The Legend of ʿAbdallāh ibn Sabaʾ and the Date of Umm al-Kitāb[1]

SEAN W. ANTHONY

Abstract

ʿAbdallāh ibn Sabaʾ is a figure generally regarded as Islam's first heretic by Sunnī scholars and also vilified by Shīʿī scholars. In this article an anonymous, esoteric work known as Umm al-Kitāb is examined as it contains an exceptional narrative that adopts a strikingly sympathetic approach to Ibn Sabaʾ. It is also argued that the work's unique take on the Ibn Sabaʾ legend sheds considerable light on the date and elusive provenance of this early Shīʿī text.

Introduction

In the history of early Shīʿism, there is perhaps no figure more infamous than the arch-heretic ʿAbdallāh b. Sabaʾ. The reasons behind his infamy often vary depending on the sectarian outlook of a given medieval author; however, the scorn reserved for Ibn Sabaʾ as Islam's first heretic *par excellence* is virtually universal. Hence, Sunnī and other non-Shīʿī authors tend to revile Ibn Sabaʾ as a Jewish interloper from Yemen who, after his (probably feigned) conversion to Islam, introduced and propagated an array of insidious doctrines regarding ʿAlī that would, in due course, give rise to Shīʿism and its sectarian reverence for ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and his descendents. Such authors attribute to Ibn Sabaʾ manifold, proto-typical Shīʿī doctrines of Umayyad-era Shīʿism such as ʿAlī's inheritence of Muḥammad's authority (*al-waṣīya*),[2] the refractory cursing of Abū Bakr and ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (*al-rafḍ*),[3] ʿAlī's

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[2]Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*, (ed.) M. J. de Goeje *et al.* (Leiden, 1879–1901), i, p. 2942; ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, *K. al-farq bayna l-firaq wa-bayān al-firqa al-nājiya minhum* (Cairo, 1910), p. 225; Khalīl b. Aybak al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafayāt*, Vol. XVII, (ed.) D. Krawulsky, Bibliotheca Islamica 6q (Wiesbaden, 1982), p. 190 (quoting Ibn Abī l-Dam, d. 1244). The trope also appears in Shīʿī works as well. See: Abū Muḥammad Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq al-shīʿa*, ed. H. Ritter, Bibliotheca Islamica 4 (Istanbul, 1931), p. 20; Saʿd b. ʿAbdallāh al-Ashʿarī al-Qummī, *K. al-maqālāt wa-l-firaq*, (ed.) M. J. Mashkur (Tehran, 1963), p. 20; al-Ṭūsī, *Ikhtiyār maʿrifat al-rijāl* (= abrg. of Muḥammad b. ʿUmar al-Kishshī's *al-Rijāl*), (ed.) Ḥ. Mustafavī (Mashhad, 1970), pp. 108–109; Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *K. al-zīna*, in: ʿA. S. al-Samarrāʾī, *al-Ghulūw wa-l-firaq al-ghāliya fī l-ḥaḍāra al-islāmīya* (Baghdād, 1972), p. 305

[3]Ibn Abī Khaythama, *al-Taʾrīkh al-kabīr*, (ed.) Ṣ. F. Halal (Cairo, 2004), iii, p. 177; ʿAbd al-Jabbār al-Qāḍī, *Tathbīt dalāʾil al-nubūwa*, (ed.) ʿA.-K. ʿUthmān (Beirut, 1966), i, pp. 546–547; idem, *Faḍl al-iʿtizāl wa-ṭabaqāt al-muʿtazila*, (ed.) F. al-Sayyid (Tunis, 1974), p. 143; Abu Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ* (Cairo, 1910), viii, p. 253.

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knowledge of secret portions of the qur'ānic revelation,[4] and, most preeminently, ʿAlī's future return from the dead (*al-rajʿa*).[5] Imāmī and Shīʿī authors, by contrast, regarded him as guilty of perverting and distorting the message of ʿAlī's followers and, thus, an archetypal proponent of 'extremist' beliefs (Ar. *ghulūw*)—in particular the profession of ʿAlī's divinity, a belief for which ʿAlī allegedly burned Ibn Saba' alive.[6] Detailed accounts of Ibn Saba' and his beliefs appear at a surprisingly early date in the source material—indeed, as early as the end of the second/eighth century—in the works of both anti- and pro-Shīʿī authors.[7] Albeit diverse and often contradictory, such early accounts, as well as their literary successors and descendents, inevitably offer an overwhelmingly and unanimously negative view of Ibn Saba' that has, in modern scholarship at least, remained the one most familiar to scholars. In the following essay, however, I would like to examine a rather exceptional narrative that departs from this trend and adopts strikingly sympathetic approach to the Ibn Saba'.

This Ibn Saba' narrative appears in an anonymous work known as *Umm al-Kitāb* (literally, 'Mother of the Book'; hereafter, *UaK*). Written in archaic Persian, *UaK* was preserved for centuries by the Nizārī-Ismāʿīlīs of the Pāmīr and Karakorum regions who revered it as a sacred text. In modern times, knowledge of the text's existence first reached the world outside the Ismāʿīlīs of these regions when A. Polovtsev, a Russian official based in Turkestan, acquired a copy of the text during his travels in the regions of the upper Oxus in 1902. A subsequent visit to the region in the Wakhān territory by another Russian official named J. Lutsch yielded yet another manuscript copy of the text in 1911. C. Salemann, who at the time served as the director of the Asiatic Museum of the Russian Imperial Academy of Sciences in Petrograd where these two manuscripts were subsequently deposited, planned to undertake the first edition of this text, but his efforts were cut short by his death in November 1916. As fate would have it, the first published edition of the text would not appear until some three decades later after Salemann's unfinished project was reprised by the Russian Orientalist and scholar of Ismāʿīlism Wladimir Ivanow, a project which he undertook with the aid of an additional exemplar of *UaK* uncovered in Shaghan by I. Zarubin in 1914.[8]

Despite the reverence accorded to the text by the Central Asian Ismāʿīlīs who preserved *UaK*, modern scholarship has been skeptical of the Ismāʿīlī provenance that such reverence would seem to suggest for the text. Indeed, since the publication of the first study of the text in

[4]Ibn Abī ʿĀṣim, *K. al-sunna*, (ed.) Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (Damascus, 1980), ii, p. 476; Abū Yaʿlā al-Mawṣilī, *al-Musnad*, (ed.) Ḥusayn Salīm Asad (Damascus, (1984–1994), i, pp. 349–350.

[5]Ps.-Nāshiʾ al-Akbar, *K. uṣūl al-dīn*, pp. 22–23, in: J. van Ess, *Frühe muʿtazilitische Häresiographie: Zwei Werke des Nāšiʾ al-Akbar (gest. 293 H.)*, Beiruter Texte und Studien 11 (Beirut, 2003²); Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *K. maqtal amīr al-muʾminīn ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib*, (ed.) I. Ṣāliḥ (Damascus, 2001), pp. 83–84; al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Madīnat al-Salām*, (ed.) B. ʿA. Maʿrūf (Beirut, 2001), ix, pp. 516–517.

[6]Kishshī, *Rijāl*, p. 106–107; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib*, (ed.) Y. al-Biqāʿī (Qum, 2000), i, p. 325. For two early, non-Shīʿī versions, see: Ibn Qutayba al-Dīnawārī, *al-Maʿārif*, (ed.) Th. ʿUkāsha (Cairo, 1969), p. 266 and Ibn Rusta, *K. al-aʿlāq al-nafīsa*, (ed.) M. J. de Goeje, Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum 7 (Leiden, 1967), p. 218.

[7]Composed by the ʿUthmānī *akhbārī* Sayf b. ʿUmar al-Tamīmī (see his *K. al-ridda wa-l-futūḥ wa-K. al-jamal wa-masīr ʿĀʾisha wa-ʿAlī*, (ed.) Q. al-Samarrāʾī, Leiden, 1995, pp. 135–137) and the Imāmī *muʿtazilī* Hishām b. al-Ḥakam, respectively (see: Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, pp. 19–20 and Saʿd b. ʿAbdallāh, *Maqālāt*, pp. 19–21). That these two later works of Nawbakhtī and Saʿd b. ʿAbdallāh preserve an earlier treatise of Hishām has been argued in W. Madelung, "Bemurkungen zur imamischen *Firaq*-Literatur," *Der Islam*, XLIII (1967), pp. 37–52; however, see now: H. Modarressi, *Tradition and Survival: A Bibliographical Survey of Early Shīʿite Literature* (Oxford, 2003), i, pp. 265–266.

[8]Ivanow, "Notes sur l'Ummu'l-kitāb des Ismaéliens de l'Asie Centrale", *REI*, VI (1932), pp. 426–427.

1932 by W. Ivanow, historians have been unanimous in surmising a non-Ismāʿīlī provenance for *UaK*. Following Ivanow's early prognosis almost without fail, scholarly consensus has argued that *UaK* exhibits rather its own unique 'gnostic' cosmology that reflects sectarian beliefs distinct from the mainstream currents of classical Ismāʿīlī thought. Yet, although there has existed a consensus with regard to what the text *is not*, scholars have been in stark disagreement as to what exactly the text *is*. The dates scholars have assigned to *UaK* have varied quite widely, from as early to the early second/eighth century to as late as the sixth/twelfth century. Even Ivanow's dating of the text itself underwent several revisions throughout his scholarly career. Thus, although he initially dated the text to the end of fifth/tenth century in a paper published later,[9] he subsequently posited a bolder dating of the text a decade later, which he regarded, at that time, as dependent on an Arabic original, which originated from the early second/eighth century.[10] Late in life, however, Ivanow withdrew this early dating of the text and re-adopted the fifth/tenth-century dating as more sound.[11] Yet despite his later reservations, it is the second, earlier dating of Ivanow that captured the enthusiasm of subsequent scholarly treatments of *UaK* that, thus, found in the contents of *UaK* an exemplary specimen of 'proto-Ismāʿīlī' thought representative of early Shīʿī 'extremist' sects, viz., the *ghulāt*.

As noted above, the first and only textual edition of *UaK* was undertaken by the same scholar to undertake the first systematic study of its contents and to argue on behalf for its singular significance for the study of Islamic religious history: the pioneering Russian scholar of Ismāʿīlism Wladimir Ivanow.[12] His was an arduous task. Although the text had been preserved in numerous manuscripts, none of these predated the copy transcribed in 1879, which I. Zaroubin had acquired in 1914 from Shughnan. As the text was transmitted over the centuries, it suffered from numerous textual corruptions, interpolations and obfuscations—many rendering the original text beyond recovery. Since Ivanow's initial efforts, *UaK* has become the subject of numerous translations, both partial and complete, in addition to numerous detailed studies expounding upon its diverse contents. Some three decades following the publication of Ivanow's edition of the text, Pio Fillipani-Ronconi translated the entire text into Italian, while putting forward some rather radical ideas as to the ultimate origins of a number of its doctrines. His translation remains the only complete (albeit imperfect) translation of *UaK* into a European language.[13] Fillipani-Ronconi's study was itself followed by a detailed study by E. F. Tijdens; however, Tijdens' death, unfortunately, left his German translation and textual commentary partial and incomplete when published posthumously in 1977.[14] Finally, Heinz Halm also examined the contents of *UaK* and translated into German major portions thereof in a series of studies that still stand as the most comprehensive treatment of the text to date.[15] Of all these studies, however, those of Halm

[9] *Ibid*., p. 425.

[10] *Idem*, *The Alleged Founder of Ismailism* (Bombay, 1946), pp. 99–101; *idem*, *Studies in Early Persian Ismailism* (Leiden, 1948), p. 108.

[11] *Idem*, *Ismaili Literature: A Bibliographical Survey* (Tehran, 1963), pp. 193–195.

[12] "Ummu'l-kitāb," *Der Islam*, XXIII (1936), pp. 1–132.

[13] *Ummu'l-Kitāb* (Naples, 1966).

[14] E. F. Tijdens, "Der mythologisch-gnostische Hintergrund des (Umm al-kitāb)," *Acta Iranica*, VII (1977), pp. 241–526.

[15] See: Halm, "'Das Buch der Schatten': Die Mufaḍḍal-Tradition der Ġulāt und die Ursprünge des Nuṣairitiertums (II)", *Der Islam*, LVIII (1981), pp. 36 ff.; *idem*, *Gnosis*, pp. 113 ff.

have proven to be the most influential, and although he revised many of Ivanow's ideas, Halm's rather staunch criticism of the conjectures of both Fillipani-Ronconi and Tijdens have deservedly earned his hypotheses on the textual history of *UaK* greater weight in the academic world.

In this essay, our analysis focuses on one of the key sections of *UaK*, which features, as mentioned above, an extensive narrative of the arch-heretic Ibn Saba'. Below, I will argue that the Ibn Saba' story contained within *UaK*—hereafter, deemed the 'school anecdote' following the precedent of Halm—contains a number of key literary features that, once situated within the context of *UaK*, greatly illuminate the mysterious provenance of the text. Although preceded in part by the likes of Henri Corbin[16] and Alessandro Bausani,[17] the work of Heinz Halm on *UaK* represents the most thoroughly articulate, systematic, and thought-provoking study on the texts provenance to-date and, therefore, will receive special treatment in what follows. Halm's dating of the earliest portions of *UaK* to the second/eighth century, which he has re-iterated in numerous works, is, in fact, a modification of Ivanow's hypothesis positing a second/eighth-century provenance of *UaK*. Halm contends that at least the earliest sections of *UaK* pre-date the earliest articulations of Ismā'īlī doctrine and espouse archaic beliefs that typify the Kūfan *ghulāt* of the second/eighth-century Islamic 'Irāq;[18] a contention that, if true, would distinguish *UaK* as the earliest literary artifact written by Shī'ī sectarians from the *ghulāt*. In what follows, I will argue that any assignment of such an early provenance to any portion of *UaK* must regrettably be abandoned as fundamentally untenable. After amassing the evidence against the early date, I then offer my own tentative conclusions regarding the provenance of the earliest textual stratum of *UaK* in light of my reading of the 'school anecdote'.

The Context of the School Anecdote within *Umm al-Kitāb*

Unlike most Ibn Saba' narratives encountered in the heresiographical tradition, *UaK*'s narrative begins with neither his disavowal of the news of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib's death from al-Madā'in nor, alternatively, his immolation as a martyr at the hands of 'Alī for professing his divinity. Rather, the narrative of the so-called 'school anecdote' begins unconventionally with the five-year-old Shī'ite *imām* Muḥammad al-Bāqir b. 'Alī Zayn al-'Ābidīn attending the sessions of a schoolmaster named 'Abdallāh-i Saba' (i.e. 'Abdallāh b. Saba') in Mecca at the request of his family. Once the young *imām* arrives at the school, Ibn Saba' does his best to instruct the boy in the letters of the alphabet, starting with *alif* and continuing on with *bā'*. The boy-*imām*, however, obstinately refuses to receive any further instruction until his tutor explains the true meaning of *alif* (and subsequently the rest of the alphabet as well). When Ibn Saba' fails to prove capable of doing so—a deficiency he readily admits—the boy-*imām* speaks to him in a series of discourses suffused with gematria and esoteric revelations on the sacred and secret meanings behind the alphabet. All of this the boy Bāqir does to the sustained bewilderment of the wizened Ibn Saba'.

[16] *History of Islamic Philosophy*, (trans.) L. Sherrard (London, 1993), pp. 75–76.

[17] *Religion in Iran: From Zoroaster to Baha'ullah*, (trans.) J. M. Marchesi (New York, 2000), pp. 150–162.

[18] Halm, *Gnosis*, p.120; *idem*, "The cosmology of the pre-Fāṭimid Ismā'īliyya," in: Farhad Daftary, (ed.), *Mediaeval Ismā'īlī History and Thought* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 82–83.

In the second part of the narrative, Bāqir manifests his true, divine nature to Ibn Sabaʾ through a series of five metamorphic epiphanies. These epiphanies—all equally the manifestation of the divinity in *UaK*—are clearly recognisable as the five *ahl al-kisāʾ*, or 'people of the cloak', of the more mainstream Islamic tradition: Muḥammad, ʿAlī, Fāṭima, al-Ḥasan, and al-Ḥusayn.[19]

In the third and final part of the school anecdote, the narrative revives motifs of the Shīʿī heresiological portrayals of Ibn Sabaʾ, but with a significant twist. Ibn Sabaʾ enters the centre of Mecca bearing witness to revelations of the boy al-Bāqir and proclaims to all who hear him that al-Bāqir is none other than God himself. Muḥammad al-Bāqir and his father ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn, however, denounce him before his Meccan audience as a senile old fool and have him burned at the stake. However, once Muḥammad al-Bāqir has returned to the privacy of his dwelling, the boy-*imām* is quickly approached by his most intimate inner-circle of initiates and disciples who all question the *imām* as to why he had ordered the execution of Ibn Sabaʾ when he had merely given testimony to truths they all profess and have learned from the *imām* himself. The answer, al-Bāqir explains, is that Ibn Sabaʾ revealed secrets which must remain hidden and unspoken until the appearance of the Qāʾim. He then resurrects Ibn Sabaʾ to bear witness to the wonders of heaven to his disciples. Following this, a brief expository passage narrates how the son of Ibn Sabaʾ, named Ṭālib, declares his willingness to sacrifice himself for the *imām*.

Below, it shall be argued that *UaK*'s 'school anecdote' reflects one the latest phases in the transformation of the Ibn Sabaʾ legend. It also represents one of its most peculiar. This phase embraces rather than rejects the Ibn Sabaʾ tradition, and, utilising his persona as a didactic model rather than object of scorn, *UaK* fashions the persona of Ibn Sabaʾ into a spiritual ancestor and forbearer rather than a loathsome heresiarch. Although there exist other brief attestations to the sympathetic light in which some Shīʿī sectarians viewed Ibn Sabaʾ in other texts (see below), as well as evidence of his revered status in ʿAlawī-Nuṣayrī literature,[20] these attestations most often come to us as second-hand reports and outsiders' testimonies or in the form of brief, arcane notices. Ibn Sabaʾ makes his most extended and sympathetic appearance in *UaK*. Moreover, the text places the heresiarch in an entirely different chronological context than that with which we have been hitherto acquainted. Here, Ibn Sabaʾ is not a companion of ʿAlī living in ʿIrāq, but an elderly schoolmaster in Mecca charged with the education of the fifth *imām* Muḥammad al-Bāqir.

As integrated into *UaK*, the narrative of ʿAbdallāh-i Sabaʾ in the school anecdote reveals its rootedness in the perspective of a community of sectarians submerged within the traditions and doctrines of the Shīʿī *ghulāt* of Kūfa. However, locating and identifying this community beyond the doctrinal affinities that are conspicuously perceptible within the text continues

[19] According to a *ḥadīth* recognised by both Sunnīs and Shīʿa alike, one morning when Muḥammad was wearing a black coat, his daughter Fāṭima, her husband ʿAlī, and their two sons, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, arrived one after another, and taking all four under his cloak the Prophet blessed them reciting the qurʾānic verse, "God desires to remove from you, the people of the house [*ahl al-bayt*], impurity and to purify you completely" (Q. 33:33). See: A. J. Wensinck, *et al.*, *Concordances et indicies de la tradition musulmane* (Leiden, 1936–1988), VIII, p. 398.52–4 and *EI*³, s.v. "Ahl al-Kisāʾ" (F. Daftary).

[20] See: P. Wolff, "Auszüge aus dem Katechismus der Nossairier," *ZDMG*, III (1849), p. 307 (nr. 66); R. Strothmann, *Esoterische Sonderthemen bei den Nusairi: Geschichten und Traditionen von den heiligen Meistern aus dem Prophetenhaus* (Berlin, 1958), p. 4 (§5).

to be an elusive goal despite the considerable efforts of the aforementioned scholars. In terms of internal evidence, *UaK* actually provides little explicit information in this regard other than its dubious claim to represent a guarded and sacred transmission of divine knowledge as communicated by Muḥammad al-Bāqir to his most trusted disciples. Touting its contents as the repository of the *imām*'s most arcane and esoteric pronouncements, the work draws from the large corpus of traditions referring to the existence of various esoteric and parascriptural compilations of the *imām*s and *ahl al-bayt* now said to be lost, or perchance concealed from all but a select few.[21] It purports to be, as claimed in the work's own prologue (see *UaK* 9 ff.), a tome akin to a *ghālī* grimoire through which the most arcane esoterica of the divine realm may be conjured and displayed before the reader's eyes.

This feature clues us in to the *UaK*'s intimate relation to the genre of esoteric works attributed to the early icons of *ahl al-bayt*. These works appear under sundry names—usually specific to the revered member of the Prophet's household to whom their content is ascribed. The *Kitāb ʿAlī* containing the esoteric pronouncements of ʿAlī himself or occasionally his own version of the Qurʾan,[22] the *Muṣḥaf Fāṭima* representing the angelic revelations communicated to the Prophet's daughter,[23] and the *K. al-Jafr al-abyaḍ* inherited by Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq are just a few of such books, albeit also the most widely known. None of these books is genuinely extant, and it is exceedingly difficult, if not outright impossible, to prove they ever were. Nonetheless, citations of said works appear abundantly throughout later sources—almost exclusively in Shīʿī compilations[24]—and, although more commonly mentioned as the exclusive possession of the *imām*s, there have occasionally arisen persons claiming to have one of the aforementioned books in their possession.[25] Even if oftentimes said to merely contain the legal rulings (Ar., *aḥkām*) of the *imām*s, these works are also cited unequivocally as the source for the *imām*s' esoteric utterances, too—especially those utterances preoccupied with apocalyptic and eschatological themes such as the names and number of the *imām*s, the appearance of the Mahdī/Qāʾim and who will fight on his side, and other similar materials.[26] The sheer pretence of their existence, however, serves to buttress the supernatural knowledge possessed by the *imām*s by virtue of their prophetic descent.[27] In the school anecdote of *UaK*, Muḥammad al-Bāqir displays in particular his mastery of the esoteric discipline of gematria, or *jafr*—indeed, such an adeptness to interpret the secret meanings of the alphabet was considered a peculiar charism bestowed by God upon the Prophet's household. Muḥammad al-Bāqir's age here is important, too; the point is, of course, that his knowledge is inspired by divinity, not acquired.

[21] See: Etan Kohlberg, "Authoritative Scriptures in Early Imami Shiʿism," in *Les retours aux écritures fondamentalismes présents et passes*, (eds.) E. Patlagean and A. Le Boulluec (Paris, 1993), pp. 297 ff.

[22] Modarressi, *Tradition*, i, pp. 4–12; cf. E. Kohlberg and M. A. Amir-Moezzi, *Revelation and Falsification: The* Kitāb al-qirāʾāt *of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Sayyārī* (Leiden, 2009), pp. 24–30.

[23] Modarressi, *Tradition*, i, pp. 17–20.

[24] *Ibid*., i, p. 7 and n. 43 thereto.

[25] Most famous among these incidents is that of Ibn Tūmart (d. 534/1130), whose Mahdist pretensions were allegedly derived from his obtaining the *K. al-jafr* from which "he had gained knowledge from *ahl al-bayt*" and realised his destiny as the Qāʾim and the identity of his successor, ʿAbd al-Muʾmin. See: Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-aʿyān wa-abnāʾ al-zamān,* ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās (Beirut, 1968–1972), v, pp. 47–8 and iii, pp. 238, 240 f. and I. Goldziher, "Materialien zur Kenntnis der Almohadenbewegung," *ZDMG*, XLIV (1890), pp. 123 ff.

[26] Kohlberg, "Authoritative Scriptures," pp. 301 ff.; Modarressi, *Tradition*, i p. 12.

[27] Toufic Fahd, "al-Djafr," *EI*^{2}, ii, pp. 375b-377; cf. M. A. Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shīʿism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam*, (trans.) D. Streight (Albany, 1994), pp. 69 ff.

One may safely discount that the origins of *UaK* ultimately derive from the sessions of Muḥammad al-Bāqir with those disciples whom he initiated into the profoundest and most arcane depths of the *imāms*' secret teachings. The work itself teems with anachronistic impossibilities and confusions while mixing an eclectic bricolage of doctrines and ideas post-dating the life and times of the fifth *imām* by generations, if not centuries. However, the actual date of the document is itself quite elusive for a number of reasons. All extant manuscripts are exceedingly late—the earliest employed by Ivanow dates from 1879—and these are themselves riddled with errors and often difficult to decipher. Persian, it seems, was also not the original language of *UaK*, but Arabic, and numerous textual indicators point to the defectiveness of this translation. As a result, the sizeable amount of scholarly speculation over the document, both into its origins and its doctrine, as well as into the reconstruction of the original text, has arrived at broadly divergent conclusions. Both Fillipani-Ronconci and Tijdens have even gone to great lengths to argue for the existence of pre-Islamic prototypes for *UaK*, which eventually underwent a process of assimilation and islamisation that later culminated in our current text. Although their theories contributed considerable insight into the text, they have in general not been well received,[28] and Ivanow's early contention that the text's origins directly relate to, and are the original product of, the Shīʿite *ghulāt* of Kūfa has remained unimpeached. Although extra-Islamic influences are perceptible and fascinating, the marks of such influences reflect the eclecticism of Shīʿī esoteric thought in general, and attempts to find an origin of the text beyond the vale of Islam appear unnecessary and superfluous.

Fillipani-Ronconci and especially Tijdens did, however, alert scholars to one of the most significant features of *UaK*: namely, the text's current unity hides the centuries of redactionary transformation that produced the version preserved by the Nizārī-Ismāʿīlīs in Central Asia. Any prudent study, it would seem, would require that one undertake the arduous task of trying to uncover the redactionary chronology of the text through a critical examination of the *UaK*'s organisation and contents. Indeed, Heinz Halm has most clearly elucidated the obstacles to establishing a firm date for the text by undertaking just such a textual analysis of *UaK*. Insofar as his observations are paramount to any study of the text, they merit a detailed overview.

First, as Halm notes, the work as we now know as *UaK* exhibits a 'horizontal' structure that appears to have been the product of an unknown editor who brought together three originally separate documents in order to form *UaK*. Hence, while *UaK* is a now a unity, this unity is, in essence, the result of an artificial and synthetic process. Halm lists these 'horizontal' layers as follows:

[28] Fillipani-Ronconi argued for both Manichaean and Buddhist origins in the introduction to his translation of the text as well as in his article, "Note sulla soteriologia e sul simbolismo cosmico dell' *Ummu'l-kitāb*," *AIOUN*, XIV (1964), pp. 111 ff. Against this view, see the reviews of his translation by J. van Ess (*Der Islam*, XLVI, 1970, pp. 95–100) and W. Madelung (*Oriens* XXV/XXVI, 1976, pp. 352–358) as well as Halm, *Gnosis*, pp. 116–117. Tijdens sought to detect within the text two layers, one authored by a Judaeo-Christian sect with Mu'tazilite sympathies and the other by a redactor under the influence of Avincennian cosmology. Halm, in my view rightly, rejects this hypothesis for reasons discussed in Halm, "Das Buch der Schatten," pp. 37 ff. For a recent effort to situate the text within a Mesopotamian context, see: Jaako Hämeen-Antilla, "Ascent and Descent in Islamic Myth", in *Mythology and Mythologies: Methodological approaches to intercultural influences*, (ed.) R.M. Whiting (Helsinki, 2001), pp. 47–67.

1. the prolegomena to the work (1–12), in which the nature and origins of *UaK* are described and its contents discussed, although not systematically;
2. the Ibn Sabaʾ narrative (12–53), followed by a series questions posed by Jābir b. ʿAbdallāh al-Anṣārī and met with the answers of al-Bāqir (53–59);
3. the so-called Jābir-Apocalypse (60–248), in which al-Bāqir discloses to his disciple Jābir al-Juʿfī the secrets of the origins of the cosmos, the fall of the soul into the world and its salvation; and, finally,
4. a large section (248–419) dedicated to the *imām*'s answers to numerous problems and inquiries.

Each of the principal three divisions, as Halm notes, is in fact only loosely related to the others. In the case of the school anecdote, for example, such can be gleaned from the fact that Ibn Sabaʾ, after playing a rather prominent role in the first section, no longer appears in *UaK* thereafter as a significant individual.

Added to this horizontal structure, there exists what Halm designates as the 'vertical' layers of the text, which are predominately of chronological derivation. The first and earliest identified by Halm is the so-called 'Jābir-Apocalypse', so named after the controversial companion of Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, Jābir b. Yazīd al-Juʿfī (d. *ca*. 127–32/744–50). This section follows immediately after the Ibn Sabaʾ narrative and is preoccupied with the secret insights of the *imām* into the fivefold nature of the Godhead, the origins of the seven spheres, or *dīvān*s, of heaven and numerous other supernatural pronouncements concerning the spiritual realm and the cosmos. As noted above, this unit appears roughly in the middle of *UaK*. According to Halm, the Jābir apocalypse, as the oldest stratum of *UaK*, belongs to the middle of the second/eighth century. He also, rather audaciously, argues that this unit ought to be identified with the *tafsīr* attributed, by other texts, to Jābir al-Juʿfī.[29]

According to Halm, the second, vertical layer represents the undertaking of the editor responsible for the basic unified structure of the text as we now have it. Halm, arbitrarily in my view, identifies this editor with the otherwise unknown figure of ʿAlī b. ʿAbd al-ʿAẓīm, indentified in *UaK* 8 as the individual who relocated the text from Kūfa during the reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 170–193/786–809) and subsequently passed it on to his disciples upon his death (see the note to the text below). Perceiving in this passage a revealing clue into the authorship of *UaK*, Halm dates this layer of the text, identical with the moment when *UaK* acquired its 'horizontal' structure, to the early third/ninth century. In addition to the actual structure of the text of *UaK* itself, this layer adds on to the earliest stratum interpolations relating to speculation concerning the macro- and micro-cosmic nature of self and the universe where one finds extrapolations on the correspondence of the microcosm, represented by bodies of believers, and unbelievers in the macrocosmic scale of the spiritual realm. These interpolations have remained perceptible insofar as they only imperfectly permeate the texts of the earlier stratum.

Thirdly, Halm points to the imprints of Khaṭṭābī influence representative of a phase in which the text was both read and copied in the circles of sectarians of the Khaṭṭābīya and

[29] Halm, "Buch der Schatten," pp. 35–36; *idem*, *Gnosis*, p. 120. Modarressi has compiled a substantial corpus of citations putatively derived from Jābir al-Juʿfī's *tafsīr* that strongly suggests otherwise; see his *Tradition*, i, pp. 94–97.

Nuṣayrīya. To this phase, *UaK* owes its numerous, scattered references to the namesake of the Khāṭṭābīya, Abū l-Khaṭṭāb b. Abī Zaynab al-Azdī—a figure who according to the majority of historical reports was executed in Kūfa during the reign of al-Manṣūr by the caliph's vizier ʿĪsā b. Mūsā but who in *UaK* appears as a contemporary and partisan of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. Oddly enough, this later fact means that *UaK* places Ibn Sabaʾ in the era of Abū l-Khaṭṭāb and Abū l-Khaṭṭāb in the era of Ibn Sabaʾ.[30] Fourthly, Halm adduces a Nizārī-Ismāʿīlī layer of *UaK*, which the text acquired after its adoption by the Nizārī-Ismāʿīlīs—perhaps first in Syria in the sixth/twelfth century, when contacts between the Nuṣayrīs and Nizārīs first began—later to be brought by a Nizārī missionary into the Pamir region. Finally, the last layer of the text derives ultimately from the Persian translation, which itself may have led to further interpolations into and additions to the text of *UaK*.

This is, as noted above, a brilliantly nuanced accommodation of Ivanow's early dating of *UaK*, which he subsequently abandoned, in that it also provides an important means for bounding over the hurdles presented by key features of *UaK* which render a second/eighth century provenance impossible, such as its mention of 12 *imāms* (*UaK* 27), its equation of a self-sacrificing sect (*madhhab-i fidāʾī*) with the Ismāʿīlīs (*madhhab-i ismāʿīlī*) of Syria (*UaK* 52–3), and so on,[31] in that it postulates in a rather compelling fashion a scenario by which *UaK* acquires over centuries new textual expansions that threaten to occlude and obscure the provenance of the most archaic content of the earliest textual strata of *UaK*.

Literary Influences in the 'School Anecdote' of *Umm al-Kitāb*

In its broad outlines, Halm's scheme offers a cogent and perceptive account of the textual layers encountered upon reading the text of *UaK*. Indeed, that *UaK* is a composite work, culled from shorter treatises and the product of many layers of editing spanning centuries, can hardly be doubted given Halm's insightful analyses. However, Halm's dating of these layers and, thus, his proposed redactionary chronology are, in my view, too cavalier and largely unwarranted for those sections to which he assigns the earliest of dates. One might counter his scheme from many fronts, but given our interests in this study, it seems best to take the school anecdote featuring Ibn Sabaʾ as the prime example of how Halm's redactionary chronology for *UaK* swiftly unravels.

The Ibn Sabaʾ legend as instantiated in *UaK* offers one the best arenas where one can test Halm's hypothesis insofar as its narrative elements permit one to detect the sort of literary influences and dependencies that might best illuminate the historical context of *UaK*'s composition. As first noted by Halm, each of the vertical layers enumerated by Halm have left traces on the Ibn Sabaʾ narrative in *UaK*; therefore, according to Halm's analysis, the school anecdote ought to belong to the earliest stratum of *UaK* alongside the Jābir-Apocalypse, which he dates to approximately the second/eighth century on the basis of these same criteria.[32] As the analysis below will show, however, an examination of the Ibn

[30]For the conventional heresiographical account, see: Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, pp. 37 ff., 58 ff. See also Halm, *Gnosis*, pp. 199–206.

[31]For which reason Madelung postulated a date for *UaK* no earlier than the sixth/twelfth century; see his review of Fillipani-Ronconi's translation in *Oriens*, XXV-XXVI (1976), p. 355

[32]Halm, "Buch der Schatten," p. 39; *idem*, *Gnosis*, p. 120.

Saba' narration in *UaK* in light of the evolution Ibn Saba' tradition more generally speaking renders this early date for the school anecdote and, by extension, severely undermines Halm's bold dating of parts of *UaK* to the second/eighth century. Below, our analysis shall begin with a discussion of the Ibn Saba' tradition vis-à-vis *UaK* and then bring the insights gained thereby to bear on other literary features of *UaK*'s school anecdote that provide a more plausible dating for the earliest stratum of *UaK*.

By the second/eighth century, the Ibn Saba' legend was still in considerable flux, but despite this flux, some general features of the Ibn Saba' legend during this century are discernable. Only towards the latter half of that century does one begin to see the emergence of the portrait of Ibn Saba' as a heresiarch who somehow fits into the heresiological architecture of Islamic-belief-gone-wrong. This phenomenon occurs most lucidly in the aforementioned writings of the ʿUthmānī *akhbārī* Sayf b. ʿUmar and the Imāmī theologian Hishām b. al-Ḥakam.[33] Leaving aside the question of their own fascinating perspectives on Ibn Saba', it suffices within the context of this essay to cite the aspect common to both that is most relevant to dating *UaK*: namely these early accounts—particularly the Imāmī account of Hishām b. al-Ḥakam—are conspicuously marked by an absence of either, 1) any reference to the alleged belief of Ibn Saba' in the divinity of ʿAlī or 2) any narrative of his fiery martyrdom at the hands of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. This is, in fact, not too odd. Any survey of the earliest surviving heresiological accounts of Ibn Saba' shows that they rather uniformly focus on either his rejection of ʿAlī's death, and not his execution at the hands of ʿAlī, or his innovation of any number of the stock and trade Rāfiḍī beliefs reviled by non-Shīʿite Muslims.[34]

As Josef van Ess first argued in his study of the *K. al-nakth* of the Muʿtazilī al-Naẓẓām (d. ca. 220–230/835–845),[35] most of the evidence suggests that the story of the immolation of Ibn Saba' appears relatively late in the heresiographical tradition because it is a tertiary development within the Ibn Saba' tradition itself, which in turn had been based on an earlier story. The execution account of Ibn Saba' appears, in fact, to be an archetypal descendent of an early Baṣran tradition transmitted by the traditionist Ayyūb al-Sakhtiyānī (d. ca. 125/743) on the authority of ʿIkrimā, the *mawlā* of Ibn ʿAbbās, in which ʿAlī executes by fire a number of individuals who apostatise from Islam.[36] Later, Shīʿī adaptations of these traditions, originating perhaps with the Imāmī historian ʿAli b. Muḥammad b. Sulayman al-Nawfalī (fl. first half of the third/ninth century),[37] appropriated this Baṣran tradition and

[33] See note 6 above.

[34] Later authors resolved this contradiction by creating a harmonised account in which Ibn Saba' escapes execution through exile, but how and why this occurs is beyond the scope of this essay. For a fuller account see: S. Anthony, *The Caliph and the Heretic: Ibn Saba' and the Origins of Shīʿism* (Leiden, forthcoming), Chapters 4–5.

[35] *Das Kitāb al-Nakṯ des Naẓẓam und seine Rezeption im Kitāb al-Futyā des Ǧāḥiẓ: Eine Sammlung der Fragment mit Übersetzung und Kommentar* (Göttingen, 1972), pp. 54 ff.

[36] The earliest version appears in a *musnad* attributed to Zayd b. ʿAlī (d.122/740), but it is likely it was compiled in the middle of the second/eighth century. See: *Musnad Zayd b. ʿAlī* (Beirut, 1966), p. 340 and W. Madelung, *Der Imām al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm und die Glaubenslehre der Zaiditen* (Berlin, 1965), pp. 53–56. For others early versions of the tradition, see: ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī, *al-Muṣannaf*, (ed.) Ḥ. ʿA.-R. al-Aʿẓamī (Beirut, 1970–72), x, p. 213 (no.9413); Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm*, (ed.) ʿA. Muḥammad and ʿA. Aḥmad (Beirut, 2001), x, p.560. Not all Baṣran versions go back to ʿIkrima; some are attributed to Anas b. Malik via Qatāda b. Diʿāma. This version, however, is textually corrupt. Cf. the analyses of Suliman Bashear, *Arabs and Others in Early Islam*, SLAEI 8 (Princeton, 1997), p. 78 and G. H. A. Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Ḥadīth* (Leiden, 2008), p. 146a.

[37] On whom, see: S. Günther, "al-Nawfalī's Lost History: The Issue of a 9th Century Shīʿite Source Used by al-Ṭabarī and Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī," in *Al-Ṭabarī: A Medieval Muslim Historian and His Work*, (ed.) H. Kennedy, SLAEI 15 (Princeton, 2008), pp. 157–174.

re-cast these apostates as *ghulāt* whom ʿAlī executes for hailing him as divinity incarnate.[38] Accounts that place Ibn Sabaʾ in the mix of these events appear only by the mid-third/ninth century and later with the earliest attestations appearing, for example, in the works of the likes of Ibn Qutayba (d. 272/889), Nawfalī's student Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Thaqafī (d. 314/926),[39] and al-Kishshī's *Rijāl*.[40] This creates the first, and perhaps most pressing, problem for Halm's dating of *UaK*. The feature of the heresiological persona of Ibn Sabaʾ shared between *UaK* and the heresiographical tradition at large—i.e., the story of his execution for his professing his *imām*'s divinity—emerged as a part of the Ibn Sabaʾ legend, it seems, only well into the third/ninth century.

If the story of ʿAlī's execution of Ibn Sabaʾ indeed post-dates the second/eighth century, as the evidence strongly suggests, then the Ibn Sabaʾ narrative in *UaK* undoubtedly does as well in so far as it clearly bears the marks of a composition written in reaction against this latter phase of the Ibn Sabaʾ legend in which, rather than functioning as an anti-Shīʿī 'black legend', the heretic's story transforms into a anti-*ghulāt* polemic serving the purpose of Imāmī scholars. The message behind *UaK*'s version of Ibn Sabaʾ's execution is abundantly clear, for it equals not a mere recapitulation of the execution narrative but, rather, a profound re-appropriation and transformation of that very legend.

As it happens, this literary development occurs outside *UaK*, too. This development, moreover, does not go unnoticed by Muslim theologians and heresiographers. Al-Maqdisī (fl. 355/966) provides one of the earliest attestations to such a pro-*ghālī* re-interpretation of the execution story, which is sympathetic rather than vehemently opposed to Ibn Sabaʾ and the Sabaʾīya. Al-Maqdisī states that a number of the "brethren" of the Sabaʾīya, as he calls them, regarded the execution of the Sabaʾīya as proof of ʿAlī's divinity because Ibn ʿAbbās claimed that, "None (should) chastise with fire save the Lord of fire [*lā yuʿadhdhibu bi-l-nār illā rabb al-nār*]", Subsequently, these Sabaʾīya "claimed after (the execution) that the fire did not touch them but became cold and harmless as it did for the prophet Abraham" (cf. Q. 21:68–71, 37:97).[41] The Muʿtazilī theologian ʿAbd al-Jabbār al-Qāḍī (d. 415/1025), writing at a quite distance from second/eighth-century Kūfa, provides us with yet another early attestation to this re-appropriation of the execution story. In his *Tathbīt dalāʾil al-nubūwa*, a work completed in 385/995,[42] ʿAbd al-Jabbār writes that in *his time* many Shīʿa in Kūfa, the Sawād and the rest of ʿIrāq claimed that ʿAlī killed Ibn Sabaʾ and his acolytes not for their

[38]Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ Nahj al-balāgha*, (ed.) M. A. Ibrāhīm (repr., Beirut, 2001), viii, pp. 94–95. Cf. Ṭūsī, *Ikhtiyār*, p. 109; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, (ed.) ʿA. A. al-Ghaffārī (Tehran, 1971), vii, pp. 291–292.

[39]See his redaction of Nawfalī's aforementioned account in Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ*, v, pp. 5–6. On his importance as a redactor of Nawfalī's materials, see: S. Günther, *Quellenuntersuchungen zu den Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn des Abū 'l-Faraǧ al-Isfahānī* (Hildesheim, 1991), pp. 133 ff.

[40]Ṭūsī, *Ikhtiyār*, pp. 106–107. Kishshī's material may be the earliest; if his *isnād* is somewhat reliable, his account of ʿAlī's execution of ibn Sabaʾ may derive from the *Kitāb al-radd ʿalā l-ghulāt* of Hishām b. al-Ḥakam's student Yūnus b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān (d. 208/823–4). I am skeptical that it does, however, and believe the tradition requires further corroboration for an early dating.

[41]Muṭahhar b. Ṭāhir al-Maqdisī, *K. al-badʾ wa-l-taʾrīkh*, (ed.) Cl. Huart (Paris, 1916), v, p. 125; cf. Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ*, v, p. 5. This is a slightly modified version of Ibn ʿAbbas' dictum, which appears throughout the original Baṣran narrative of ʿAlī's immolation of the apostates (see: note 36 above), intended to strengthen the case of the *ghulāt*.

[42]See: G. S. Reynolds, *A Muslim Theologian in the Sectarian Milieu: ʿAbd al-Jabbār and The Critique of Christian Origins* (Leiden, 2004), pp. 61–62.

belief in his divinity but for revealing openly the secret of the *imām*'s true identity.[43] This is the precise claim of *UaK*, only with Muḥammad al-Bāqir assuming the role accorded to his ancestor ʿAlī.

By far the most important attestation to this *ghālī*-reappropriation of the Ibn Sabaʾ execution narrative outside *UaK* appears a Nuṣayrī treastise entitled *al-Risāla al-rastbāshiyya* (from the Persian '*rast bāsh*'; viz., 'be righteous'). Written by the Shīʿī scholar al-Ḥusayn ibn Ḥamdān al-Khaṣībī (d. 358/969), the work was dedicated to the Būyid prince ʿIzz al-Dawla Bakhtiyār (r. 334–56/967–77 in Baghdād).[44] Although many of Khaṣībī's works were accepted by mainstream, Imāmī Shīʿism, as Yoran Friedman has recently demonstrated, Khaṣībī's oeuvre is split between those works accepted by the Imāmī-Shīʿa, such as his *al-Hidāya al-kubrā*, and those intended for his sectarian following of '*muwaḥḥidūn*' who formed the core of what soon evolved into the Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī branch of Shīʿism. The *Risāla al-rastbāshīya* falls unambiguously into this latter category of Khaṣībī's writings.[45]

In Khaṣībī's treatise, the narrative of Ibn Saba''s execution pertains to one of the many 'terrestrial signs [*āyāt arḍīya*]' of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, evidencing the *imām*'s ability to bring the dead back to life. Khaṣībī's version presents us initially with a scenario in which Ibn Sabaʾ and ten of his associates are burned alive and then concealed in a pit in the manner akin to the earliest narratives of Ibn Saba''s execution. After burning Ibn Sabaʾ and his companions alive and burying them in the pit, the account claims that the following morning ʿAlī "brought them back to life [*aḥyāhum*]", and the Kūfans saw Ibn Sabaʾ and his ten companions "sitting in green robes and perfumed with scents the likeness of which has not been smelled even in the good things of this world, sitting at the doors of their houses and in their shops, and walking in the markets and fairways (of Kūfa)". Awestruck, the Kūfans approach ʿAlī to ascertain the meaning of these events, whereupon he answers, "Indeed, I burned them alive with fire yesterday and covered them in their pit while you all watched. I even prayed (over them) while you bore witness. If God makes them alive once again after this, then by God he does whatsoever he wills".[46] In subsequent Nuṣayrī thought, this version of Ibn Saba''s execution becomes quite influential. Ibn Sabaʾ effectively attains the status of a saint, and his quasi-docetic martyrdom assumes further paradigmatic importance for the Nuṣayrīs in their doctrine of the *nidāʾ* (call), also called the *taṣrīḥ* (declaration), in which an initiate publicly declares the divinity of the *imām* knowing full-well that he will be martyred and even suffers the humiliation of a public denunciation by the *imām*, albeit as an act of dissimulation (*taqīya*).[47]

[43] *Tathbīt*, ii, pp. 549–550. A similar story to that of *UaK*, although far shorter, appears also in the *Haft Bāb-i Bābā Sayyednā*, in: W. Ivanov, *Two Early Ismaili Treatises* (Bombay, 1933), p. 15 (Prs.); Eng. trans. in: M.G.S. Hodgson, *The Order of the Assassins: The Struggle of the Nizârî Ismâʿîlîs against the Islamic World* (The Hague, 1955), p. 294. S. J. Badakhchani has recently identified the previously unknown author of the *Haft Bāb* as Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd, a Nizārī *dāʿī* and poet with close associations with Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, thanks to a recently discovered manuscript indentifying him as the individual who authored the work in 602/1205. See: Badakchani, (ed.) and (trans.), *The Paradise of Submission: A New Persian Edition and English Translation of Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī's Rawḍa-yi taslīm* (London, 2005), pp. xv-xvi and p. 244 and n. 15 thereto.

[44] J. J. Donohue, *The Buwayhid Dynasty in Iraq 334*H./*945–403*H./1012 (Leiden, 2003), 51 ff., 149 ff. On Khaṣībī's relationship with ʿIzz al-Dawla in particular, see: Y. Friedman, *The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs: An Introduction to the Religion, History, and Identity of the Leading Minority in Syria* (Leiden, 2010), pp. 29–30.

[45] *Ibid.*, 33 f., 253 f.

[46] Khaṣībī, *al-Risāla al-rāstbāshīya*, in: *Rasāʾil al-ḥikma al-ʿalawīya* (Beirut, 2006), 34 f.

[47] *Idem*, *Fiqh al-risāla al-rāstbāshīya*, in: *Rasāʾil al-ḥikma*, 108; cf. Friedman, *Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*, 126 ff.

The overlaps between *UaK* and the Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī re-imaginings of the Ibn Sabaʾ narratives are particularly important, although their exact nature or their inter-textual relationship remains to be determined. What is certain, however, is that the school anecdote reveals how *UaK* often exhibits a textual complexity integral to the text itself that belies any attempt to date either its whole or its earliest strata to the second/eighth century while simultaneously attributing what are clearly later features to subsequent interpolations. However, the school anecdote in which Ibn Sabaʾ, or ʿAbdallāh-i Sabaʾ as he is so named in *UaK*, features bears the promise of even further insight into *UaK*'s provenance as well, in that the narrative draws from a diverse pool of motifs and tropes that extend beyond the mere confines of the heresiological portraits of Ibn Sabaʾ. These are worth teasing out, for they not only demonstrate the eclecticism of the text and the wide body of materials which exerted influence upon its author, or authors, but also serve as an indication of the corpus of traditions from which the compiler(s) of the text drew.

In the school anecdote of *UaK*, ʿAbdallāh-i Sabaʾ initially acts as the boy-*imām*'s teacher. In so doing, he thus dons a role vis-à-vis the child Muḥammad al-Bāqir curiously reminiscent of a role attributed to Jābir b. ʿAbdallāh al-Anṣārī (d. *ca.* 77/696), a companion of the Prophet and a loyal partisan of ʿAlī well-known in Shīʿī literature. After living a life of exceptional longevity, his reputation persisted long after his death as a highly esteemed scholar and foundational authority among the Shīʿa.[48] Often Jābir al-Anṣārī even surfaces in Shīʿī *isnād*s as an authority for the knowledge of the *imām*s themselves, a fact that, although producing a number of difficulties for later Shīʿite doctrines concerning the nature of the *imām*s' knowledge, seems to have inspired more fascination than embarrassment with regard to the significance his personality across the generations of Shīʿī scholarship.[49] According to some accounts, for example, it was Jābir who transcribed a copy (*ṣaḥīfa*) from a green tablet given by Gabriel to Fāṭima.[50] Elsewhere tradition depicts him as living long enough to fulfill the Prophet's charge to him to deliver his greetings to Muḥammad al-Bāqir, a preternatural confirmation of al-Bāqir's legitimate station as the Prophet's successor.[51] Jābir al-Anṣārī reputedly knew the true interpretation of certain qurʾānic verses relating to the apocalypse as well. Hence, he allegedly affirmed the interpretation of Q. 28:85, so passionately cited by Sayf b. ʿUmar's Ibn Sabaʾ,[52] "Verily, he who charged you with the Qurʾān shall restore you to the place of return [*inna alladhī faraḍa ʿalayka al-qurʾān la-rādduka ilā maʿād*]", as the qurʾānic proof for the return from the dead, or *rajʿa*, of the Prophet and the *imām*s at the end of time.[53] In *UaK*, Jābir al-Anṣārī's famous role vis-à-vis Muḥammad al-Bāqir, in fact, seems to be reprised by Abdallāh-i Sabaʾ—which may account for the odd placement of Ibn Sabaʾ outside his usual chronological context. Although Jābir al-Anṣārī does indeed have a role to play in *UaK*, his appearance in the school anecdote is consigned to that of a mere

[48]M. J. Kister, "Djābir b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Anṣārī," *EI*², suppl., p. 231.
[49]See: E. Kohlberg, "An Unusual Shīʿī *Isnād*," *IOS*, V (1975), pp. 142–149.
[50]Kohlberg, "Authoritative Scriptures," p. 304.
[51]Kister, "Djābir," p. 231a.
[52]*K. al-ridda*, p. 136.
[53]Tūsī, *Ikhtiyār*, p. 45; Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, (ed.) Ṭayyib al-Mūsawī al-Jazāʾirī (Najaf, 1967), ii, p. 147; Ḥasan b. Sulaymān al-Ḥillī, *Mukhtaṣar Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, (ed.) Mushtāq al-Muẓaffar (Qumm, 2000), pp. 151, 155.

transmitter of the story. Only after the resurrection of Ibn Sabaʾ does Jābir al-Anṣārī figure prominently as an interlocutor with Muḥammad al-Bāqir (see: *UaK* 53 ff.).

Another central motif, and one that appears in its most substantive and distinctive form in *UaK*'s Ibn Sabaʾ episode, is *UaK*'s espousal of a particular brand of 'pentadist' Shīʿism. The Pentadists, or al-Mukhammisa, were so named due to their fivefold division of the divine essence. Most of our knowledge of this sect derives from the writings of the Imāmī heresiographer Saʿd b. ʿAbdallāh al-Qummī (d. 301/913–14), who describes their beliefs in the greatest detail. Saʿd b. ʿAbdallāh identifies the Pentadists with a branch of the adherents of the doctrine of Abū l-Khaṭṭāb, the Khaṭṭābiyya, who regarded Muḥammad as God and asserted "that he appeared in five forms [*khamsat ashbāḥ*] and five different likenesses [*khamas ṣūra* (sic.) *mukhtalifa*]".[54] These five forms, in which the divine essence instantiates and incarnates itself, are the so-called *ahl al-kisāʾ* noted above: Muḥammad, ʿAlī, Fāṭima, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn. According to the Pentadist doctrine, the person (*shakhṣ*) of Muḥammad constitutes the divine essence (*maʿnā*), which remains unchanged throughout these manifestations, insofar as he was the first manifestation and the first speaker (*awwalu shakhṣ*^{in} *ẓahara wa-awwalu nāṭiq*^{in} *naṭaqa*).[55] Saʿd al-Qummī also claims that the Pentadists see the essence of Muḥammad as having been manifested throughout former ages, to both Arabs and non-Arabs alike, in the likeness of kings, Persian rulers (Ar., *akāsira*), and prophets, but none accepted the unity (*waḥdānīya*) of his person until he appeared in the *imām*s. Thus,

> The outer [*ẓāhir*] God to them is the Imāmate, but the inner [*bāṭin*] God's essence [*maʿnā*] is Muḥammad. Those who are chosen perceive by illumination [*al-nūrānīya*], and those who are not chosen (perceive) on the human level of flesh and blood. He is the *imām* only with another body and with a substituted name [*bi-ghayr jism*^{in} *wa-bi-tabdīl ism*^{in}]. All prophets, messengers, Persian rulers, and kings—from Adam to the appearance of Muḥammad—their station [*maqām*] was established as the station of Muḥammad. He is the Lord, and likewise the *imām*s after him. Their station is his station. Also Fāṭima, they claim that she is the Lord and cause *sūrat al-tawḥīd* to refer to her as: "Say he is God, the one and only" (Q. 122:1), and that she is the oneness of deliverance [*waḥdānīya mahdīya*]; and "he begets not", (Q. 122:2) is al-Ḥasan; and "he is not begotten" (Q. 122:3) is al-Ḥusayn, "and there is none like unto him" (Q. 122:4).[56]

Saʿd b. ʿAbdallāh's description finds remarkable parallels in the scene of Muḥammad al-Bāqir's five transfigurations before ʿAbdallāh-i Sabaʾ (see: *UaK* 39–41 below). The Ismāʿīlī *dāʿī* Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 322/934), our only other source describing pentadist beliefs, describes the Mukhammisa in similarly, albeit in much more laconic terms, stating that they believe all the persons of *ahl al-kisāʾ* to be of one essence, although he neglects to explicitly mention their belief in the divinity of the five persons.[57]

[54] Saʿd b. ʿAbdallāh, *Maqālāt*, p. 56.

[55] *Ibid*. Saʿd b. ʿAbdallāh lists another pentadist sect which posits ʿAlī, rather than Muḥammad, as the *maʿnā* founded by Bashshār al-Shaʿīrī, a devotee of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, known as the ʿAlyāʾiyya (*ibid.*, pp. 59–60); cf. Halm, *Gnosis*, p. 218 ff.

[56] Saʿd b. ʿAbdallāh, *Maqālāt*, pp. 56–57.; cf. Halm, *Kosmologie und Heilslehre*, pp. 157 ff. and idem, *Gnosis*, pp. 218 ff.

[57] Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *K. al-zīna*, p. 307: "The Mukhammisa are those who claim that Muḥammad, ʿAlī, Fāṭima, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, all five of them, are one thing [*shayʾun wāḥid*^{un}]. The Spirit dwells in them equally, preferring neither one over the other. They claim that Fāṭima was not a woman and are loathe to speak of Fāṭima in feminine terms and thus call her Fāṭim".

No other passage from *UaK* typifies the espousal of the Pentadist doctrine as the five manifestations of Muḥammad al-Bāqir before his teacher, Ibn Sabaʾ. This series of successive appearances of the pentad of the *ahl al-bayt*, however, does not occur only in *UaK*. Parallels can also be found particularly in the post-Fāṭimid literature of the Mustaʿlī-Ṭayyibī *dāʿīs* of the Yaman. ʿImād al-Dīn Idrīs (d. 872/1468) relates briefly in his esoteric treatise *Zahr al-maʿānī* a series of visions revealed to Jābir b. ʿAbdallāh al-Anṣārī by the *imām* ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn in which the latter appears in the form of *mīm*, *fāʾ*, *ḥāʾ*, *sīn* and finally *ʿayn* (i.e., Muḥammad, Fāṭima, al-Ḥasan, al-Ḥusayn and ʿAlī). Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn then asks, "Can your reason bear this, Jābir?—they are merely garments [*qumuṣ*] in every time and the age substitutes the garment, but I do not change. For the prophets and *imām*s are temples of the Light revealing in them truth at their appearance".[58] According to Ivanow, yet another version of this anecdote, much closer to that in *UaK* insofar as it features Muḥammad al-Bāqir rather than his father, can be found in the *Ghāyāt al-mawālīd* of al-Sulṭān al-Khaṭṭāb al-Hamdānī (d. *ca.* 946/1539).[59] Such parallels confirm the familiarity of the author(s) with a corpus of esoteric materials circulating in Ismāʿīlī circles. In addition to these Ismāʿīlī sources, one finds the pentad anecdote adapted and incorporated into later Nuṣayrī literature as well, although after undergoing considerable transformation in doctrinal content.[60]

The depiction of Muḥammad al-Bāqir and ʿAbdallāh-i Sabaʾ is, of course, one of incongruence wherein the standard roles of master and disciple are turned upon their heads. Here, against all appearances or expectations the brilliant luminary proves to be the youthful, but divinely-inspired, *imām* rather than the seasoned, erudite master. This motif, of course, is quite an ancient one harkening back to an era preceding even the rise of Islam itself.[61] The dialogue of the five year old Muḥammad al-Bāqir and ʿAbdallāh-i Sabaʾ reproduces in an uncanny fashion the scenario featuring the boy Jesus and his befuddled schoolmaster that was first made current in the *Infancy Gospel of Ps.-Thomas*[62] and which was then dispersed widely through this gospel's literary descendents such as the *Gospel of Ps.-Matthew*,[63] the various apocryphal accounts of the life of Mary, and other early parascriptural Christian writings. Irenæus of Lyon (fl. second century A.D.), who provides one of our earliest attestations to

[58] *Zahr al-maʿānī* in: W. Ivanow, *Rise of the Fatimids* (Calcutta, 1942), p. 64; cf. *idem*, *Ismaili Literature*, pp. 77 ff.

[59] Ivanow, *Rise*, p. 256, n. 2; cf. I. K. Poonawala, *Biobibliography of Ismāʿīlī Literature* (Malibu, Calif., 1977), pp. 133 ff.

[60] Thus, in a Nuṣayrī work authored by Maḥmūd Baʿamrā, Muḥammad al-Bāqir appears to his disciple Dhū l-Dawr in the prayer niche (*miḥrāb*) of the Prophet's mosque in Medina seated before in five bodily manifestations: Muḥammad, Fāṭir (i.e., Fāṭima), al-Ḥasan, al-Ḥusayn and Muḥsin. See: R. Strothmann, *Esoterische Sonderthemen*, pp. 19–20 (§ 71) and Halm, *Gnosis*, p. 387, n. 689.

[61] *UaK* may have also appropriated the Mazdakite notion of the *kūdak-i dānā*—i.e., the 'omniscient child'. See: E. Yarshater, "Mazdakism," in *Cambridge History of Iran*, (ed.) E. Yarshater (Cambridge, 1983), iii/2, p. 1014 and W. Madelung, *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran* (Albany, 1988) pp. 8–9.

[62] The infancy gospel has long been notorious for its extremely complex and broad textual history: versions of *Inf. Ps.-Th.* appear in at least 13 different languages. The pioneering study is that of S. Gero, "The Infancy Gospel of Thomas: A Study of the Textual and Literary Problems", *Novum Testamentum*, XIII (1971), pp. 46–80. This essay, however, should now be read in tandem with the more updated studies of S. Voicu, "Verso il testo primitive dei . . . 'Racconti dell' infanzia del Signore Gesù," *Apocrypha*, IX (1998), pp. 7–95 and T. Chartrand-Burke, "The Greek Manuscript Tradition of the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*," *Apocrypha*, XIV (2003), pp. 129–151.

[63] On which, see: J. Gijsel, *Libri de nativitate mariae* I, *Psuedo-Matthaei Evangelium: textus et commentaries*, Corpus Christianorum, Series Apocryphum 9 (Turnhout,1997).

the stories existence, attributed the origins of this gospel story to the Marcosian Gnostics, writing (*Advs. Hær.*, 1.20,1):[64]

> (The Marcosians) have surreptitiously introduced an infinite multitude of apocryphal and bastard scriptures produced by them to make an impression on the simple-minded and who are ignorant of the true scriptures. Towards the same end, they bring forward the falsity that when the Lord was a child and learning his letters, the schoolmaster said to him, as was the custom, "Say *alpha*". "*Alpha*," he answered. But when the master again enjoined him to say *bēta*, the Lord answered, "First tell me yourself what is *alpha*, and I will tell you what is *bēta*". They explain this response of the Lord as meaning that he alone knew the Unknowable that was manifest under the figure of the letter *alpha*.

Irenæus testifies to the early popularity of the anecdote, but the vast literature relating the tale, albeit in manifold iterations, testify to its continued popularity over the centuries.

When and how this anecdote of the Christ-child entered the Islamic tradition is of little surprise: the story appears assimilated into *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* literature as well as *tafsīr*-compilations from an early date—albeit often in the form of Christ explaining the true meaning of the *basmala* rather than the alphabet.[65] Even Muḥammad al-Bāqir himself, according to Shīʿī tradition, related the story. The *imām*'s version reads as follows:[66]

> Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Isḥāq—Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Hamdanī, a *mawlā* of the B. Hāshim—Jaʿfar b. ʿAbdallāh b. Jaʿfar b. ʿAbdallāh b. Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib—Kathīr b. ʿAyyāsh al-Qaṭṭān—Abū l-Jārūd Ziyād b. Mundhir[67]—Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Bāqir, upon him peace, said:
>
> When Jesus son of Mary was born and was only a day old, he was as though he were two months old. When he was seven months old, his mother took him by the hand, brought him to the school [*al-kuttāb*], and sat him down before the teacher [*al-muʾaddib*]. The teacher said to him, "Say 'In the name of God the Merciful the Compassionate'". "In the name of God the Merciful the Compassionate", said Jesus. Then the teacher said to him, "Say the alphabet [*abjad*]", Jesus lifted his head and said, "Do *you* know what *abjad* is?" The teacher rose up with a whip (in his hand) to hit him, so (Jesus) said, "O teacher, hit me if you know. If not, ask me so that I may explain it to you". "Explain it to me", he said. So Jesus said, "As for the *alif*, it is the blessings

[64] A. Rousseau and L. Doutrieleau (eds.), *Contre les heresies, Livre I, Tome II*, Sources chrétiennes 264 (Paris, 1979), pp. 288–289. On the Marcosians and their founder, see: Niclas Förster, *Marcus Magus: Kult, Lehre und Gemeindeleben einer valentinianischen Gnostikergruppe* (Tübingen, 1999).

[65] E.g., see: al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān*, (eds.) A. M. Shākir and M. M. Shākir (Cairo, 1954), i, pp. 121–122 (no. 140) and n. 2 thereto; al-Thaʿlabī, *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*, (trans.) W. M. Brinner (Leiden, 2002), pp. 647–8; al-Kisāʾī, *The Tales of the Prophets*, trans. Wh. Thackston (Boston, 1978), pp. 332–333; Ibn Muṭarrif al-Ṭarafī, *The Stories of the Prophets*, (ed.) Roberto Tottoli, Islamkundliche Untersuchungen 258 (Berlin, 2003), pp. 170.ult-171 (Ar.), and see also the references cited by Tottoli in his annotation of al-Ṭarafī's text in *ibid.*, p. 99 (§445). Cf. also *UaK* 60 ff., where Muḥammad al-Bāqir explains the *basmala* to Jābir al-Juʿfī.

[66] Ibn Bābawayh, *Maʿānī al-akhbār*, (ed.) ʿA. A. al-Ghaffārī (Tehran, 1959), pp. 45–46; *idem*, *al-Tawḥīd*, (ed.) Hāshim al-Ḥusaynī al-Ṭihrānī (Tehran, 1967), p. 236; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* (Tehran, 1954), xiv, p. 286. Cf. M. Ayoub, "Towards an Islamic Christology: An Image of Jesus in Early Shīʿī Literature," *MW*, LXVI (1976), pp. 163–188.

[67] The namesake of the Zaydite sect known as the Jārūdīya, Abū l-Jārūd al-Hamdānī (d. *ca.* 150/767), was, in addition to a fervent supporter of Zayd b. ʿAlī's revolt, a close disciple of Muḥammad al-Bāqir, from whom he reputedly also transmitted a *tafsīr* (See: W. Madelung, "Abū Jārūd," *EIr*, i, p. 327; Modarressi, *Tradition*, i, p. 122). Kathīr b. ʿAyyāsh, who precedes him in the *isnād*, is the main transmitter of both his *tafsīr* and his notebook of *ḥadīth* (known as *al-Aṣl*); see: Modarressi, *Tradition*, i, pp. 122–123.

[*ālāʾ*] of God; the *bāʾ* the splendour [*bahja*] of God; the *jīm* the beauty [*jamāl*] of God; the *dāl* the religion [*dīn*] of God. Now, *hawwaz*:[68] the *hāʾ* is the terror [*hawl*] of God, the *wāw* the woe [*wayl*] of the inhabitants of hell, the *zāʾ* the moans [*zafīr*] of Gehenna. *Ḥuṭṭī*:[69] the sins of the penitent have been absolved [*ḥaṭṭat khaṭāyā al-mustaghfirīn*]. *Kalman*: the word [*kalām*] of God, there is no altering his words. *Saʿfaṣ*: measure for measure, and portion for portion [*ṣāʿun bi-ṣāʿin wa-l-jazāʾ bi-l-jazāʾ*]. *Qarshat*: the (souls') collecting and assembling [*qashruhum wa-ḥashruhum*]." The teacher said, "O woman, take the hand of your boy, for he has already attained learning and has no need of a teacher!"

The alphabet upon which the discourse of the child Jesus expounds here is clearly the old Semitic one, as indicated by the omission of Arabic additions *thakhudh* and *ḍaẓagh*.[70] This suggests a Syriac *Vorlage* rather than an Arabic intermediary.

While this episode appears also in the edition of the *Arabic Infancy Gospel*, published in 1697 by H. Sike on the basis of a MS now lost,[71] this Gospel is likely a production post-dating the early Islamic period. Moreover, other important MS of the *Ar. Inf.*, such as that preserved in the Medici Library in Florence, lack any mention of said episode—a fact that indicates that the passages parallel to the *Inf. Ps.-Th.* are most probably interpolations into an older version of the *Ar. Inf.*[72] In any case, the textual evidence of *UaK* indicates that the school anecdote uses as a template a text descending from an originally Syriac composition, much like the earliest stories found in the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* and *tafsīr*-literature—even if one postulates the existence of an intermediary Arabic translation pre-dating *UaK*'s composition.

Although the *Inf. Th.* exists in an early and important Syriac version,[73] the extant text closest in narrative structure and content to the school anecdote of *UaK* is to be found in one of the literary descendents of the *Inf. Th.*: the Syriac Nestorian composition *The History of Our Lady Mary the Blessed* (Syr., *Taš*ʿ*ītā d-mārty Maryam ṭūbnītā*;).[74] The assimilation of the

[68] i.e., the next three letters of the alphabet.

[69] As above, the following three letters of the alphabet: *ḥāʾ*, *ṭāʾ* and *yāʾ*.

[70] G. Weil and G. S. Colin, "Abdjad," *EI*², i, p. 96.

[71] H. Sike, *Evangelium Infantiae vel liber apocryphus de Infantia Salvatoris ex manuscripto edidit ac Latina versione et notis illustravit* (Ultrecht, 1697). All references to the *Ar. Inf.* below refer to the edition published in Thilo, *Codex Apocryphus Novi Testamenti* (Leipzig, 1832), i, pp. 63–158 (with the emendations of E. Rödiger)

[72] See the edition and study of Mario Provera, *Il vangelo arabo dell' infanzia* (Jerusalem, 1973). G. Graf, however, lists several more MSS, in both Arabic and Garshūnī, of which the latter, to my knowledge, remains unstudied; see: *Geschichte der chistlichen arabischen Literatur* (Vatican City, 1944–1953), i, pp. 226–227. Several other studies of the *Arab. Inf.* omit the school anecdote as well. Cf. K. H. S. Burmeister, "Fragments of an Arabic Version of Two Infancy Gospels", *Studia Orientalia Christiana Collectanea*, VII (1962), pp. 103–114; Sergio Noja, "L'Évangile arabe apocryphe de Thomas, de la 'Biblioteca Ambrosiana' de Milan (G 11 sup)," in *Biblische und Judistische Studien: Festschrift für Paolo Sacchi*, (ed.) A. Vivian (Paris, 1990), pp. 681–690; *idem*, "À propos du text arabe d'un évangile apocryphe de Thomas de la Ambrosiana de Milan", in *YAD-NAMA: Im memoria di Alessandro Bausani*, (eds.) B. S. Amoretti and L. Rostagno (Rome, 1991), i, pp. 335–341.

[73] William Wright, *Contributions to the Apocryphal Literature of the New Testament* (London, 1865), pp. 11–16 (Syr.), pp. 6–11 (Eng.). Wright based his edition on an important sixth-century MS (British Library, Add. 14484, foll. 12v-16r); however, another important, early MS (Göttingen, Universitätsbibliothek, Syr. 10), dated to the fifth or sixth century A.D., remained neglected for some time until the study of W. Baars and J. Helderman collated the manuscript with Wright's edition in their study, "Neue Materialien zum Text und zur Interpretation des Kindheitsevangelium des Psuedo-Thomas," *OrChr*, LXVII (1993), pp. 191–226 and LXVIII (1994), pp. 1–32.

[74] In this story, as in *UaK* 12–13, the Christ-child is sent by his family to school at age five to receive instruction in the alphabet, whereupon the lesson is interrupted by the teacher's failed attempt to teach Jesus the letters *alpā* and *bītā*; see: E. A. Wallis Budge, *The History of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the History of the Likeness of Christ* (London, 1899), i, p. 71 (Eng.) and ii, pp. 66–67 (Syr.). Cf. S. C. Mimouni, "Les Vies de la Vièrge; État de la question", *Apocrypha*, V (1994), pp. 239–246. A Jacobite Life of Mary also exists preserved in various, hitherto unedited manuscripts. See: A. Mignana, "The Vision of Theophilus, Or the Book of the Flight of the Holy Family

apocryphal narrative of the Christ child into a story about al-Bāqir is itself unexceptional, for the story had been assimilated in manifold permutations by *ʿulamāʾ* and belle-lettrists of sundry creeds. What distinguishes *UaK*, however, is the appropriation of the story for the propagation of its own version of Pentadist doctrine.

These textual forerunners and models, although significant and illuminating for our understanding of the underpinnings of the text of *UaK*, exerted in reality only a superficial influence over the contents of *UaK*, providing mostly form rather than doctrinal content. *UaK* remains a strikingly idiosyncratic text. Yet their influence upon *UaK* also conveys to us significant, albeit indirect, indications as to when and where the text came into existence. These elements are so intertwined within the text and the motifs they represent so developed that one is hard-pressed to find textual confirmation for Halm's suggested chronological scheme.

If one utilises the testimonies of al-Maqdisī, ʿAbd al-Jabbār, and al-Khaṣībī as an approximate *terminus post quem*, the likelihood that the school anecdote as we know it predates the fourth/tenth century diminishes significantly. It is highly implausible, in my estimation, that *UaK* predates the minor occultation (260–329/874–914), and it is quite probable the earliest stratum of *UaK* may indeed originate from this era. *UaK* exhibits both structural and doctrinal similarities with the so-called Mufaḍḍal-corpus, a body of 'extremist' Shīʿite materials purporting to contain the dialogues of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq and Mufaḍḍal b. ʿUmar al-Juʿfī, and *UaK* might, therefore, also belong to the period of the minor occultation from which most of this corpus seems to have flourished.[75] However, the 'final product', so to speak, that came to comprise the current *UaK* undoubtedly post-dates even this period. Madelung's more conservative dating of *UaK* to the sixth/twelfth century, therefore, offers a more appealing context for the composition of *UaK* as an integral text,[76] although one must concede to Halm at the same instant that *UaK* assimilates and draws upon diverse sets of documents and texts that indubitably served as the textual ancestors to our present text. Halm's and Tijdens's keen observations as to potential textual interpolations remain salient and thought-provoking; however, any attempt to maintain that *UaK* contains documents composed within the second/eighth century, salutary as Halm's efforts might have been, ought be abandoned. Still, just to what extent these earlier texts may be fully recovered requires further study, the scope of which lies beyond the constraints of this essay.[77]

in Egypt," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, XIII (1929), pp. 383–474 and S. C. Mimouni, *op. cit.*, p. 239 and n. 128 thereto.

[75] H. Halm, "'Das Buch der Schatten': Die Mufaḍḍal-Tradition der Ġulāt und die Ursprünge des Nuṣairitiertums (I)", *Der Islam*, LV (1978), pp. 219 ff.; L. Capezzone, "Il Kitāb al-Ṣirāṭ attributto a Mufaḍḍal Ibn ʿUmar al-Ğuʿfī: Edizione del ms. unico (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale Ar. 1449/3) e studio introduttivo", *RSO* LXIX (1995), pp. 295–416; Modarressi, *Tradition*, i, pp. 333–337; Friedman, *Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs*, pp. 241–247.

[76] *Oriens*, XXV/XXVI (1976), p. 555.

[77] To my own observations about the significance of the Ibn Saba' materials for dating *UaK*, one may now add the fascinating observations of Bernd Radtke. Radtke has demonstrated that there exists a profound overlap between the vocabulary utilised in the so-called Jābir-Apocalypse identified within *UaK* by Halm, especially the sections containing discourses on the macro- and micro-cosmos, and between the vocabulary utilised in the theosophical writings of the mystic al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. ca. 300/910). Ḥakīm's case is somewhat exceptional and, in Radtke's estimation at least, the possibility of cross-pollination between his writings and those of the *ghulāt* is slim. Although his "theosophy," as Radtke puts it, "had no immediate sequel" (Ṣūfīs of the generations immediately following him almost entirely neglected his thought), al-Ḥakīm's writing offers important evidence that many of the ideas present in Halm's earliest dated unit of *UaK*, the Jābir-Apocalypse, could have plausibly been originated

Annotated Translation of the School Anecdote

As for the translation below, some general comments are in order by way of introduction and explanation. The translation, as noted above, is only partial and is limited to the prolegomena of *UaK* and the school anecdote that follows directly thereafter. Numbers marked off in brackets correspond to the divisions found in Ivanow's edition of the text. In general, I have annotated my departures from Ivanow's text in the notes, but for the sake of clarity, a number of minor, global changes merit mention here. Most of these changes are merely cosmetic. Ivanow's conservative preservation of the clearly erroneous rendering of schoolmaster's name as ʿAbdallāh-i Ṣabbāḥ has been modified to its more correct version: ʿAbdallāh-i Sabaʾ. Although no manuscript attests to this reading, it is certainly the original one. Several manuscripts, as Ivanov makes note, contain the variant rendering ʿAbdallāh-i Ṣabā, a slightly more correct rendering of the name as originally intended.[78] Also, I have noted Halm's and Tijdens's designations of those passages which he asserted to be later interpolations by placing them between {braces}. As the text also departs from the Persian text to include Arabic phrases and sentences, all qurʾānic and non-qurʾānic passages written entirely in Arabic have been italicised to mark them off from the rest of the text.

Translation:

This book is called the Mother of the Book, which is the source of all books. All the knowledge [*ʿilm*] of this world [*dunyā*] is drawn from this book. This book is called the Mother of the Book [5] in this sense: whosoever reads this book so shall it be that he shall at once be in no need of further knowledge.

This book is called the Spirit of the Book [*rūḥ al-kitāb*], for it is the spirit and meaning of every book. The description of the divine countenance [*ṣifat-i bināʾī*] is also in this book.

This book is called the Light of the Book [*nūr al-kitāb*], because the light of the heavens and the earths are in this book.

This book is called the Seven Discourses [*sabʿ al-maqālāt*],[79] for it discloses the seven divine discourses [*haft maqālāt-i ilāhī*].

This book [6] is called the Seven Disputes [*sabʿ al-mujādalāt*], for the seven disputes of Adam and Iblīs are in this book.

This book is called Exalted of Ranks [*rafīʿ al-darajāt*],[80] for by this book are the ranks and sources of the believers and unbelievers and host of spirits known.

This book is called the Herald of Good Tidings [*bashīr al-mubashsharāt*], for by this book are the good news and tidings of the believers and salvation and deliverance found.

within al-Ḥakīm's lifetime or shortly thereafter, i.e. the late third/ninth century or slightly later. See: B. Radtke, "Iranian and Gnostic Elements in Early Taṣawwuf: Observations concerning the *Umm al-Kitāb*," in *Proceedings of the First European Conference of Iranian Studies, part 2: Middle and New Iranian Studies*, (eds.) G. Gnoli and A. Panaino (Rome, 1990), pp. 519–530.

[78] ʿAbdallāh-i Ṣabbāḥ is clearly an attempt to render ʿAbdallāh-i Saba' into a form resembling the name of the first Nizārī *dāʿī* of Alamūt, Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ. As Ivanow notes, "the form Ṣabbāḥ is merely one of the 'corrections' of the copyists" ("Ummu'l-kitāb," p. 7; cf. *idem*, "Notes," p. 428 and n. 2 thereto; van Ess in *Der Islam,* XLVI, 1970, p. 97; Tijdens, p. 279).

[79] In the text: *wāsiʿ al-maqālāt*; that *wāsiʿ* is a corruption of *sabʿ* as made clear by the following clause; cf. Halm, *Gnosis*, p. 369 n. 235.

[80] See: Q. 40:15.

{This book is called the Ten Discourses [*ʿashar al-maqālāt*], for by this book are the attributes of the ten (*sic.*) *dīvān*s and the quality of the ten spirits [7] known.}[81]

This book is called the Seven Epiphanies [*sabʿ al-ẓuhūrāt*], for by it are the seven corporal and spiritual cycles, in essence and actuality, known.

This book is called the Book of Recompenses [*kitāb al-mujāzāt*], for in this book are spoken the recompenses and rewards of the unbelievers and believers of micro- and macro-cosmos [*ʿālam-i kūchek va ʿālam-i bozorg*].

This book is called the Book of Mother-Books [*kitāb al-ummuhāt*], for the origin and source of the Torah, the Gospel, the Psalms, the Furqān (viz., the Qurʾān), and every book in this [8] world are all in this book.

This book was dictated [*gofta*] in the city of Mecca, in the quarter of the Quraysh and the Banū Hāshim in the house of ʿAbd al-Manāf,[82] and was in the archive [*khizāna*] of Bāqir—peace be upon him. Jaʿfar-i Juʿfī[83] removed it and brought it to Kūfa until, in the time of Hārūn (al-Rashīd), ʿAlī b. ʿAbd al-ʿAẓīm[84] brought it to al-ʿIrāq. At the time of his own death, he handed it over to the believers and those he sent [*muʾminān va-mursalān*] charging them to take due diligence and take precautions that the believers, the confessors of God's unity, and [9] the leaders not to give this book to any insolent person [*muʿtariż*] and not to dictate it to any creature, for not all believers penetrate the knowledge of the religion of illumination.[85] This is that knowledge that is beyond our understanding and imagining. Only a believer confessing the oneness of God, a prophet sent (by God), or an archangel [*fereshta-ye muqarrab*] could accept that their heart be the vessel of the light of divine oneness.

[81] Although corrupt, this passage does not in fact seem to have been an interpolation. *UaK* in actuality only mentions *seven*, not ten, *dīvān*s, but it does speak of 10 discourses late into the 'Jābir-Apocalypse' (*UaK* 247); cf. Halm, *Gnosis*, p. 369 and n. 237 thereto.

[82] In the text: *dar maḥalla-ye quraysh va ibn-i hāshim dar khāna-ye ʿAbd al-Manāf*.

[83] Ṭūsī lists a certain Jaʿfar b. Ibrāhīm al-Juʿfī as a companion of Muḥammad al-Bāqir (*Rijāl*, p. 129.-4), with whom van Ess and Halm attempt to identify with the person named here in the text (cf. Halm, *Gnosis*, p. 369 n. 239 and van Ess in *Der Islam*, XLVI, 1970, p. 96). However, Ṭūsī's text might have also been corrupted; one should perhaps read the *nisba* as al-Jaʿfarī rather than al-Juʿfī. Jaʿfar b. Ibrāhīm al-Jaʿfarī—called 'al-Jaʿfarī' because he was a descendent of ʿAlī's revered brother, Jaʿfar b. Abī Ṭālib—was the companion of three *imām*s: ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn, Muḥammad al-Bāqir (if the emendation to Ṭūsī's text is accepted), and Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (see: Ṭūsī, *Rijāl*, 111.7, 175.4). It seems, though, that it is only from ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn that one finds a significant body of reports transmitted on his authority; cf. Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Lisān al-mīzān* (Beirut, 1987), ii, p. 135 and Majlisī, *Biḥār*, lxxii, p. 40 and lxxiii, p. 287. Hence, the text of *UaK* might have read 'Jaʿfar al-Jaʿfarī', but with the *nisba* corrupted to read 'al-Juʿfī' due to a later copyist's attempt to 'correct' the text so as to resemble the *nisba* of the most prominent companion of al-Bāqir in *UaK*, Jābir al-Juʿfī. On the other hand, it is also possible that the text jumps chronologically here to refer to the actions of Abū al-Muṭṭalib Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad b. al- Mufaḍḍal al-Juʿfī, a grandson of Mufaḍḍal b. ʿUmar al-Juʿfī (fl. late second/eighth century) and a scholar to whom is attributed a book titled *Kitāb ādāb al-dīn*. For example, see: al-Ḥasan b. Shuʿba al-Ḥarrānī, *Ḥaqāʾiq asrār al-dīn,* in *Majmūʿat al-Ḥarrāniyyīn*, vol. 1, Silsilat al-Turāth al-ʿAlawī 4 (Beirut, 2006), pp. 117.9, 136.1, 142.1. The chronology is somewhat problematic but not impossible. This latter identification would place the provenance *UaK* squarely in proto-Nuṣayrī circles. I owe this latter observation to Mushegh Asatryan of Yale University.

[84] Unknown. Ivanow speculates that he may be the son of the Ḥasanid ʿAbd al-ʿAẓīm b. ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAlī, a revered Shīʿī ascetic buried in Rayy for whom the Būyid vizier of the city, al-Ṣāḥib Ibn ʿAbbād, wrote an epistle in praise of his virtues. However, as a companion of the *imām*s Muḥammad al-Jawād (203–20/818–35) and ʿAlī al-Hādī (220–54/835–68), no son of his could have possibly been a contemporary of Hārūn al-Rashīd. Cf. W. Madelung, "ʿAbd al-ʿAẓīm al-Ḥasanī," *EIr*, i, pp. 96–97. Halm's attempt to identify this ʿAlī b. ʿAbd al-ʿAẓīm with the third/ninth-century compiler of *UaK* is a bit more inspired (*Gnosis*, p. 123), but is even more speculative and just as unconvincing.

[85] Reading with Ivanow's text: *na-hama-ye muʾminān ʿilm be-dīn-i rowshānī bar-tābad* and rejecting Halm's emendation of *na-hama* to *be-hama* (see: *Gnosis*, p. 369 n. 243).

No other believer could bear this knowledge of the world of secrets without shortening his lifespan or accepting the diminishment of life.[86]

[10] By this book the nature of the oneness of the Creator—may he be exalted—is known, as well as the realities of the creative power of God [*ṣanʿ-i ḥaqq*]: the towering curtain, the believers' veil, the depiction of the throne and footstool, the tablet, the pen, and the veils of the spirits of the believers, the unbelievers, the insolent [*muʿtariżān*], the unqualifiable and ineffable [*bīchūnī va bīchegūnī*], the existent and non-existent, and the recognition of the Exalted King[87]—may his glory be exalted!

By this book are the five angels alongside the seven divine and human cycles [11] made known. The seven disputes of Iblīs and Adam and the total creation of that which enters and does not enter into the understanding, imagining and ponderings of the heart—everything is presented in this book from the teachings [*maqālāt*] of Bāqir—his peace be upon us!—that "*He who revealed to you the Book; in it are verses made clear, these are the Mother of the Book* [*umm al-kitāb*]*, and other ambiguous verses*" (Q. 3:7).

This book Bāqir named Umm al-Kitāb, and it was the Umm al-Kitāb of the Discloser of Knowledge [*bāqir al-ʿilm*]—his peace be upon us! [12] At the time and place that Bāqir was born from his mother and came into being, he spoke to his mother, the Mother of Believers, Āmina[88] thus, "*Verses made clear they are the Umm al-Kitāb*" (Q. 3:7).

Then Imām al-Bāqir was sent to school [*kuttāb*]. To him was revealed divine glory[89] and divinely inspired wisdom and knowledge[90] unknown to any schoolmaster. Jābir b. ʿAbdallāh al-Anṣārī narrated that at this time the Discloser of Knowledge [*bāqir al-ʿilm*] was still yet a five-year-old child when he was sent to the school of ʿAbdallāh-i Sabaʾ. As [13] is the custom of schoolmasters, he wrote the twenty-nine[91] letters of the alphabet on his tablet—a tablet of pure silver[92]—and placed it in the hands of Bāqir al-ʿIlm. "Say *alif*", he commanded. Bāqir al-ʿIlm said, "*Alif*". "Say *bey*", ʿAbdallāh said. Bāqir said, "I won't until you say the meaning of *alif*!" "O delight of the eyes of believers! *Say alif, O Bāqir!" Then he said, "Alif is God* [*Allāh*]*; there is no god but he, the living, the enduring".*

[86] This appears to allude to the well-known Imāmī tradition (which has many iterations), "Our (i.e., the *imām*s') teaching [*ḥadīthunā*] is difficult [*ṣaʿb*], even arduous [*mustaṣʿab*]. None can bear it except a prophet sent by God [*nabī mursal*], an archangel [*malak muqarrab*], or a servant whose heart God has tested for faith [*ʿabdun imtaḥana llāhu qalbahu li-l-īmān*]". See: Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, (ed.) M. Kūchabāghī (Tehran, 1983), pp. 20 ff. and Kulaynī, *Kāfī*, ii, pp. 253 ff. On its role in the Imāmī tradition, see: A. Amir-Moezzi, "Seul l'homme de Dieu est humain: Théologie et anthropologie mystique à travers l'exégèse imamite ancienne (aspects de l'imamologie duodécimaine iv)," *Arabica*, XLV (1998), p. 250.

[87] Prs. *mālik-i taʿālā*; the most common designation for God throughout *UaK*.

[88] Āmina is, of course, the name of the Prophet Muḥammad's mother who, according to the Islamic tradition, died soon after his birth. Muḥammad al-Bāqir's real mother was named not Āmina, but rather Fāṭima Umm ʿAbdallāh, and was a daughter of al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī (making al-Bāqir the direct descendent of both al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī).

[89] In the text: *farā īzadī*. There is also an unlikely variant reading: divine statutes (*farāʾiż īzadī*); see: Ivanow, "Ummu'l-kitāb," p. 180.

[90] Prs., *ḥikmat-o ʿilm-i taʾyīdī*; an allusion to the divine knowledge granted to the qurʾānic Jesus (see: Q. 2:87 and 257).

[91] Cf. Tijdens, p. 279. The Arabic alphabet contains 28 letters in total, 29 if one counts the ligature *lām-alif*.

[92] *Ibid*. A similar tablet often appears in the literature of other Shīʿīs as well. According Imāmī-Shīʿī accounts, Jābir al-Anṣārī allegedly saw in Fāṭima's house a tablet including the names of the Twelve Imāms (Kohlberg, "An Unusual Shīʿī *Isnād*", p. 144 n. 10).

He said: "O ʿAbdallāh, *alif* is the Lord [*khodāvand*]. The *lām* above that (*alif*) is Muḥammad.[93] The meaning of *alif* is the spirit of Muḥammad. *Alif* is three letters and one [14] diacritic:[94] the *alif*, *lām*, *fāʾ*, and the diacritic of the *alif* are Muḥammad. The *lām* is ʿAlī, and the *fāʾ* is Fāṭima. *Nūn*[95] is Ḥasan and Ḥusayn; for a *nūn* is at the end of Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, and at the end of *alif* is a diacritic [*nuqṭa*]".[96]

ʿAbdallāh was in awe and said: "O Light to the believers' eyes! What a wondrous thing, this uncreated book you speak of in describing the properties of *alif*!"

Bāqir said: "Such has been this book of ours, the Family of the Prophet [*ahl-i bayt*], in all ages and times. {O ʿAbdallāh, *alif* is the throne of God [*īzad*] Most High, [15] and his Name is the speaking spirit of life [*rūḥ al-ḥayāt-i nāṭiqa*] present in the mind of the believers [*bar maghz-i muʾminān*]. The *lām* is the spirit of illumination [*rūḥ-i rowshanī*]. The *fāʾ* is the spirit of dominion [*rūḥ al-jabarūt*]. The *nūn* is the spirit of thought [*rūḥ al-fikr*]. A spirit above the letter *alif* in his form[97] is the veil of ʿAlī. *Alif* is the spirit of ʿAlī; *lām* is two resplendent pearls; *fāʾ* is the thought of the spirit of revelation of ʿAlī [*fikr-i rūh al-waḥī-ye ʿAlī*]; and the diacritic [*nuqṭa*] is the speech [*nuṭq*] of ʿAlī, with the luminescence [*nūrāniyyat*] that is behind the three letters}.[98]

Then ʿAbdallāh-i Sabaʾ, still amazed, said: "*O son of the Messenger of God, by God, by God* [16] *the mighty and exalted!* It is divine providence [*hidāyat*] that I, in this way, would ever hear such knowledge from any master [*az hīch khodāvandī*]! How amazing it is that they sent you to my school not having sat in any other school, read any book, or seen any man of letters [*adīb*]! Oh fruit of the believers' hearts, what is the meaning of such a state (that I am in), for it is impermissible that a person teach men knowledge of which he himself has need. I would like not to teach you *alif* so that now I might learn from you. O eyes of Muḥammad and ʿAlī, perfect your grace and let *bāʾ* and *tāʾ* [17] be read so that your father and mother might find mercy.

Bāqir said: "O teacher [*adībī*], the *bāʾ* is the door to the *alif*: *alif* is Muḥammad, *bāʾ* is ʿAlī, and the diacritic [*nuqṭa*] of *bāʾ* is the speech [*nuṭq*] of ʿAlī. {The *alif* is the spirit of illumination, the *bāʾ* the spirit of the life of the mind, and the diacritic is speech}.[99]

"O my teacher, tell me: of these letters which letter is the first?"

ʿAbdallāh said, "*Alif* is".

"According to which proof?" Bāqir asked.

ʿAbdallāh said, "O two eyes of the believers! Other than this, I know not as of yet!

[93] In the text: *alif khodāvand ast va-lām bālā-ye ān muḥammad ast*. The pericope is without an obvious interpretation since what exactly is meant by the "*lām* above the *alif*" is not entirely clear. Halm (see: *Gnosis*, 379 n. 253) suggests tentatively that the *hamza* «ء» is intended; cf. Tijdens, p. 280.

[94] In the Arabic script, the name of the letter « ا » is written using three letters as «ألف»; the diacritic dot (Ar. *nuqṭa*) referred to here appears above the final letter *fāʾ* «ف».

[95] The *nūn* comes from the initial letter in word for diacritic, *nuqṭa*.

[96] Perhaps this passage represents a fusion of pentadist belief with the identification of God with letters of the alphabet ascribed to the Mughīrīya See: S. Wasserstrom, "The Moving Finger Writes: Mughīra b. Saʿīd's Islamic Gnosis and the Myth of Its Rejection", *History of Religions*, XXV (1985), pp. 15 ff.

[97] Reading with Halm (*Gnosis*, p. 129) "*peykar-i vey*", rather than "*be-yak rūy,*" as in the text.

[98] Tijdens (pp. 279–280) regards this passage as a later interpolation of a copyist, pointing to the tautological nature of its re-explanation of the significance of *alif*.

[99] Again, an expansion on the meaning of *alif* that may be a later interpolation; see: Tijdens, pp. 285 ff.

Bāqir said: "O ʿAbdallāh, all these masters of learning [18] held school in ignorance and while not knowing what is first, *alif* or *bāʾ*! The first of these letters is *bāʾ*, then *alif*; *bāʾ* is ʿAlī, and *alif* is Muḥammad. Only outwardly [*be-ẓāhir*] is Muḥammad the precursor [*pīshrow*]. ʿAlī is the door [*bāb*] of Muḥammad. (Only) through the door [*dar*] can one enter the palace, and (only) through ʿAlī can one approach Muḥammad. Muḥammad and ʿAlī are one, and *alif* and *bāʾ* are one.[100] The diacritic [*nuṭqa*] of *alif*, which is concealed,[101] is the speech [*nuṭq*] of Muḥammad, which is concealed. The diacritic of *bāʾ* «ب», which is manifest, is the speech of ʿAlī, which [19] is manifest by the gnosis [*ʿilm*] of light. Those infidels from the hive of Ahrīman [*īn kāfirān az kandū-ye ahrīman*][102] know the *sharīʿa* of Muḥammad and practice it but have no awareness [*khabar*] of the *sharīʿa* of ʿAlī or that Muḥammad is this life [*dunyā*] and ʿAlī the next [*ākhirat*]. *An affirmation of His word, may He be glorified: 'They know of the outward appearance of the life of the world, but of the End they are heedless'* (Q. 30:7). O ʿAbdallāh, first among these letters is the diacritic or *bāʾ*?"

ʿAbdallāh answered, "O two eyes of Muḥammad, I do not know the meaning of this unless I hear it from you!"

Bāqir said, "The first of these letters [20] is the diacritic, and this diacritic is the speech of the believers that is enunciated by speech [*nuṭq-i muʾminān ke be-nuṭq bar khʷānda ast*].[103] *Bāʾ* is the spirit between the two eyebrows and *alif* the physical form [*kālbod*]. First is the diacritic, then *bāʾ* before *alif*. O ʿAbdallāh, you are my teacher, is *alif* greater or *jamal* (sic.) «ج».[104]

ʿAbdallāh said, "I know not whether *alif* or *jamal*[105] unless I hear it from you!"

Bāqir said, "*Alif* is the spirit of luminescence from which comes the amity and fraternity of the believers. *Jamal*[106] is the spirit that in the spiritual realm is the speaking soul [*nafs-i nātiqa*].[107]

[100] This passage seems to provide evidence that the ostensible differences between the Mukhammisa and the ʿAlyāʾiyya—i.e., according priority to either Muḥammad or ʿAlī—may in fact amount to a misleading distinction between what must have certainly amounted to two mutually intelligible discourses.

[101] Viz., the diacritic of the letter *alif* « ا » only becomes apparent when it appears over the *fāʾ* «ف» when its name is written out fully as *alif* «ألف».

[102] Ahrīman, the traditional name of God's adversary in the Zoroastrian religion (cf. J. Duchesne-Guillemin, "Ahriman," *EIr*, i, pp. 670 ff.), should be understood here as referring to the devil insofar as *UaK* speaks of the devil as Ahrīman a total of six times (see: Tijdens, p. 292). Bausani suggest reading *kandū* as *Kondav* and, thus, as a variant of Konī-Dēv, the sinister general of Ahrīman in Manichaen myth (see: *Religion in Iran*, pp. 151–152).

[103] A somewhat obscure passage that has been translated differently: "... il *logos* dei Credenti, poiché mediante il *logos* si profferisce [discorso]" (Filippani-Ronconi, p. 9); "... das Wort der Frommen, das durch das Wort hervorgerufen wurde" (Tijdens, p. 292); "... das Reden der Gläubigen, denn durch das Reden hat er verkündigt" (Halm, *Gnosis*, p. 130).

[104] In the text, the Persian reads: "*alif bozorgtar ast yā oshtor?*"—lit. "Is *alif* bigger or a camel?" Here, *oshtor*, or camel, clearly arose from a misguided attempt at the translation of *jamal*, which in Arabic means 'camel', but which in other Semitic languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac, etc.) is also the name for the equivalents of the Arabic letter *jīm* «ج». In Syriac, the corresponding letter is *gamal* «ܓ». Aside from the structural similarities discussed above, this passage provides the strongest evidence of a Syriac *Vorlage* for the Bāqir story. This passage, as noted by van Ess (*Der Islam*, XLVI, 1970, p. 96), also provides the strongest textual evidence that *UaK* was originally an Arabic composition later translated into Persian. *Pace* Ivanow, *Guide*, p. 193.

[105] Prs., *oshtor.*

[106] Prs., *oshtor.*

[107] The third/ninth-century Arabic translation of the so-called *Theology of Aristotle* also employs the term *al-nafs al-nāṭiqa* as a translation of λοιζομένην φυχήν of Plotinus, *Enneads*, IV 7, 8^5, 17; cf. Radtke, "Iranian and Gnostic Elements", p. 525.

ʿAbdallāh said, [21] "Oh fruit of the believers' hearts! It is as it has been spoken. *Alif* is greater. If *alif* is so much, then should one extend it?"[108]

Bāqir said, "*Alif* is the spirit in the intellect that one calls the spirit of faith [*rūḥ al-īmān*] and that is above the speaking spirit of life [*rūḥ al-ḥayāt-i nātiqa*], which examines eight other spirits that are caused to stand above it and are encompassed by the spirit of faith from the Earth to the Heavens. One is the spirit of memory [*rūḥ al-ḥifẓ*]—the Tablet Preserved of the Most High King that is shrouded by the spirit of faith. [22] One is the spirit of thought [*rūḥ al-fikr*], which is the Pen of this Tablet that is shrouded by the spirit of memory. One is the spirit of dominion [*rūḥ al-jabarūt*] that is shrouded by the spirit of thought. One is the spirit of gnosis [*rūḥ al-ʿilm*] that is shrouded by the spirit of dominion. One is the spirit of intellect [*rūḥ al-ʿaql*] that is shrouded by the spirit of gnosis. One is the spirit of holiness [*rūḥ al-quds*] that is shrouded by the spirit of intellect. One is the spirit of the one greater [*rūḥ al-akbar*], which is the universal spirit [*rūḥ-i kull*] that is shrouded by the spirit of holiness. One is the spirit of the greatest [*rūḥ al-aʿẓam*] that is shrouded by the greater spirit. [23] O ʿAbdallāh!—All are shrouded by all. In this way, *alif* is greater".

Then ʿAbdallāh stood on his feet and prayed, saying, "I bear witness![109] Glory, glory! Holy, holy! Muḥamamd and ʿAlī! Truly, truly! Muḥammad al-Muṣṭafā and his Walī! al-Salsal!"[110]

Then Bāqir al-ʿIlm said, "*Alif* is a corporeal form [*shakhṣ*] and *jamal*[111] a spirit. *Shakhṣ* «شخص» consists of three letters and four diacritics; altogether they are seven. These seven spirits stand above the *nāṭiqa* out of the seven [24] divine cycles like a rainbow. These, however, can approach the partition of *nāṭiqa*—just as the *bāʾ* stands over the diacritic. O ʿAbdallāh!—Is the diacritic greater/bigger [*borzorgtar*] or the *alif*?"

ʿAbdallāh said, "O light of the eyes of Muḥammad and ʿAlī!—Will you say that the diacritic is greater/bigger?!"

"Yes," Bāqir said, "seven heavens and earths are contained in this diacritic!"

"O fruit of the believers' hearts", said ʿAbdallāh, "expound upon this explanation!"

"O ʿAbdallāh," Bāqir continued, "by the realities of the Reality, the diacritic of *bāʾ* is the *dīvān* of the expanse of eternity [*dīvān-i ghāyat al-azalī*].[112] Thus, you say [25] that the word *nuqṭa* «نقطة» is composed of five diacritics [*panj nuqṭa*]. The word *nuqṭa* consists of three consonants and five diactrics. The five are the Chosen of the Chosen [*khāṣṣ al-khāṣṣ*] of the Exalted King: Muḥammad, ʿAlī, Fāṭima, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. The three consonants are the three *dīvān*s of Salmān, Miqdād, and Abū Dharr.[113] The *nūn* «نون» of the word *nuqṭa* consist of three letters, the *qāf* «قاف» is three letters, *ṭāʾ* «طاء» two letters;[114] they total eight altogether. Eight are the angels with seven colours, the eighth of whom is the Exalted King—his glory be exalted! {These five diacritics[115] are the hearing and sight of the Exalted King and his

[108] In the text, "*ke agar alif rā chandān ke be-kashī be-shayād kashīdan*"; the passage may be corrupt. Cf. Filippani-Ronconi, p. 10 and Tijdens, p. 103.

[109] In the text: *sajda*; the text should probably read instead, "*ashhadu*" (see: Tijdens, pp. 300f).

[110] Al-Salsal is to be identified with Salmān al-Fārisī. Tijdens's translation also adds Abū l-Khaṭṭāb to the litany of names invoked (*op. cit.*, p. 303); however, it does not appear in Ivanow's text or his list of textual variants (cf. Ivanow, "Ummu'l-kitāb," p. 108).

[111] Prs., *oshtor*.

[112] Viz., the highest heaven of the divine *dīvān*s; cf. *UaK* 96–119 and Halm, *Gnosis*, pp. 149 ff.

[113] Prs., Bā Dharr; cf. *UaK* 131–3.

[114] Properly speaking, the letter *ṭāʾ* actually consists of *three*, not two, letters: *ṭāʾ* «ط», *alif* «ا», and *hamza* «ء».

[115] Halm's translation reads "Diese sieben [*sic.*] Punkte . . . " (*Gnosis*, p. 131).

gaze—his glory be exalted!}[26] O ʿAbdallāh, if I were to explain these diacritics completely, this would go beyond all boundaries and measures. This diacritic conceals seven and twelve *dīvān*s!"

ʿAbdallāh said, "O Lord of myself and all believers! How are these seven and twelve contained in one diacritic?!"

Bāqir said, "*Nuqṭa* consists of three consonants: *nūn* (has the numerical value of) 50 and 5, *qāf* is 100 and 10, and *tāʾ* is 400 and 4.[116] Altogether, they are 19, as well as 7 and 12. This is the seven and twelve that illuminate and fill the two worlds with light. [27] And we (the *imām*s?) are twelve from spiritual loins of the Commander of the Faithful ʿAlī [*az posht-i rūḥānī-ye amīr al-muʾminīn ʿAlī*] and the womb of Fāṭima—their peace be upon us!—and seven are the angels whom we are never without, whether in divinity or humanity.[117] They are with us '*as long as the Heaven and the Earth remain*' (Q. 11:109), for '*indeed, in the Heavens and Earth are signs to those who believe*' (Q. 45:3)."

ʿAbdallāh said, "O my Lord, a word from your lips and sweet-spoken mouth is like salve to the soul! Your face is a glimpse into eternal paradise! [28] O fruit of the believers' hearts, the two worlds of which you speak, which of them is the luminescent one [*rowshan ast*]?"

Bāqir said, "One is the macro-cosmos [*ʿālam-i bozorg*], which has been mentioned, and the other is the micro-cosmos [*ʿālam-i kūchek*], which is the throne and footstool of the Most High King—the form and vessel [*shakhṣ-o haykal*] of the *imām*s of the age and the divine masters [*ʿālimān-i rabbānī*]. The word *nuqṭa* consists of three lights that are also related: *nūn* is the spirit of faith above the spirit [*rūḥ*], and the spirit of the *qāf* is above the speech [*nuṭq*] and the diacritic of the *tāʾ*.[118] These five diacritics are the very same five Chosen: the spirit [29] of hearing [*rūḥ-i shenvāʾī*] is Ḥasan, the spirit of sight [*rūḥ-i bīnāʾī*] is Ḥusayn, the spirit of smell [*rūḥ-i būyāʾī*] is Fāṭima, the spirit of speech [*rūḥ-i gūyāʾī*] is ʿAlī, the spirit of taste [*rūḥ-i chāshen-gīr*] is Muḥammad. The three letters and five diacritics are eight lights. The middle letter is the spirit behind the forehead [*rūḥ bar maghz-i pīshānī*]—meaning the Most High King. To his right are four letters: the right eye, the right ear, and right nostril and the speech of the brilliant knowledge [*nuṭq-i ʿilm-i nūr*], who are Salmān, Miqdād, Abū Dharr, and ʿAmmār. And to the left are three letters: the left eye, the left ear, and the left nostril, who are Abū Hurayra, Abū Jundab, and Abū Kumayl. [30] This spirit coloured by the moon sits in the midst of seven lights above the throne and the footstool. Such is the word of the Most High, '*To God belongs dominion over the Heavens and the Earth, the one who forgives whomever he wills and chastises whomever he wills, but God is forgiving and merciful*' (Q. 48.14). O ʿAbdallāh, the Lord—may he be glorified—is the spirit that holds dominion over Heaven and Earth, meaning the light, which is on the throne and footstool in his service and which is

[116] As noted by Halm (*Gnosis*, p. 370 n. 260), the *ṭāʾ*, which has a value of 9, has been dropped and replaced with the *tāʾ*—by which the *tāʾ marbūṭa* « ة » (lit., tied *tāʾ*) occurring at the end of the word *nuqṭa* « نقطة » is meant—in order to make the equation work.

[117] This passage, as noted first by Ivanow ("Notes", p. 423 n. 3), seemingly must originate after the advent of the minor occultation in 260/874. It is odd, however, insofar as it speaks of twelve "from the loins of ʿAlī" rather than Muḥammad, since it should read eleven if ʿAlī is counted as the first *imām*. Should this be interpreted esoterically (i.e., ʿAlī is Muḥammad, Muḥammad is ʿAlī, etc.), be attributed to an authorial error, or something else? The Jābir-Apocalypse also speaks of "the twelve lights of the house of the Prophet [*davāzdah nūr-i ahl-i bayt*]" (*UaK* 71), a passage which both Tijdens (*op. cit.*, p. 313) and Halm (*Gnosis*, p. 142) dismiss, without much discussion, as a later interpolation.

[118] Viz., the *tāʾ marbūṭa*; see note above.

in the heart, forgiving some and not forgiving others [31] who are cast into eternal torment [*ʿadhāb*]. The twelve are the twelve limbs each entrusted with a task, and the seven are the messengers of the Exalted King whose light shall never depart from the temple [*haykal*] of the believers. The speaking, discerning spirit of life [*rūḥ al-ḥayāt-i nāṭiqa-ye mumtaḥin*] from the azure firmament [*qubba-ye lājvardī*] is shrouded in the minds of the believers. From the mind a border joins to the heart and another joins to the two lips and tongues. It speaks all languages found in the world [*har āvāzī ke dar dunyā'st dārad*]. One is the spirit of faith in the oneness of God [*rūḥ al-īmān-i muwaḥḥed*], which brings friendship and amity to the [32] spirit of the hearts of the believers and the lovers of the light [*muḥibbān-i rowshānī*] and aids the brothers of the believers—shrouded by the moonlit veil in the speaking spirit of life [*rūḥ al-ḥayāt-i nāṭiqa*]. One is the spirit of preservation [*rūḥ al-ḥifẓ*], the Preserved Tablet [*lawḥ-i maḥfūẓ*] of the Exalted King in the micro-cosmos [*ʿālam-i kūchek*], which is the steward of the wisdom of the kingdom of God [*ʿilmhā-ye malkūtī*]—shrouded by the sunlit sea in the spirit of faith, which is the assurance [*amīn*] of the Exalted King. One is the spirit of thought [*rūḥ al-fikr*], the pen of the tablet that ponders the Highest Kingdom [*malkūt al-aʿlā*], the unproclaimed [33] and the unheard wisdom that [*ʿilmhā az nā-khʷānda va nā-shanīda*] hangs from the veil of the Exalted King and is shrouded by the violet *dīvān* in the spirit of preservation. One is the spirit of knowledge [*rūḥ al-ʿilm*], which is the breath of Jesus that gives life to the dead—shrouded by a veil of carnelian red [*ʿaqīq-rang*] in the spirit of thought. One is the spirit of the intellect [*rūḥ al-ʿaql*], which is the judge of the Exalted King—shrouded by the *dīvān* coloured by fire in the spirit of knowledge. One is the spirit of holiness [*rūḥ al-quds*],[119] the visible form of God [*ke muʿāyana-ye shakhṣ-i khodāvand ast*] that is beyond understanding and imagining, beyond naming and designation, and beyond intimation [*ke az fahm va wahm va ism va nām va neshān bīrūn ast*]—made manifest by the ruby *dīvān* [34] in the spirit of the intellect and never encased in or brought to the micro-cosmos in the form of flesh and blood [*dar qālib-khūnīn va gūchdīn*]. Thus is the word of the Most High: '*Its meat and blood do not reach God, rather your piety reaches him*' (Q. 22:38). These seven spirits are bound to one another like a rainbow above the minds of the believers and godly instructors. As the rainbow rests on the highest point of the earth in the macro-cosmos, these spirits rest veil upon veil above the mind, which is the surface [35] of the plateaux of the Day of Resurrection and Judgment [*ke zamīn-i ʿaraṣāt-i qiyāmat ast*]. Each light exists in the jugular vein, and in this cycle are two spirits. One is from the station of the insolent [*manzilat-i muʿtarizān*] found in the right half of the heart in the 'chamber of wind' [*khāna-ye bād*]; the other is from the station of the believers who are in an aerial and heavenly form [*dar qālib-i havāʾī va samāʾī*], and this is also in the chamber of pure waters. Both of these spirits are bound to these with the religion of light and luminescence through the vein with seven branches. They fear God and seek his face. [36] And on this mountain—whose name is 'heat [*del*]'—they seek eternal salvation, testifying to his word, '*If we would have sent down this Qur'ān on top of a mountain, then you would have seen it humbled and rent asunder by the fear of God. We impress these similitudes upon humankind that they might ponder*' (Q. 59:21). These seven spirits in whose hands is all creation and each heptad [*har haftī*] in the heavens and the earth in divine and human sphere [*dar ilāhīyat va basharīyat*] are a demonstration and proof

[119] Or, "the Holy Spirit": see note above.

of them. The sign [*āyat*] of this is that God Most High said to al-Muṣṭafā (i.e., Muḥammad) in excellent speech, '*Verily we created humankind from an extract of clay; then we made it sperm firmly affixed; then we made it a clot of blood and made the clot a lump, and made the lump bones. Thus we clothed the bones with flesh and formed it into another creation*' (Q. 23:12–14)."

[38] Then ʿAbdallāh-i Saba' kissed the head and face of Bāqir al-ʿIlm and sprung up on his feet. He prayed and praised, saying, "Glory and holiness! Holiness and glory! Muḥammad and ʿAlī! Truly, truly! Muḥammad and ʿAlī, with his blessings [*ālā'*] and graces [*nuʿamā'*]! Take heed believers and Muslims! O merciful and forgiving God! I testify that you are the Lord of all believers and the Creator of the heavens and the earth! O Lord and Creator! Glory! Holiness!" Thus he spoke [39] and collapsed on the ground.

When his senses returned, he no longer saw Muḥammad al-Bāqir; rather, he saw Muḥammad the Chosen [*al-muṣṭafā*], whose face shone with light like lightning and with two tresses of light in front. And he would say, "*I am 'Glory to God'* [*anā subḥāna'llāh*]"—meaning, "I am the pure and sanctified Lord [*manam khodavānd-i pāk va pākīze*] and transcend all attributes and description". ʿAbdallāh, who saw this, collapsed onto the ground.

When he returned to himself again, he saw the Commander of the Faithful ʿAlī, who said, "*I am 'Praise be to God'* [*anā l-ḥamdu lillāh*]"—meaning, "I am the Lord whom the heavens and the earth extol and praise and [40] '*there is nothing which does not declare his glory*' (Q. 17:44). ʿAbdallāh again collapsed on the ground.

When he lifted his head he no longer saw ʿAlī but saw Fāṭima, who had a green veil pulled over her head and was wrapped in cloth "*of fine silk and shining brocade*" (Q. 18:31),[120] from which a million rays of light shone. And she was saying, "*There is no god save the God I am* [*lā ilāha illā anā'llāh*]"—meaning, "Besides me there is no Lord in any place whether in the divine or human realm or in the heavens or on the earth. There is no god but I, Fāṭima the Creater [*al-fāṭir*].[121] I am the Creator of the spirits of the believers. [41] '*I am Creator and Author to whom belongs the beautiful names*' (Q. 59:24)." ʿAbdallāh once again became prostrate.

When his senses returned, he no longer saw Fāṭima but saw Ḥasan-i ʿAlī from whom there emitted flashing and resplendent light like a moon of the fortieth night. He was saying, "*I am 'God is great'* [*anā'llāhu akbar*]"—meaning, "I am the Lord who is greater than the heavens and the earth and the elder [*mehtar*]. *'I am God; there is no god but he to whom belongs the beautiful names'* (Q. 39:24)."

After ʿAbdallāh returned to his senses again, he no longer saw Ḥasan but saw Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī, from whose lips and teeth shone the Moon and Jupiter [42] and a Sun from his visage overtook the Sun of the Macro-cosmos. For fear that ʿAbdallāh would be burned [*be-sūkhtī*], he said, "*There is neither power nor strength save with God, the High and Mighty*"—meaning, There is no god beyond me [*az man bīrūn khodavānd nīst*]. I am the chastiser of unbelievers and the saviours the believers. I am Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī; I am Ḥasan b.ʿAlī; I am Fāṭima the Resplendent [*zahrā'*]; ʿAlī the Exalted [*al-aʿlā*]; and I am Muḥammad the Chosen".

Again ʿAbdallāh collapsed on to the ground, and when his senses returned he did not see Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī. Rather, he saw Bāqir al-ʿIlm—his peace be upon us!—as he had first seen him,

[120] i.e., the clothing worn by the inhabitants of heaven.
[121] Cf. Halm, *Kosmologie und Heilslehre*, p. 151.

wagering [*gerow mī bast*] with the Moon [43] and Sun and words appearing from his lips and teeth like hosts of light. After ʿAbdallāh saw these wonders, he lost consciousness. Once he had returned to consciousness, he said, "I bear witness![122] Glory! Holiness! Muḥammad and ʿAlī! Truly, truly! Praised is God the Chosen and his Walī[123] al-Salsal and Abū l-Khaṭṭāb![124] *You are the first and the last*; *you are the exoteric and the esoteric*; *and you know all things*".[125]

Afterwards, he went out from the presence of Bāqir. He went to the centre of Mecca and said, "O people of [44] Mecca and Medina! O people of ʿIrāq, Arab and non-Arab [*ʿajam*]! O people of Fārs and Kermān! O people of Baṣra and Kūfa! Be my witnesses that my Lord in the heavens and the earth is none other than Muḥammad al-Bāqir, the son of ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn. I bear witness that the Lord of the eighteen thousand worlds is he. *He is the first and the last*, *he is the exoteric and the esoteric*, *and he knows all things*. Then the people all gathered together group by group. Disagreement appeared in their midst, and they said, [45] "'Abdallāh-i Saba' has been led-astray and has become a misguided old man!"

Then ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿAbidīn and his son Bāqir al-ʿIlm—their peace be upon us!—ordered for ʿAbdallāh-i Saba' to be killed and for him to be burned at the stake. They said, "This man has lost his mind",[126] until the schism, confusion and uproar of the people subsided.

When Bāqir al-ʿIlm returned home and those similarly enlightened of the same mind and age as Bāqir al-ʿIlm [*rowshaniyān-ke hambāl-o hamsāl-i bāqir al-ʿilm*] gathered around him, such as Jābir b. ʿAbdallāh al-Anṣārī, Jābir al-Juʿfī,[127] [46] Jaʿfar al-Juʿfī,[128] and Ṣaʿṣaʿa b. Ṣūḥān.[129] Each one gave thanks and praise and said to Bāqir al-ʿIlm, "O Master of the Age [*walī l-zamān*]!—ʿAbdallāh-i Saba' spoke the truth! But you ordered that he be killed and burned at the stake. He did not deserve such a fate for what he said. All of us give the same testimony that he gave, except we do not know its true meaning [*maʿnā*]."

Then Bāqir al-ʿIlm said, "O enlightened ones, there is great danger in removing the veil from us. For six thousand years of the cycle of the law [*dawr-i sharīʿat*] the veil has not been removed from us and has not been spoken openly. At [47] the appearance of the Qā'im,[130] one may speak at that time of the meaning of this: that the Mighty King appears as the Qā'im. Today it is untimely to bear testimony to all these things. ʿAbdallāh removed

[122]The text reads "*sajda*", which is incomprehensible; read instead, with Tijdens (*op. cit.*, p. 347; cf. Halm, *Gnosis*, p. 370 n. 261), "*ashhadu*".

[123]Reading with Tijdens (*op. cit.*, p. 347) and Halm (*Gnosis*, p. 371 n. 262) "*wa-walīhi*" rather than "*wa-ālīhi*" as in the text.

[124]Abū l-Khaṭṭāb's name here appears likely as a result of a later Khaṭṭābī redactor; see: Halm, *Gnosis*, p. 371 n. 264.

[125]This passage is entirely in Arabic: *anta l-awwal wa-anta l-ākhir, anta al-ẓāhir wa-anta al-bāṭin, wa-anta bi-kulli shayʾin ʿalīmun*.

[126]Or, "this man is possessed [*dīvāna*]!"

[127]Jābir b. Yazīd al-Juʿfī (d. 128/746 or 132/750).

[128]See note above.

[129]One of the prominent *qurrā'* forming the opposition to 'Uthmān and, later, a celebrated partisan of ʿAlī who died during the caliphate of Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān. His appearance here poses an intractable chronological difficulty, for Muʿāwiya's reign ended a mere three years after Muḥammad al-Bāqir's birth in 57/677 whereas the events here putatively occur while the *imām* was five years old.

[130]Lit., "the standing" or "the riser"; cf. Madelung, "Ḳā'im Āl Muḥammad," *EI*², iv, p. 456. A common name of a messianic figure often identified with the *imām* or *mahdī* among the Shīʿa, the full significance of the term as employed is not entirely clear, but it should not be conflated with its later, Ismāʿīlī expansion: "*al-qā'im bi-amr allāh*"—i.e., "he who undertakes the command of God". Antecedents of the term can also be found in Samaritan and Gnostic texts; see: Halm, *Gnosis*, pp. 362–363 at n. 77.

the veil from us, and all who remove the veil from us we must also remove the veil from them.[131]

"O enlightened ones, brothers! You know that in the days of our Lord, the Commander of the Faithful ʿAlī—who appeared with authority and to whom was given the caliphate—the minaret in the city of Kūfa prostrated itself to him and could not be made upright again and thus remained, [48] and all the people bore witness, in secret and openly, with undoubting hearts and with unwavering conviction. Only Abū l-Khaṭṭāb spoke openly concerning this light and declaration, 'O Arab and non-Arab [*'ajam*]! Be my witnesses that there is no god in the 18,000 worlds save ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib,' until our Lord, our father, commanded that Abū l-Khaṭṭāb be executed and burned at the stake.[132] O enlightened ones, if our father had not killed and burned Abū l-Khaṭṭāb at the stake, then he would have spoken the word that must not be spoken for 940 more years".[133]

[49] Then all of the believers asked for forgiveness. Jābir b. ʿAbdallāh al-Anṣārī stood on his feet and said, "*Whatsoever God willed came to be, and nothing came to be that he did not will.* The command of God is right; all that he wills is done". Lord Bāqir pardoned them and recited this verse, "*Then he went out to his people from the Temple and prophesied to them: 'Pray morning and evening! O John, hold fast to the Book!' And we gave him wisdom even as a youth*" (Q. 19:11 f.).

As Bāqir al-ʿIlm recited this verse, [50] a form [*shakhṣī*] neither living nor dead—"*there one does not die, nor does one live*" (Q. 20:76)—came out from the wall of Fāṭima's chamber. Bāqir al-ʿIlm blew a breath on him, and as the spirit appeared from the lips and teeth of the moonfaced child, it went down the throat of this form. It straightened up and then recited, "*. . . the testimony, the great and the exalted!*" (Q. 13:9) and testified to the divinity of Bāqir [*khodavāndī-ye bāqir*] before all the enlightened ones.

Bāqir said, "O ʿAbdallāh, what have you seen and in what state were you?"

ʿAbdallāh said, "O Lord of lords [51] and Light of all lights, I saw myself asleep [*dar khʷāb*] in paradise seated alongside *houri*s inside palaces and inside spiritual and luminescent pavillons alongside young boys and youthful servants (cf. Q. 56:17) and '*demure houris in pavillons*' (Q. 55:72). I saw Muḥammad, ʿAlī, Fāṭima, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn to whose divinity all the inhabitants of paradise bore witness, and I also bore witness and said, '*God testifies that there is no god but he, the living, the enduring*'. And I saw you, my Lord, as though a hundred thousand moons and suns appeared from your lips [52] and teeth. As I awoke from sleep, I saw none of this but saw you blowing breath into my mouth, and all my limbs were able to speak, and I bore witness!"

[131] Cf. the Nuṣayrī work of Maymūn b. al-Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī (d. 426/1034–5), *Majmūʿ al-aʿyād*, (ed.) R. Strothman in *Der Islam*, XXVII (1944), p. 381.7 in which the death of Ibn Saba' is described in terms of a 'trial' (Ar. *miḥna*).

[132] Abū l-Khaṭṭāb's execution and activities transpired, not during ʿAlī's caliphate, but during the imāmate the sixth *imām*, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq. This passage could have been the handiwork of a later Khaṭṭābī redactor (Halm, *Gnosis*, p. 371 n. 371).

[133] Having been born in 57 A.H., Bāqir as a five year old child would be speaking here in the year 62 A.H. 62 years according to the lunar hijrī-calendar equals 60 solar years, thereby implying that the coming of the *qā'im* would correspond to a thousand years after the *hijra*? See: Halm, *Gnosis*, p. 371 n. 371.

Ṭālib, the son of ʿAbdallāh,[134] stood on his feet and said, "I too will sacrifice myself for Lord Bāqir [*be-fidā-ye khodavānd-i bāqer mī-konam*] so that I may see the likes of which my father has seen!"

This self-sacrificing, Ṭālibī school of thought [*īn madhhab-i fidāʾī va-ṭālibī*] is the very one {in Damascus and Syria}[135] that Ṭālib founded. The Ismāʿīlī school of thought is the one that the successors of Abū [53] l-Khaṭṭāb had founded, who sacrificed their own bodies for the sake of the successors of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq and Ismāʿīl,[136] which remained throughout all cycles. *"Peace be upon those who follow Guidance"* (Q. 20:47)!

Sean W. Anthony
University of Oregon

[134]The mention of a son of Ibn Saba' named Ṭālib is solely attested to by *UaK* in this passage; however, Ibn Babawayh in his *Risāla fī l-iʿtiqādāt* includes a statement made by the Imāmī *mutakallim* Zurāra b. Aʿyān (d. ca. 149–9/765–6) to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq that a descendent of ʿAbdallāh b. Saba' adhered to the doctrine that God had delegated his powers to the *imām*s, i.e., *tafwīḍ*. See: Ibn Babawayh, *Risāla fī l-iʿtiqādāt*, in: *Muṣannafāt al-Shaykh al-Mufīd* (Qumm, 1993), v, p. 100

[135]Here the text identifies '*madhhab-i fidāʾī*' of Ṭālib the Nizārī-Ismāʿīlī 'Assassins' of Syria, which would date the passage to at least the second half of the sixth/twelfth century. Those who argue for the antiquity of *UaK* regard it as a late addition to the older strata of *UaK*. See: Tijdens, pp. 361 ff. and Halm, *Gnosis*, p. 371 n. 273. However, there is nothing integral to the structure of the text that warrants this conclusion.

[136]The identification of the followers of Abū l-Khaṭṭāb with followers of the descendents of Ismāʿīl b. Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq goes back to at least the second/eighth century; See: Nawbakhtī, *Firaq*, pp. 55–56; Saʿd b. ʿAbdallāh, *Maqālāt*, pp. 81–82.