation* implied in Avicenna's theory itself. The innovatory boldness of this step can be gauged by the fact that in the medieval West opposition to 'Latin Avicennism' was inspired in particular by fear of the 'individualistic' consequences of its angelology. For Abu al-Barakat, there is indeed an active intellect for each human being (as there is for St Thomas Aquinas), but this intellect is 'separate'—that is to say, it is transcendent; it is not just a faculty immanent in terrestrial individuality. It therefore bestows on the individual as such a 'transcendent' dimension, which is superior to all the norms and collective authorities on the level of this world. This is the sense in which Abu al-Barakat can be termed 'revolutionary'.

We may note that he continued to write long after al-Ghazali died. This fact in itself is sufficient evidence that it would be more than exaggeration to believe that al-Ghazali's critique spelled ruin for the destiny of philosophy in Islam.

#### 7. ABU HAMID AL-GHAZALI AND THE CRITIQUE OF PHILOSOPHY

1. While being on guard against certain exaggerations, one may freely admit that this Khurasinian was one of the most powerful personalities

and possessed one of the best organized minds that Islam has ever known, as is evidenced by his honorary title, shared with a few others, of *Hujjat al-Islam*: the proof or guarantor of Islam. Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali was born in 450/1059 in Ghazalah, a village on the outskirts of Tus (the home of the poet Firdawsi) in Khurasan. He and his brother, who is discussed later in connection with Sufism {VI, 4), lost their father when they were still young children. But before his death, he had consigned them to the guardianship of a friend, a Sufi sage, at whose hand they received their first education. Later the young Abu Hamid went to Nishapur in Khurasan, then one of the most important intellectual centres in the Islamic world. Here he became acquainted with the master of the Ash'arite school of the time, Imam al-Haramayn, and became his follower (c/ above, HI, 3).

On the death of al-Haramayn in 478/1085, he made contact with the famous Saljuq vizir Nizam al-Mulk, the founder of Baghdad university (*al-Madrasah al-Nizamiyah*), where al-Ghazali was appointed professor in 484/1091. This period marks a decisive stage in his life, for the university provided him with a milieu favourable to the expansion and radiance of his personality, and he was able to deepen his knowledge of philosophy. Two works belong to this period of his life. There is, first, the book on 'The Intentions of the Philosophers' (*Maqasid al-falasifah*), which had such a curious fate in the West. It was translated into Latin in 1145 CE at Toledo, by Dominicus Gundissalinus, with the title *Logica et philosophia Algazelis Arabis*, but without the introduction and conclusion in which al-Ghazali stated his aim, which was to describe the doctrines of the philosophers in order to refute them. The work was taken by our Latin Scholastics as evidence that al-Ghazali was a philosophical colleague of al-Farabi and Avicenna, and he was included in the polemic against the 'Arab' philosophers.

The other work from the same period is the famous and violent attack against the philosophers, about which we shall be speaking; but now that we know a little more about the continuity of philosophical and spiritual thought in Islam, it appears ludicrous to say of this critique, as was said in the last century, that it dealt philosophy in the Islamic East a blow from which it was unable to recover. Great astonishment is expressed when, for example, one describes to certain Iranian shaykhs the importance which Western historians have accorded to

al-Ghazali's critique of philosophy. Al-Suhrawardi, Haydar Amuli, Mir Damad and others would have been equally astonished.

His thirty-sixth year was a decisive turning-point in al-Ghazali's life. At this time the problem of intellectual certainty presented itself to his conscience in a form so acute that it brought on a severe inner crisis, which completely disrupted his professional activity and his family life. In 488/1095 he abandoned the university and his family, sacrificing everything to the quest for inner certainty, the guarantee of Truth. We can imagine the shock caused by al-Ghazali's decision—after all, he was then rector of the *Nizamiyah* university and mouth-piece of the Ash'arite doctrine, identified at that time with the orthodoxy itself of Sunni Islam; and it reveals in al-Ghazali the strength of an exceptional personality.

He left Baghdad and set out on the narrow way which leads to certainty. For ten years, clothed in the garb of a Sufi, he went on his solitary pilgrimage through the Muslim world. His travels took him to Damascus and Jerusalem (before it was captured by the Crusaders), Alexandria and Cairo, Mecca and Medina, and he devoted all his time to the spiritual practices of the Sufis. When he had overcome the crisis and annulled his doubts he returned to his native land, taught for a few more years at Nishapur, and died at Tus in 505/1111 on the 19th December, at the age of fifty-two—younger even than Avicenna.

2. Al-Ghazali thus confronted the problem of knowledge and of personal certitude to its fullest extent. But was he alone, among all the Muslim thinkers, in searching for experiential certainty in inner knowledge? This is an essential theme in al-Suhrawardi, who seems to have known almost nothing at all about al-Ghazali, and Avicenna and Abu al-Barakat had already faced the problem of self-awareness and its implications. As for knowledge of the *heart*, it had been admirably formulated, as we now know, by the Imams of Shiism.

Yet what makes this quest of al-Ghazali's so moving is the drama into which it precipitated his life. When he speaks about true knowledge, what he says rings with the authenticity of personal testimony. In his *al-Munqidh Min al-dalal* ('The Preservation from Error') he writes: 'True knowledge is the knowledge through which the known object is utterly disclosed (to the spirit), in such a manner that no doubt can exist with regard to it, and no error can tarnish it. It is the level at which the *heart* cannot admit or even conceive of doubt. Any

knowledge which has not attained this level of certitude is incomplete and susceptible to error.' In another place (*Risalat al-laduniyah*), he describes this unveiling as 'the direct seizure by the thinking soul of the essential reality of things, stripped of their material form— As for the object of knowledge, it is the very essence of things reflected in the mirror of the soul... The thinking soul is the focus of the radiance of the universal Soul. From this Soul it receives the intelligible forms. It contains all knowledge in a potential state, as the seed contains all the possibilities of the plant and its state of being.'

This is excellent positive philosophy, and all philosophers, especially an *ishraqi*, would freely acknowledge its merit and validity. Unfortunately, it does not work both ways. Al-Ghazali's negative attitude towards philosophers achieves a violence which is astonishing in so elevated a soul. No doubt the polemical aspect of his work reveals his inner torment. This polemic takes up no less than four works, in which he turns successively against the Ismailis, the Christians, the so-called free-thinkers, and finally the philosophers. And what is even more astonishing is the degree to which al-Ghazali relies on logic and rational dialectic in order to achieve his polemical purpose, when elsewhere he is so utterly convinced of their inability to attain the truth!

3. The idea which motivates the book attacking the Ismailis (the 'Batinians', or esotericists) appears to involve rather too closely questions of power—that is, the concerns of the 'Abbasid caliph al-Mustazhir, who was anxious to ensure the legitimacy of his position against all Fatimid pretenders (hence the title *Kitab al-Mustazhiri*). The work was partially edited and analysed by I. Goldziher in 1916. Since at that date none of the great Ismaili texts, either Arabic or Persian, was yet known, it was easy for the editor to be fully in agreement with al-Ghazali. The situation today is different.

One is struck by al-Ghazali's bitterly *dialectical* attack against a type of thinking which is essentially *hermeneutic*. The process of the Ismaili *ta'wil*, or esoteric exegesis, escapes him, as does the concept of a knowledge which is transmitted (*tradita*) like a spiritual heritage ('*ilm irthi*) to its heirs. He insists on seeing only a 'religion of authority' in what is actually an *initiation* into a doctrine (*ta'lim*), into a hidden meaning which is neither constructed nor demonstrated by means of syllogisms, and which requires an inspired Guide, who is the Imam (see above, II). He fails to grasp both the actual meaning of the Shiite

Imamate, and what it is that conditions 'spiritual birth' (*wiladah ruhaniyah*), with its metaphysical basis. We referred above to the texts of the Shiite Imams on the knowledge of the *heart*, which would have satisfied al-Ghazali had he known them. His book simply illustrates the idea that an orthodox Sunni theologian may possess of esotericism. The entire question, moreover, needs to be reconsidered, for we now know of the existence of a massive Ismaili response to al-Ghazali's attacks. This was the work of the fifth Yemeni *Da'i*, Sayyid-na 'Ali ibn Muhammad ibn al-Walid (d. 612/1215); it is entitled *Damigh al-batil*, 'The book which annihilates falsehood', and consists of two manuscript volumes of one thousand five hundred pages. We may rest assured that a comparative study of the two texts will be extremely interesting.

The polemical book against the Christians is meant to be a 'courteous refutation (*radd jamil*) of the divinity of Jesus', in which the writer relies for support on the explicit statements of the Gospels. Strangely enough, al-Ghazali is less emphatic about the demand for unitarianism (*tawhid*) and the danger of anthropomorphism (*tashbih*) than about the affirmation of his method, which consists, equally curiously, in taking only science and reason as guides in the interpretation of the evangelical texts. This is, no doubt, an 'evangelical' protest against the dogmas of the Church; but the results of it should be compared with the completely different effect produced by the Christology which penetrated, without any polemic, other spiritual movements in Islam: Ismailism, al-Suhrawardi, Ibn al-'Arabi, al-Simnani and so on. We have already referred to the way that this Christology links up with Islamic gnosis and to how, when allied to gnosis pure and simple, it differs for all that from the official dogmas which are the object of al-Ghazali's attack. In short, this is a Christology which penetrates into 'prophetic philosophy' by extending, as we saw, the idea of the *Verus Propheta* to the 'Seal of the prophets' and to the cycle of the *walayah* after him.

Another polemical book, written this time in Persian—probably after al-Ghazali's return to Nishapur—takes issue with the 'freethinkers' (*ibahiyah*)—a very wide category which includes the anomian or non-conformist Sufis, errant philosophers, and 'heretics' of all descriptions. It could be said that the people who come under this heading here correspond to the so-called *Schwärmer* in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Germany, the 'Enthusiasts'. Here again those

that Avicennans have existed down to our day. The great works which came out of the school of Isfahan prove that there is no question of a 'philosophy of compromise', and even less of the 'works of epitomists'. It is indeed a question of that 'prophetic philosophy' which we described at the beginning of this study, and which was revived in sixteenth century Iran. This revival enables us to understand the reasons why, given the fate of al-Ghazali's critique, the true destiny of original philosophy in Islam—the philosophy which could arise only in Islam—was fulfilled in a Shiite milieu.

After al-Ghazali, it was al-Shahrastani (d. 547/1153) who, like a good *mutakallim*, renewed the attack against the Hellenizing philosophers, especially Avicenna. This he did both in his admirable history of religions (*Kitab al-Milal*) and in a book, as yet unedited, against the philosophers (*Masari' al-falasifah*), as well as in his treatise on dogma (*Nihayat al-Iqdam*). He provoked a monumental response from the great Shiite philosopher Nasir al-Din Tusi (d. 672/1274), who defended Avicenna.

In fact, it was not the *Tahafut* that was influential, but rather al-Ghazali's great work 'On the Restoration (or revival) of the Religious Sciences' (*Ihya' 'ulum al-din*), a work rich in analyses, such as that on musical audition (the *sama'*) which reveal a profound spiritual intelligence. Certain Shiite authors have no hesitation in quoting it. Muhsin Fayd, the most famous pupil of Mulla Sadra al-Shirazi, went as far as rewriting the entire work in order to make it conform to the Shiite spirit (he entitled it *al-Mahajjat al-baydah*). The speculative and spiritual life of the following centuries, especially in Iran, was to bear the stamp, not of al-Ghazali's critique of philosophers, but of another revival or restoration, undertaken by al-Suhrawardi. There would no longer be the dilemma of whether to be a philosopher or a Sufi. One cannot properly be the one without being the other. This produces a type of spiritual man of whom philosophy demands what it has perhaps never demanded anywhere else. This is why we must say something about the teaching of some of the greatest of the Sufis, and about the nature of the spiritual restoration that al-Suhrawardi desired.

## VI. Sufism

### 1. PRELIMINARY REMARKS

1. According to the generally accepted etymology, the word *sufi* derives from the Arabic *suf*, meaning wool, in allusion to the distinctive Sufi custom of wearing garments and a cloak of white wool (the *khirqah*). Etymologically, therefore, the word contains no apparent reference to the spiritual doctrine which distinguishes the Sufis in Islam, and its usage is no less secular. The term *guffs* designates the body of mystics and spiritual men who profess the *tasawwuf*. The word *tasawwuf* is the verbal noun of the fifth form derived from the root *swf*; it means to make a profession of Sufism, and is used when speaking of Sufism pure and simple (*cf.* the words *tashayyu'*, to make a profession of Shiism; *tasannun*, to make a profession of Sunnism, and so on). Another explanation of the word, and at first sight a more satisfactory one is that it transcribes the Greek *sophos*, meaning sage. Although Orientalists in general do not accept this explanation, al-Biruni in the fourth/tenth century (see above, IV, 6) made a case for it (*cf.* the word *fyilasuf*, which is a transcription of the Greek *philosophos*, although in the one Arab word there is a *sad*, in the other a *sin*). However that may be, we should bear in mind the extraordinary skill with which Arabic grammarians in general could discover a Semitic etymology for any word imported from outside.

2. As evidence of mystical religion in Islam, Sufism is a spiritual phenomenon of tremendous importance. Essentially, it is the realization of the Prophet's spiritual message, the attempt to live the modalities of this message in a personal way through the interiorization of the content of the Quranic Revelation. The *mi'raj* or 'ecstatic assumption', during which the Prophet was initiated into the divine secrets, remains the prototype of the experience which each Sufi in turn attempts to recapture for himself. Sufism is a resounding affirma-

tion, an irremissible testimony on the part of spiritual Islam against any tendency to reduce Islam to a legalistic and literalist religion. It was induced to develop a detailed technique of spiritual asceticism, whose stages, progress and aims require the existence of an entire metaphysical system which goes by the name of *'irfan*. The polarity of *shari'ah* and *haqiqah*—or, to put it more fully, the triad formed by the *shari'ah* (the literal fact of the Revelation), the *tariqah* (the mystical way), and the *haqiqah* (spiritual truth as personal realization)—is thus essential to its life and doctrine.

This explains, on the one hand, all the difficulties that Sufism has had to face over the centuries from official Islam. On the other hand, it begs an answer to the question of whether the polarity of *shari'ah* and *haqiqah*, which is attained by way of the *tariqah*, is actually an innovation belonging to Sufism, or whether it is not an essential component of an Islam which, although it may not bear the name of Sufism, is nevertheless spiritual Islam. The references below to the doctrine of some of the great masters of Sufism bring us face to face with the basic positions adopted by Shiism and its 'prophetic philosophy'. This conclusion gives rise to a question of capital importance, one which can be correctly formulated only when we have acquired a deeper knowledge of the spiritual world of Shiism; for the 'phenomenon of Sufism' in some measure differs according to whether it is lived in Shiite Iran or whether it is lived in Sunni Islam, the Islam with which orientalist until now have been most familiar.

Unfortunately, we cannot go into this problem here, still less find a solution to it; but we can at least establish certain factors in order to define an extremely complex situation. It might appear, from the themes grouped in chapter II above under the heading of 'prophetic philosophy', that Sufism came into being spontaneously. This would be true as far as Shiite Sufism is concerned. (All the labours of Haydar Amuli, and his influence down to our day, point to this conclusion, and we drew attention above [II B II 4] to the phenomenon of the *union* of Ismailism with Sufism.) But in fact, and numerically over the centuries, the great majority of Sufis are to be found in the Sunni world. Furthermore, in the Shiite world we frequently observe a reticence with respect to Sufism which borders on censure—and this not only on the part of the official Mullahs, the representatives of the legalistic religion, but also on the part of spiritual personalities who derive their

doctrine from the teaching of the Imams and who, even though they use the vocabulary of Sufism and profess the same theosophical metaphysics, yet make no profession of Sufism and have great reservations about it. This type of Shiite spirituality, still wholly alive in our own day, confronts us with the question which there is no way of evading.

3. Let us begin with the pertinent fact that the name 'Sufis' was first applied to the members of a group of Shiite spirituals of Kufah, between the second and third centuries of the Hijrah. Among them was a certain 'Abdak, as a text by 'Ayn al-Quda al-Hamadani (d. 525/1131) informs us: 'The pilgrims on the way of God in preceding epochs and during the first generations were not distinguished by the name of Sufism (*tasawwuf*). *Sufi* is a word which became current only in the third century (twelfth century CE), and the first person to be known by this name in Baghdad was 'Abdak the Sufi (d. 210/825).' 'Abdak, we are told, was a great shaykh prior to al-Junayd and to al-Junayd's master, Sari al-Saqati (see below, VI, 2). This in no way alters the fact that, as we know, the eighth Imam, 'Ali al-Rida (d. 203/818) with whom 'Abdak was contemporary, was severe in his comments about Sufism, and that after the end of the third/ninth century all traces of Shiite Sufism seem to vanish until the appearance, in the seventh/thirteenth century, of Sa'd al-Din Hamuyah (d. 650/1252), and of the other masters of Shiite Sufism—Haydar Amuli, Shah Ni'mat Allah al-Wali, and so on—who succeeded each other down to the Safavid Renaissance.

4. Several things are to be observed in connection with this. In the first place, if we concentrate on the notion of the *walayah* which is at the heart of Shiism, and note the change it underwent in Sunni Sufism, in the work of, say, a master such as al-Hakim Tirmidhi (see below, VI, 3), we may conclude that that in itself was already sufficient reason for the censure by the Imams and the Shiites, at least with respect to certain specific Sufi groups. Among the latter, the doctrine of the *walayah* betokens the transition to Sunni Sufism through the elimination of Imamology, even when this resulted in an Imamology without an Imam, something which is equivalent to the paradox of a Christology without Christ:

It cannot be said that the Imams' condemnation of these groups

brought about the complete disappearance of Shiite Sufism, for there are two facts to be taken into account. One is the overt existence of Shiite Sufism from the thirteenth century down to the present day. The other is that the lineage of most of the *turuq* or Sufi congregations starts with one of the Imams. Those who have contested the historical authenticity of these genealogies have failed to perceive that the less 'historical' they are, the more they are evidence of a conscious desire on the part of these congregations to provide themselves with a spiritual ancestry going back to one of the Shiite Imams. There is obviously a reason for this. The temporary disappearance of any visible traces of Shiite Sufism can be sufficiently explained by the coming of the Saljuq power to Baghdad at the beginning of the fourth/tenth century (see above, HI, 3, A), which obliged every Shiite to be strict in his observance of the *taqiyah*, the 'discipline of the arcane', ordained by the Imams themselves. For this reason we must always be extremely cautious in drawing any conclusions.

5. Secondly, we have just alluded afresh to the characteristic type of spiritual Shiite {see above, II, sect. 6) who, without belonging to Sufism, uses the technical vocabulary of a Sufi. Neither al-Suhrawardi, nor Hayder Amuli, nor philosophers such as Mir Damad, Sadra al-Shirazi and a host of others, belonged to a *tariqah* (a word, as we know, which means the 'spiritual way' and which also serves to designate the materialization of this way in a Sufi brotherhood or congregation). It would seem to be the case that it was first and foremost the *congregational* organization of Sufism that the Shiite critics had in mind: the *khanqah* (monastery), the 'monkish' garb, the role of the shaykh who tended to be a substitute for the Imam, especially for the hidden Imam, the inner master and guide, since he is invisible. We must take account of the fact that the relationship with the *shari'ah* as it is lived in Shiism, above all when it represents a minority, is not quite the same as in Sunnism. Shiism is already and of itself the spiritual way, the *tariqah*—that is to say, initiation. Needless to say, a Shiite society is not a society of initiates, for that would contradict the very notion of initiation. But the Shiite milieu is 'virtually' an initiatic one. Through his devotion to the holy Imams, the Shiite is predisposed to receive this initiation from them, and such initiation provides him with a direct and personal link with the spiritual world in its 'vertical dimension' without his having to enter formally into an organized *tariqah*, as is

the case in Sunnism.

In order to grasp this phenomenon comprehensively, we must be aware of all its variants. Parallel to the *turuq* or Sunni brotherhoods, there are Shiite Sufi *turuq* which possess an external organization. (In present-day Iran, there is that of the Shah-Ni'mat Allah is with its multiple ramifications, that of the Dhahabis, and so on.) But it is equally necessary to mention the many *turuq in* Shiism which have no external organization at all and even no denomination. Their existence is purely spiritual, in the sense that there is a personal initiation which is conferred by a shaykh whose name—if a particular personality is in question—is sometimes preserved, but of whom more usually there is no written record. Finally, there is the case of the *Uwaysis*, whose name derives from the name of the Yemeni Uways al-Qarani, one of the very first Shiites, who knew the Prophet and was known to him although they never met each other. We are therefore talking about those who have not had a human teacher who is external and visible, but who have all received a personal spiritual guide. This is, precisely, the meaning of devotion to the Imams and that to which it predisposes those who are so devoted. Some *Uwaysis* are known by name; they existed in Sunnism and are innumerable in Shiism.

6. Bearing these observations in mind, we must agree that a history of Sufism in Islam, in its links with the other manifestations of spirituality analysed in the present study, would be a task of formidable complexity. It is of course possible to distinguish the major periods. The pious ascetics of Mesopotamia who took the name of Sufis lead us to what is known as the school of Baghdad; at the same time the school of Khurasan was in existence. The doctrine of the few masters of whom we give some account below already heralds what we shall later be in a position to call 'Sufi metaphysic'. But the great themes which we shall indicate do no more than lead us back to precisely the themes we have come to know in Shiism: the polarity of *shari'ah* and *haqiqah*, *zahir* and *batin*, the idea of the cycle of the *walayah* in hierohistory following on the cycle of prophecy. The idea of the *qutb*, or mystical *pole*, in Sunni Sufism is simply a translation of the Shiite idea of the Imam, and the mystical esoteric hierarchy of which the *pole* is the summit continues in any case to presuppose the idea of the Imam. These are all facts which will make the question confronting us here even **more** crucial when the second part of this study comes

to deal with the later periods of Shiism, and above all with the doctrine and influence of the school of Ibn al-'Arabi (d. 638/1240).

Unfortunately, we are too strictly limited by space here to discuss the features envisaged by some general explanations of Sufism: the influence of neo-Platonism, of gnosis, of Indian mysticism, and so on. We shall not even be able to mention more than a few of the great figures of Sufism. There will be many, therefore, who are absent—that is to say, many Sufi masters who cannot be discussed here, starting with Khwajah 'Abd Allah al-Ansari of Herat (396/1006-481/1088), the nine hundredth anniversary of whose death was celebrated at Kabul in the summer of 1381/1962.

## 2. ABU YAZID AL-BASTAMI

1. Abu Yazid Tayfur ibn 'Isa ibn Surushan al-Bastami was of very proximate Mazdean descent, for his grandfather Surushan was a Zoroastrian who had converted to Islam. Abu Yazid spent most of his life in his native town of Bastam (not to be confused with Bistam) in north-eastern Iran, and died there around 234/848 or 261/874. He is rightly regarded as one of the greatest mystics to come out of Islam over the centuries. His teaching was the direct expression of his inner life, and it earned him admiring tributes from the most diverse people, even though he assumed neither the activities nor the responsibilities of a spiritual guide or a public preacher. He did not even leave any written work. The essence of his spiritual experience has come down to us in the form of stories, maxims and paradoxes, which were collected by his immediate followers or by some of those who visited him. They form a collection of inestimable spiritual and metaphysical import. These maxims are known in the spiritual history of Islam by the technical name of *shathiyat*, a term which is difficult to translate: it implies the idea of a shock which overturns, and we shall translate it here as 'paradoxes', 'excesses', 'ecstatic utterances'.

2. Among the immediate followers of Abu Yazid al-Bastami, worth particular mention is his nephew Abu Musa 'Isa ibn Adam, his eldest brother's son, for it was through him that al-Junayd, the famous master of Baghdad, came to know Abu Yazid's sayings, translated them into Arabic and accompanied them with a commentary which has been partially preserved in the *Kitab al-Luma'* by al-Sarraj. Among those

who visited him we may mention Abu Musa al-Dabili (from Dabil in Armenia), Abu Ishaq ibn al-Harawi, a follower of Ibn Adham and the famous Iranian Sufi Ahmad ibn Khidriyah, who visited Abu Yazid during the latter's pilgrimage to Mecca. The most complete and important source for the life and sayings of Abu Yazid is, however, the 'Book of Light on the Sayings of Abu Yazid Tayfur' (*Kitab al-Nur fi kalimat Abu Yazid Tayfur*), the work of Muhammad al-Sahljaji (d. 476/1084; ed. 'A. Badawi, Cairo 1949). We should mention in addition the collection of maxims included by Ruzbihan Baqli Shirazi in the great Summa which he devoted to the *shathiyat* of the Sufis in general (an edition of the Persian text is in preparation), and which he accompanied by an exceedingly personal commentary.

3. An essential aspect of the doctrine of this great Iranian Sufi, as it is revealed in his stories and maxims, is a profound awareness of the triple condition of being: in the form of I (*ana'iyah*), the form of You (*antiyah*), and the form of He (*huwiyah*, the ipseity or Self). In this ordering of the awareness of being the divine and the human aspects are united and reciprocate in a transcendent act of adoration and love. Abu Yazid describes the stages on the way to the highest spiritual realization with great vividness. We can cite only one text here by way of example:

'I contemplated my Lord with the eye of certitude after He had turned me away from all that is other than Him, and illuminated me with His Light. He then brought me to a knowledge of the marvels of His secret, and revealed to me His ipseity (His Self). I contemplated my I by means of His own ipseity. My light faded under His light, my strength vanished under His strength, my power under His power. Thus I saw my I through His Self. The greatness that I attributed to myself was in reality His greatness; my progression was His progression.

'After that I contemplated Him with the eye of Truth (*'ayn al-haqq*) and I said to him: Who is he? He answered me: Neither myself nor other than myself... When at last I contemplated the Truth by means of the Truth, I lived the Truth through the Truth and I subsisted in the Truth by means of the Truth in an eternal present, without breath, without word, without hearing, without knowledge, until God had communicated to me a knowledge sprung from



His knowledge, a language that proceeded from His grace, a look modelled on His light.'

### 3. AL-JUNAYD

1. Al-Junayd (Abu al-Qasim ibn Muhammad ibn al-Junayd al-Khazzaz) was of Iranian origin and was born at Nihavand. He lived all his life in Iraq—to be precise, in Baghdad—where he died in 297/909. In Baghdad he received the traditional teaching from one of the greatest scholars of the time, Abu Thawr al-Kalbi, and he was initiated into mysticism by his uncle Sari al-Saqati, and by other Sufi masters such as al-Harith al-Muhasibi, Muhammad ibn 'Ali al-Qassab, and others. Both during his life and after his death, his influence on Sufism was profound. His personality, sermons and writings put him into the front rank of the Sufism known as the 'school of Baghdad', and he is also called by the title of *Shaykh al Ta'ifah*, the master of a group of Sufis.

About fifteen treatises by al-Junayd have survived, part of them consisting of the correspondence he exchanged with some of the great Sufi among his contemporaries. They contain analyses and statements concerning certain themes of the spiritual life, on the notions of *sidq* (truthfulness), *ikhlas* (sincerity) and *'ibadah* (divine adoration in truth). The actual treatises are developments of one or other of the classic subjects of Islamic spirituality—for example the *Treatise on Divine Unity (Kitab al-Tawhid)*—from the twin points of view of theology and mysticism; the *Book of Mystical Absorption (Kitab al-Fana')*, in which the writer studies the conditions that lead to the state of supra-existence (*baqa'*); the *Rules of Conduct for him who cannot do without God (Adab al-muftaqir ila Allah)*; the *Medicine of Souls (Dawat al-arwah)*, and others.

2. With regard to the teaching of this great master, two points should be made here which bear out the observations above (VI, 1). Firstly, al-Junayd's spirituality is conditioned by the polarity of the *shari'ah*—the letter of the divine Law which changes from prophet to prophet—and the *haqiqah*, the permanent spiritual truth. As we have found elsewhere, it is this which from the very beginning constitutes the religious phenomenon of Shiism, and is the premiss of Shiite Imamology. Al-Junayd is opposed to the extremes of certain Sufi who arrive at the conclusion that since the *haqiqah* is ontologically superior to

the *shari'ah*, the *shari'ah* is useless and must be abrogated as soon as they have passed beyond it and gained access to the *haqiqah*. We have seen elsewhere that Twelver Shiism and Ismailism were divided on this very point. It would be interesting, therefore, to 'rethink' the facts of the spiritual situation, taken in their entirety: the situation does not arise *with* Sufism alone, and it cannot be explained *by* Sufism alone.

A second essential point of al-Junayd's doctrine is revealed in the doctrine of *tawhid* as the basis of the experience of mystical union. It cannot be doubted that al-Junayd made a comprehensive study of this problem, to which he devoted a whole book. For him, *tawhid* consists not simply in demonstrating the Unity of the divine Being by means of rational arguments, in the manner of the theologians of the *kalam*, but rather in living the transcendent Unity of God himself. If this requirement defines an authentic spirituality, it is also a reminder that the sixth Imam told his disciples how he meditated upon the Quranic text until he understood it as he to whom it had been revealed understood it from Him who revealed it.

### 4. AL-HAKIM AL-TIRMIDHI

1. Al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi, or *Termezi* according to the Persian pronunciation (Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad ibn 'Ali al-Hasan or al-Husayn) lived sometime during the third/ninth century. The exact dates of his birth and death are not known, nor even the broad outlines of the external life of this Iranian from Bactria. Basically everything that is known about him can be reduced to the names of certain of his teachers and to the account of his exile from Tirmidh, his native town. We also know that he continued his studies at Nishapur. On the other hand, al-Tirmidhi left valuable information about his inner life and his spiritual development in an autobiography discovered by Helmut Ritter. Furthermore, he is the author of a large number of treatises, many of which have been preserved (*cf. in fine* Bibliography).

2. Al-Tirmidhi's spiritual doctrine is essentially based on the notion of the *walayah*: divine friendship, intimacy with God, spiritual initiation. This is why the questions raised in our preliminary remarks (see above, VI, sect. 1) assume such urgency here. We know that this notion of the *walayah* is the very foundation of Shiism (see above, II, A),

and that the word, the concept and the thing itself are first found in the texts which record the teaching of the Imams. It seems, therefore, that al-Tirmidhi's *work par excellence* is the work, or one of the works, in which we can study the process that gave rise to the paradox of a *walayah* deprived of the Imamology on which it is founded. We will confine ourselves here to two comments.

The first of these is that al-Tirmidhi actually distinguishes two types of *walayah*, one general or common (*walayah 'ammah*) and one particular [*walayah khassah*]. He extends the notion of the first *walayah* to all *muslimin*: the pronunciation of the *shahadah*, or Islamic profession of faith, is enough to create the bond of the *walayah* which then becomes the bond with God, common to all believers who accept the prophetic message. With regard to the particular *walayah*, it belongs to a spiritual elite, to those who are intimate with God, who converse and communicate with Him because they are in a state of effective and transcendent union. We should remember that the idea of the dual *walayah* was first propounded and established by Shiite doctrine. As unfortunately we have no room here to make a full comparison, we must refer to the original Shiite context of this dual concept (see above, II, A, 3 ff.). We are forced to conclude that in the Sufism of al-Tirmidhi there is a radical shift of structure, a kind of 'laicization' as it were, of the concept of the 'general *walayah*'.

Our second observation concerns the relationship between the *walayah* and prophecy (*nubuwah*) in al-Tirmidhi's doctrine. According to him, the *walayah* encompasses, together with all believers in general, all the prophets as well, because the *walayah* is the source of their inspiration and the foundation of their prophetic mission. He asserts that the *walayah* in itself is superior to prophecy because it is permanent, and is not bound to a moment in time like the prophetic mission. Whereas the cycle of prophecy is historically complete with the coming of the last Prophet, the cycle of the *walayah* remains in existence until the end of time through the presence of the *awliya'*.

This schema, interesting though it may be, has nothing new to teach someone who is conversant with Shiite prophetology, unless it is that without one noticing it, a structure can become unbalanced in default of fuller information. We saw above (ch. II) that the idea that the cycle of the *walayah* succeeds the cycle of prophecy was the very premiss of Shiism and its prophetic philosophy, and that it

presupposes a dual aspect or 'dimension' of the 'eternal prophetic Reality', whose corollary is the interdependence of prophetology and Imamology. Our two observations are related to each other, since in both cases we are drawing attention to an operation which aims at retaining the idea of the *walayah* while at the same time eliminating the *Imamology* which is the *walayah's* source and foundation. This is a serious problem, one which affects the history of Islamic spirituality in its entirety—and which, moreover, is not a problem at all for Shiite authors.

##### 5. AL-HALLAJ

1. Al-Hallaj is certainly one of the most outstanding and representative characters of Sufism. His name and reputation have broken through the limited circle of the Muslim spiritual elite, so well known was the tragedy of his imprisonment and trial at Baghdad and his subsequent martyrdom as a witness of mystical Islam. Much has been written about him in all the languages of Islam, and his fame has now spread to the West, thanks to the labours of Louis Massignon, who became his editor and interpreter. We will therefore refer to these works, limiting ourselves here to an outline of his biography which is a lesson in itself.

2. Abu 'Abd Allah al-Husayn ibn Mansur al-Hallaj, also the grandson of a Zoroastrian, was born at Tur in the province of Fars in south-western Iran, near the town of Beiza' (al-Bayda'), in 244/857. While he was still very young, he was taught by the famous Sufi Sahl ibn 'Abd Allah al-Tustari, whom he then accompanied into exile to Basrah. In 262/876 al-Hallaj left for Baghdad, where he became the pupil of 'Amr ibn 'Uthman al-Makki, one of the great spiritual masters of the period. He remained with him for about eighteen months, in the course of which he married the daughter of one of his followers. In 264/877 he met al-Junayd (see above, VI, 3), and under the latter's supervision he practised the exercises of the spiritual life. Al-Junayd clothed him with his own hands in the *khirqah*, or Sufi cloak. But in 282/896, on returning from his first pilgrimage to Mecca, al-Hallaj broke off relations with al-Junayd and with most of the Sufi masters of Baghdad. He then went to Tustar in south-west Iran, where he stayed for four years. This period is distinguished by his growing disagreement with **the** traditionalists and the jurists.

Relations became so strained that about four years later al-Hallaj rejected the garb of the Sufi in order to mingle with the people and preach to them of the spiritual life. It is said that he maintained good relations with the famous doctor/philosopher Rhazes (al-Razi, see above, IV, 4), with the 'socialist' reformer Abu Sa'id al-Jannabi, and even with certain official authorities such as prince Hasan ibn 'Ali al-Tawdi. Al-Hallaj travelled all over the provinces of Iran, from Khurasan in the north-east to Khuzistan in the south-west. He practised the spiritual life, paying no heed to established conventions and ceaselessly exhorting the people to lead an inner life. After five years, in 291/903, al-Hallaj made his second pilgrimage to Mecca, and then went further afield: to India, Turkistan, even to the borders of China. He was nicknamed 'the intercessor', and there were many conversions to Islam as a result of his enlightening influence.

3. In 294/906 al-Hallaj went to Mecca for the third time. He remained there for two years, and then returned for good to Baghdad, where he established himself as a public preacher, always choosing themes of great spiritual and metaphysical import. He described his doctrine, affirming that the final goal, not only for the Sufi but for all beings, is union with God, a union realized through Love and requiring an act of divine transformation which brings one's being to its highest state. These lofty ideas soon provoked various kinds of opposition: opposition from the doctors of the Law and from politicians, as well as the reserve of some Sufis.

The canonists censured his doctrine of the mystical union because, they said, it confuses the divine with the human and ends in a type of pantheism. The politicians accused him of sowing seeds of unrest in people's minds and looked on him as an agitator. The Sufis for their part had reservations about him because they held that he was guilty of imprudence when he revealed divine secrets in public to people who were prepared neither to receive nor to understand them. This was also the opinion of the Shiites, and of the esotericists in general, with regard to him: al-Hallaj was guilty of publicly breaking the 'discipline of the arcane'. Finally, the jurists and the politicians intrigued together in order to obtain a *fatwa*—a sentence—against him. They obtained one from the great jurist of Baghdad, Ibn Dawud al-Isfahani, asserting that al-Hallaj's doctrine was false, that it im-

perilled the dogma of Islam and that it justified his being condemned to death.

4. Twice arrested by the 'Abbasid police, al-Hallaj was imprisoned in 301/913 and summoned to appear before the vizir 'Ali ibn 'Isa. A pious and liberal man, the vizir opposed his execution; but this was no more than a respite. Al-Hallaj was kept in prison for eight years and seven months. Events were precipitated with the coming to power of a new vizir, Hamid ibn al-'Abba, an implacable adversary of al-Hallaj and his followers. Al-Hallaj's enemies returned to the attack and demanded a new *fatwa* condemning him, which was granted to them by Qadi Abu 'Umar ibn Yusuf. This time the sentence was carried out, and al-Hallaj was put to death on the 24th Dhu al-Qa'dah 309—the 27th March 922 CE.

#### 6. AHMAD AL-GHAZALI AND 'PURE LOVE'

1. In connection with the first sentence pronounced against al-Hallaj, we mentioned the name of the jurist Ibn Dawud al-Isfahani, and this fact illustrates a profound tragedy of the soul. For Ibn Dawud al-Isfahani, who, as his name suggests, was of Iranian descent (he died in 297/909 at the age of forty-two), was also the author of a book which is both a masterpiece and a summation of the Platonic theory of love in the Arabic language (the *Kitab al-Zuhrah* or 'Book of Venus', a title which can also be read as *Kitab al-Zahrah* or the 'Book of the Flower'}). This is an extended rhapsody, written partly in verse and partly in prose, which celebrates the ideal of Platonic love as typified in 'udri love. In fact, the author's destiny conformed to the destiny, so often sung by the poets, of an ideal tribe of southern Arabia: the legendary people of the Banu 'Udhrah (the 'virginalists'), a people chosen and chaste above all others, for whom 'to love was to die'. In the course of his long rhapsody, the author summarizes the Platonic myth of the *Symposium*, and concludes: 'It is also reported of Plato that he said: I do not understand what love is, but I know that it is a divine madness (*junun ilahi*) which is neither to be praised nor condemned.'

Al-Hallaj, too, preached the doctrine of love; and yet Ibn Dawud condemned him. In order to understand this tragedy, we must take fully into consideration a situation that existed among the post-Hallajian

mystics, particularly in the case of Ahmad al-Ghazali and Ruzbihan Baqli of Shiraz (d. 606/1209), who was both a 'Platonist' and the interpreter—or rather expander—of al-Hallaj. From then it becomes possible to speak of an ambivalence or ambiguity about this Platonism in Islam, of its two possible situations with respect to prophetic religion, since there are two ways in which it can be understood and lived. There is what might be called the 'theophanism' of Ruzbihan, which is a hermeneutics of the prophetic meaning of Beauty, a *ta'wil* that here too effects the union of the *zahir*, the apparent, with the *batin*, or hidden meaning. For *Ibn Dawud*, who is a *zahiri* or exotericist, this hidden meaning is a closed book. For Ruzbihan, the hidden meaning of the human Form is the primordial theophany: it is God revealing himself to himself in the Adamic form, in the celestial anthropos who was called into being in pre-eternity, and who *is* his own Image. This is why Ruzbihan took particular pleasure in al-Hallaj's famous verses: 'Glory be to Him who manifested His humanity as a mystery of the glory of His radiant divinity', and why he based the bond between human and divine love on this same mystery. Ibn Dawud could not accept this, and was forced to take sides against him.

We cannot quote Ibn Dawud's last words here, nor the final lines of Ruzbihan's 'Jasmine of Love's Faithful' (*cf.* part II of the present study); but we can affirm that each of their statements typifies perfectly the respective attitude and destiny of these two Islamic 'Platonists' at the heart of prophetic religion. What the Platonist Ibn Dawud feared, in common with the theologians (both the neo-Hanbalites and others), was an assimilation of God to man, which would radically compromise the transcendence of abstract monotheism—that is to say, the purely exoteric conception of the *tawhid*. Likewise, certain Sufis had themselves denied all possibility of attributing eras to God. Others had regarded the *'udhri* lover as a model for the mystical lover whose love is directed towards God. In the case of the latter, there is a transference of love: everything happens as though one were passing from a human *object* to a divine *object*. For the 'Platonist' Ruzbihan, this pious transference is itself a trap. It is only possible to pass between **the** two gulfs of *tashbih* (anthropomorphism) and *ta'til* (abstractionism) by way of human love. Divine love is not the transference of love to **a** divine *object*—it is a metamorphosis of the *subject* of human love.

This theophanic perception led Ruzbihan to formulate a prophatology of Beauty.

Thus we need to evoke here the long line of 'love's faithful' who found in Ruzbihan their fulfilled paradigm. The tri-unity of love-lover-beloved becomes the secret of the esoteric *tawhid*. The tragedy of Ibn Dawud al-Isfahani lay in the fact that it was impossible for him to perceive this secret and to live this threefold union. Ahmad al-Ghazali and Farid 'Attar knew that if the lover contemplates himself in the Beloved, the Beloved in turn can contemplate himself and his own beauty only in the gaze of the lover who is contemplating him. In Ahmad al-Ghazali's doctrine of pure love, lover and beloved are transfigured in the unity of the pure substance of love.

2. Ahmad al-Ghazali (d. 520/1126 at Qazwin in Iran) was the brother of the great theologian Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (see above, V, 7), on whom he may have exerted some influence, but 'did not succeed in communicating to him that passion of pure love, of inconsolable desire, which fires his own writings' (L. Massignon). A little book by Ahmad al-Ghazali, a veritable breviary of love, written in concise and difficult Persian, and which he entitled 'The Intuitions of Love's Faithful' (*Sawanih al-'ushshaq*), exercised considerable influence. It is a rhapsodic piece of writing, consisting of a series of short and rather loosely-connected chapters, and it brings into play an extraordinarily subtle psychology. As Helmut Ritter, to whom we are indebted for the editing of this valuable text, wrote: 'It would be hard to find a work in which psychological analysis achieves such a level of intensity.' The following is a translation of two short passages.

'When love really exists, the lover becomes the nourishment of the Beloved; it is not the Beloved who is the nourishment of the lover, for the Beloved cannot be contained within the capacity of the lover. The moth which has become the lover of the flame is nourished, while still at a distance, by the light of this dawn. It is the forerunner of the illumination of daybreak which beckons it and welcomes it. But it must go on flying until it reaches it. When it reaches it, it can no longer advance *towards* the flame; it is the flame which advances *within* it. The flame is not nourishing the moth; the moth is nourishing the flame. And this is a great mystery. For a fleeting instant it becomes its own Beloved (since it *is* the **flame**). And in this it is made perfect.' (Chapter 39).

'Love's plan is a noble one, for it requires that the Beloved should have a sublime qualification. This makes it impossible for the Beloved to be caught in the net of union. It was doubtless in relation to this that when Iblis (Satan) was told: My curse is on thee! (38:79), he replied: I call your Glory to witness! (38:83). This means: what I love in You is that majesty which is so high that no one can rise to your level and no one is worthy of You. For if someone or something could be worthy of You, it would be because there was some imperfection in your Glory.' (Chapter 64) It was this that gave birth to the famous subject of 'Iblis damned by love.'

3. We cannot separate the name of Ahmad al-Ghazali from that of his favourite disciple, 'Ayn al-Qudat al-Hamadani, who was executed at the age of thirty-three in 525/1131. His tragic fate resembles that of al-Hallaj before him, and prefigures that of al-Suhrawardi, the Shaykh al-Ishraq (see below, VII). 'Ayn al-Qudat was both jurist and mystic, philosopher and mathematician. One of his treatises, *Tamhidat*, which is particularly rich in teachings on love and which develops the doctrine of Ahmad al-Ghazali, was also commentated at length by a fifteenth-century Indian Sufi, Sayyid Muhammad Husayni Gisudaraz. 'The sovereignty of the divine Glory shone out. Then the pen subsisted, but the writer vanished.' 'God is too transcendent for the prophets to know him, and *a fortiori* for others to know him.'

4. We must not omit to mention Majdud ibn Adam Sana'i (d. ca. 545/1150), the inventor of the Sufi didactic poem in Persian. His most interesting work is a long poem entitled 'The Journey of Men towards their Return' (*Sayr al-'ibad ila al-ma'ad*), and it describes, in the form of an account in the first person, a pilgrimage through the cosmos of the Islamic neo-Platonists. This mystical voyage takes place under the guidance of the intelligence in person (whom the *Fedeli d'amore* in Dante were to call *Madonna Intelligenza*). This was also the theme of Avicenna's 'Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan', of al-Suhrawardi's mystical prose Recitals, and of all the literature on the theme of the *Mi'raj*. Here already is posited the structure which would expand into the vast mystical epics orchestrated in Persian by Farid al-Din 'Attar, 'Assar of Tabriz, Jami, and other lesser-known poets.

5. These all too brief observations enable us to perceive what might be called the 'metaphysics of Sufism'. With Ruzbihan of Shiraz we

approach the climax represented by his younger contemporary Muhyi al-Din ibn al-'Arabi, whose summa of mystical theosophy is a monument for which it is difficult to find a comparison. The Hellenizing philosophers have been left behind. Would their path again cross that of the Sufi metaphysic, or were their aims different enough to justify certain sarcasms on the part of the Sufis about the inability of philosophers to 'get off the ground'? By way of reply we can say that the work of al-Suhrawardi, and with it the birth of the *ishraqi school*, were a response to the profound demand of a culture in which the history of philosophy is inseparable from the history of spirituality.