The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs
Islamic History and Civilization

Editorial Board
Sebastian Günther
Wadad Kadi

VOLUME 77
The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs

An Introduction to the Religion, History and Identity of the Leading Minority in Syria

By

Yaron Friedman

LEIDEN • BOSTON

2010
CONTENTS

Preface .............................................................................................................. xi
Abbreviations .................................................................................................. xv
Note on Citation, Dates and Transliteration .................................................. xxi

Introduction ...................................................................................................... 1

I. History of the Nusayris ................................................................................. 5
  1. Ibn Nuṣayr—“The Gate of God” ............................................................ 6
     1.1 Excommunication ............................................................................. 8
     1.2 His mystical circle .......................................................................... 8
     1.3 The creation of a community .......................................................... 11
     1.4 Financing ......................................................................................... 12
     1.5 The nidaʾ of Ibn Nuṣayr ................................................................. 13
     1.6 Successor ......................................................................................... 14
     1.7 The tradition of Ibn Nuṣayr’s superiority over his predecessors .... 15
     1.8 Literature ......................................................................................... 16
     1.9 Transition period ............................................................................. 16
  2. Al-Husayn ibn Ḥamdān al-Khaṣībī: the founder of the sect ..................... 17
     2.1 His first mystical guidance ............................................................... 18
     2.2 His second mystical guidance .......................................................... 19
     2.3 Becoming a leader ........................................................................... 20
     2.4 Open propaganda ............................................................................ 22
     2.5 Immigration to Syria and creation of a new community ................. 23
     2.6 The return to Iraq ............................................................................ 25
     2.7 Al-Khaṣībī’s taqiyya: posing as an Imāmī scholar ...................... 26
     2.8 Establishing the Iraqi center ............................................................. 28
     2.9 The connection with the Buyids ...................................................... 29
     2.10 The successor in Iraq ..................................................................... 30
     2.11 The successor in Aleppo ................................................................. 31
     2.12 Al-Khaṣībī’s writings ..................................................................... 33
CONTENTS

3. Crystallization and the editing of books .......................... 34
   3.1 Al-Jisrī and the theological circle in Baghdad .......... 35
   3.2 Al-Jillī inherits the leadership ................................. 35
   3.3 Signs of propaganda and conversion .......................... 37
   3.4 Al-Jillī’s net .......................................................... 38
   3.5 Judicial activity ...................................................... 39

4. Maymūn al-Ṭabarānī and the book of the holidays ........ 40
   4.1 Leadership in a time of danger ................................. 41

5. Rival sects: Ishāqīs and Druzes .................................. 43

6. The Banū Shu’ba of Ḥarrān ........................................ 45

7. The end of the golden age ........................................... 47

8. Shaykh al-Nashshābī’s travels ....................................... 48

   9.1 A detailed biography ............................................... 51
   9.2 Al-Makzūn’s innovations ......................................... 53

10. Oppression under the Mamlūks ..................................... 56
    10.1 First attempt to convert the Nuṣayris .................. 56
    10.2 The uprising of the Nuṣayrī mahdī ..................... 57
    10.3 A deadly fatwā of Ibn Taymiyya ......................... 62

11. Nuṣayrī medieval history—a chronological table .......... 64

II. The Nuṣayrī Religion .................................................... 67
    1. Western research on the Nuṣayrī religion .................. 68
    2. The nature of the divinity ....................................... 72
       2.1 The divine triad ................................................. 73
          2.1.1 Relations between mA‘nā and ism ................. 78
          2.1.2 Addition of the third aspect of divinity .... 79
          2.1.3 The ism and the bāb ..................................... 79
          2.1.4 The appearance of the triad according to
                  the principle of the siyāqa ......................... 80
          2.1.5 The mystical meaning of the Āyat al-nūr .... 80
       2.2 The doctrine of Docetism .................................... 81
          2.2.1 Possible sources of inspiration .................. 84
       2.3 The five aytām .................................................. 85
       2.4 The personification of the deity .......................... 88

3. The Nuṣayrī cosmos ...................................................... 91
    3.1 The creation of the world and the tradition of
          the letters ...................................................... 95
    3.2 The process of creation and the tradition of
          the fall .......................................................... 96
    3.3 God’s education in his triple appearance ............... 101
10.11 Nawrūz: the Persian New Year ........................................ 164
10.12 Yawm al-Khamīs al-Kabīr: the holiday of
“Great Thursday” ............................................................ 168
10.13 Mīhrajān: the holiday of the autumn equinox .... 169
Lunar Calendar ............................................................... 170
Solar Calendar ............................................................... 172

III. Identity between Sunna and Shi’a ...................................... 175
1. Two Shi‘ī attitudes .............................................................. 176
   1.1 Al-Majlīsī’s excommunication of the Ghulāt .... 176
   1.2 An indulgent Shi‘ī view concerning the
       Nuṣayrīs .................................................................. 180
   1.3 The ambivalent attitude towards the Ghulāt ...... 183
2. The Sunnī takfīr against the Nuṣayrīs ............................... 187
   2.1 The fatwā of Ibn Taymiyya ...................................... 188
   2.2 Other fatwās: against Nuṣayrīs and Druzes and
       the Nuṣayrī mahdī case ......................................... 192
   2.3 Context and significance of the fatwās ..................... 195
   2.4 Refutation of Nuṣayrīsm together with Shi‘ism ... 198
3. The Nuṣayrī identity through the Dīwān of al-Khaṣībī ... 199
   3.1 Muslims .................................................................... 202
   3.2 Ja‘farī Shi‘īs ............................................................... 204
   3.3 Ghūlāt ....................................................................... 206
   3.4 Nuṣayrīs .................................................................... 208
4. Initiation ........................................................................... 210
   4.1 Initiation in medieval Nuṣayrism ............................... 212
   4.2 Two versions of the Dustūr: al-Ṭabarānī and
       al-Adhanī ................................................................. 216
   4.3 Terminology of initiation as a characteristic of
       secret societies ......................................................... 218
   4.4 Initiation in modern sources ...................................... 219
5. The Nuṣayrī brotherhood .................................................... 221

Conclusion ........................................................................... 223
1. The question of external influences .................................... 223
   1.1 Greek philosophy and Judaism .................................. 224
   1.2 Christian inspiration .................................................. 225
   1.3 Zoroastrian influence .................................................. 230
2. Identity ............................................................................. 233
   2.1 Modern trends ............................................................ 235
## CONTENTS

Appendices

1. Primary Nūṣayrī Sources ............................................................ 241
2. Titles and Contents of Unavailable Sources ......................... 277
3. Ciphers in the Writings of al-Ṭabarānī ................................. 281
4. The Table of Ranks Based on Abdallāh ibn Muʿāwiya’s Kitāb al-marātib wa-ʾl-daraj ................................................................. 285
5. List of the Imāms and their bābš ........................................... 287
6. Dīwān al-Khaṣibī—Information and Summary ..................... 289
7. A Summary of the Kitāb al-majmūʿ: A Dastūr (Book for Initiates) from the Nineteenth Century ................................. 295
8. The Fatwā of Ibn Taymiyya against the Nūṣayrīs ............... 299

Select Bibliography ................................................................. 311
Index .................................................................................. 317
PREFACE

This monograph offers research on the Nuṣayrī-ʾAlawīs, covering a variety of aspects. The absence of such research since Dussaud’s *Histoire et religion des Nosairīs* (1900) demands a new comprehensive study. The aim of this book is to review the history and religion of the sect in the light of old documents used by orientalists in the nineteenth century, documents that became available in the twentieth century, and later sources of the Nuṣayrī-ʾAlawī sect published most recently in Lebanon. Another goal here, not dealt with in Dussaud’s book, is to study the question of the identity of the sect through the ṬAlawī-Sunnī-Shīʿī triangle.

A consistent endeavor has been made to keep the research for this book as objective as possible. Notwithstanding the claim of objectivity by Western scholars, they have a tendency to repeat the orthodox Sunnī point of view concerning the identity of sects.1 Western publications tend to refer to the Nuṣayrī-ʾAlawīs as heretics, although the members of the sect consider themselves to be Muslims. The use of the term “sect” is neither pejorative nor in opposition to “the church”, as suggested by Max Weber.2 Many criticisms have been raised against its use as a translation of the Arabic *firqa* (pl. *firaq*). Marshall Hodgson, for example, explains that Weber’s definition is based on his study of the Christian church, which differs from Islamic orthodoxy in many ways.3 Michael Cook holds that Weber’s explanation that the sect is non-political and non-hierarchic is wrong when applied to Muslim sects and Shiʿī groups in particular.4 Although these criticisms are valid, Cook and Hodgson do not propose an alternative translation for the term *firqa*. Hence, our

---

1 As Hodgson noted: “Islamists, both Muslim and Western, have had a way of absorbing the point of view of orthodox Islam; this has gone so far that Christian Islamists have looked with horror on Muslim heretics”; see M.G.S. Hodgson, “How did the early Shi’a become sectarian?”, *JAOS* 75 (1955), p. 5.
consideration of the Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs as a sect follows Heinz Halm’s view that Weber’s definition or parts of it could be appropriate for such sects as the Druzes but not for the Shīʿa: “a small number of adherents, lack of state recognition, spontaneous confession and freedom to join or not join, members’ awareness that they belong to a religious separate qualified elite”.

In my opinion, this selective definition also fits the Nuṣayrī sect. In Arabic, the word firqa usually has a negative connotation, while ṭāʾifa is used in a positive sense, but not necessarily in every case.

Since the sacred writings of the Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs are kept secret by the members of the sect because of their sensitivity, it is important to note that the religious material used in this volume is only that which is accessible in public libraries and printed books. My research did not involve private sources and libraries, or personal manuscripts belonging to members of the sect. Moreover, I believe that a true understanding of the available material is limited to the external level that a non-ʿAlawī can reach. A profound grasp of these writings can be achieved only by the sect’s mystical Shaykhs.

I owe a special dept of gratitude to Professor Kais Firro of the University of Haifa, who backed this project and made valuable suggestions. I wish to thank my friend and colleague, Dr. David Cook, without whom the newest and the most important sources for this study would not have been accessible. He contributed to the improvement of my previous research, by reading early drafts of my two articles and adding important notes. I also owe a special debt to Mrs. Rebecca Toueg and to Margaret Owen for their rigorous editing of the manuscript.

The present work is a result of a research process that began in 1995 at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. I was first introduced to the Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī doctrine and history by Dr. Me’ir M. Bar-Asher, an authority in the field. During these studies, I initiated my first original research in the field, focusing on al-Khaṣibi, the actual founder of the sect and a key figure for the understanding of the sect’s identity. This research yielded an article that is used in this book with some additions and improvements. The enlargement of the research into a study of the Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī identity between Sunna and Shi’a, including medieval and modern aspects, was enabled thanks to a doctoral scholarship granted by the

---

French government in 2001–2003 at the Sorbonne Paris IV University. I was guided with devotion by Professor Paul Fenton, an expert on Jewish and Islamic mysticism, whose vast knowledge contributed to its completion. This study, entitled *Les Nuşayrî-ʿAlawîs entre Sunna et Shīʿa: refus et acceptation selon les sources arabes médiévales et modernes*, was completed in 2006. It was approved (*très honorable*) by the jury, which was headed by Professor Muhammad Ali Amir-Moezzi and consisted of Professor Fenton, Professor Burhan Ghalioun and Dr. Stéphane Valter. Professor Moshe Maoz and Professor Eyal Zisser, experts in Syrian politics, were external judges of the thesis. With numerous additions and some corrections, the thesis served as a basis for several parts of this book. I wish to thank all the above-mentioned scholars for their support and encouragement of my research. Most of their important notes concerning my doctorate were considered carefully in the actual research. The book includes another recent article on the most famous Sunni decree concerning the Nuşayrî-ʿAlawî sect.

I am grateful to Dr. Reuven Amitai and Dr. Isaac Hasson from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, who aided me in completing my research through their encouragement and recommendations as well as their methodological guidance and teaching. I also wish to thank Professor Moshe Sharon from the Hebrew University to whom I owe my background in medieval Shīʿism.

I would like to acknowledge the help of institutions which gave me access to some of the rare and important documents used in this volume: the National Library at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the University of Haifa library, the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris, and the John Rylands Library in Manchester.

Last but not least, my thanks are due to my wife Dorit and my children Itamar, Noa, and Michal who supported me with patience through the long days of study.

---

7 The actual location of the final version of the doctoral thesis is the Bibliothèque Serpente—Université Sorbonne Paris IV.
8 The thesis defence took place at Sorbonne Paris IV, 27 February 2006.
ABBREVIATIONS

The following list includes all the available sources of the Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī sect, with their abbreviations as used in this book, in alphabetical order. Hitherto, two articles aimed to sum up the available Nuṣayrī bibliography. The first was published by Catafago (1876) and the second by Massignon (1938). This list is an updated bibliography of the sect, including the location of sources and their previous catalogue references (Cat). For a detailed list of primary sources including information about their contents and reliability, see Appendix 1.

AAM ʿĀdāb ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib/Ishāq ibn Muḥammad al-Nakhaʿī

AAN Kitāb al-akwār wa-ʾl-adwār al-nūrāniyya/Muḥammad ibn Nuṣayr

AUH Kitāb al-anwār wa-ʾl-ḥujub/Muḥammad ibn Sinān (attributed)

ARM Akhbār wa-riwāyāt ʿan mawālīnā ahl al-bayt minhum al-salām
Ms Hamburg 303. Cat: Massignon item 44.

BD al-Baḥth wa-ʾl-dalālā/Maymūn ibn al-Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī
Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī II spread in RR and FRR. Cat: Catafago item 12; Massignon item 49.

BI Kitāb al-bidʿ wa-ʾl-iʿāda/al-Ḥusayn ibn Ḥārūn al-Baghdādī

BS Kitāb al-bākūra al-Sulaymāniyya/Sulaymān al-Adhanī

---


Printed in Beirut, appeared in 1864 according to E. E. Salisbury, *JAOS* 8 (1866) without place or date; reprinted corruptly by Dār al-Sahwa li-‘l-Nashr, Cairo, in 1990. Includes *Kitāb al-majmū‘*. Cat: Catafago item 20; Massignon item 24 (wrong attribution of the anonymous *Kitāb al-majmū‘* to al-Khaṣibī).

**DKH**  *Dīwān al-Khaṣibī* al-Ḥusayn ibn Ḥamdān al-Khaṣibī

Ms. Manchester 452 fol. 1a–140b. Cat: Catafago item 25; Massignon item 23.

**DMA**  *Dīwān al-Muntajab al-‘Ānī*


**DMM**  *Kitāb al-dalāʿīl fi maʿrīfat al-masā’il*/Maymūn ibn al-Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī

Ms. Hamburg 304 fol. 141a–207b; *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī* III, 117–156. Cat: Catafago item 5 as *Kitāb al-dalāʿīl fi maʿrīfat al-rasā’il*; Massignon item 43.

**DMS**  *Dīwān al-Makzūn al-Sinjārī*


**FRR**  *Fiqh al-risāla al-rāstbāshiyya*/al-Ḥusayn ibn Ḥamdān al-Khaṣibī

*Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī* II, 83–156.

**HA**  *Kitāb al-haft wa-l-azīlla*/al-Mufaddal ibn ʿUmar (attributed)


**HAD**  *Ḥaqāʾiq asrār al-dīn*/al-Ḥasan ibn Shuʿba al-Ḥarrānī


**HAIH**  *Ḥujjat al-ʿārif fi ithbāt al-ḥaqq ʿalā l-mubāyin wa-l-muḥālif /ʿAlī ibn Ḥamza ibn ʿAli ibn Shuʿba al-Ḥarrānī*


**HIF**  *Kitāb al-ḥāwī fī ʿilm al-fatāwā*/Maymūn ibn al-Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī


**HK**  *Kitāb al-hidāya al-kubrā*/al-Ḥusayn ibn Ḥamdān al-Khaṣibī


**HUA**  *Kitāb al-ḥujub wa-l-anwār /Muḥammad ibn Sinān (attributed)*


**IM**  *Kitāb ʿidāḥ al-miṣbāḥ/ʿAbdallāh al-Jannān al-Junbulānī*

*Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī* I, 236–299. Cat: Catafago item 18; Massignon item 16.
Abbreviations

JK al-Jawhariyya al-kalbiyya/Maymūn ibn al-Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī
Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī III, pp. 19–40. Cat: Catafago item 38 as al-Jawhariyya; Massignon item 50 as al-Jawāhir.

KBS Kitāb bāṭīn al-ṣalāt/Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Jilli

KHA Kitāb ḥāwī ʿl-āsrār/Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Jilli

KHC Khuṭba and Catechism
Ms. Kiel 19; Ms. Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale), fonds arabe 5188. Cat: Massignon item 121.

KM Kitāb al-maʿārif /Maymūn ibn al-Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī
Ms. Hamburg 304, fol. 1a–126b. Cat: Massignon item 47.

KMA Kitāb al-mashyakha

KS Kitāb al-ṣirāt /al-Mufaḍḍal ibn ʿUmar (attributed)

KT Kitāb al-tamhīs/Ḥasan ibn Shuʿba al-Ḥarrānī

KU Kitāb al-usūs /al-Mufaḍḍal ibn ʿUmar (attributed)
Ms. Paris 1449, fol. 1a–79b; Cat: catafago item 8; Massignon item 3 attributed to al-Mufaḍḍal without references.

MA Kitāb majmūʿ al-aʿyād/Maymūn ibn al-Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī
Edited by R. Strothmann in Der Islam 27 (1944–1946); Cat: Catafago item 19; Massignon item 41.

MAHS Masāʿil ʿAbdallāh ibn Hārūn al-Ṣaʿīgh

MB Masāʿil Bayrūt/Maymūn ibn al-Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī
Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī III, 203–205. Cat: Massignon item 56 (?).

---

MHAD  Risāla mūdiḥat ḥaqāʾiq al-asrār/al-Ḥasan ibn Shuʾba al-Ḥarrānī

MHIS  Masāʾīl Abī Muḥammad al-Ḥasan ibn Shuʾba al-Ḥarrānī/al-Ḥasan ibn Shuʾba al-Ḥarrānī

MKH  al-Masāʾīl al-khāṣṣa/Maymūn ibn al-Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī

MN  Munāzarat Shaykh al-Nashšābī
Ms. Paris 1450, fol. 67b–155a; Cat: Massignon item 30.

MS  Kitāb al-mithāl wa-l-ṣūra/Muḥammad ibn Nusayr

RA  Risālat al-andiya/Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Jillī

RB  Risālat al-bayān li-ahl al-ʿuqūl wa-l-adhhān/Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Jillī

RFR  Risālat al-fatq wa-l-ratq/Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Jillī

RH  Risālat al-ḥurūf/Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Jillī
Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawi II, pp. 335–339; Massignon item 36.

RHA  al-Risāla al-Ḥarrāniyya/Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-ʿAbdī al-Numayrī/Namīrī

RIA  Risālat ikhtilāf al-ʿālamayn/Muḥammad ibn Shuʾba ʿl-Ḥarrānī

RM  al-Risāla al-Masīḥiya/Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Jillī

RMHM  Risāla al-munsifa fī ḥaqīqat al-maʾrifa/Maymūn ibn al-Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī

RMU  al-Risāla al-murshida/Maymūn ibn al-Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī

RMUF  al-Risāla al-Mufaddaliyya/al-Mufaddal ibn ʿUmar (attributed)
Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawi VI, 9–18.

RN  al-Risāla al-Nuʾmāniyya/Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Jillī
Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawi II, 303–308. Cat: Massignon item 55, attributes the epistle to al-Ṭabarānī.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RR</td>
<td>al-Risāla al-rāstbāshīyya</td>
<td>al-Ḥusayn ibn Ḥamdān al-Khaṣībī</td>
<td>Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawi II, 15–82. Cat: Catafago item 37, appeared as Zard bāshīyya; Massignon item 27.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJ</td>
<td>Meeting of al-Ṣāʿīgh and al-Jisrī</td>
<td>(no title)</td>
<td>Ms. Paris 1450, fol. 176b–179a; Cat: Massignon item 38.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUR</td>
<td>Urjūza</td>
<td>Shaykh ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn al-Ṣuwayrī</td>
<td>MS. Manchester, 655, fol. 217b–249b. Cat: Massignon, item 34.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA</td>
<td>Taʾrīkh al-ʿAlawīyyīn</td>
<td>Muḥammad Amin Ghalīb al-Ṭawīl</td>
<td>Printed in Lādhiqīyya (publisher missing), 1926. Cat: Massignon item 126.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5 Moreover, the name zard bāsh “who turns yellow” in Persian has no logical meaning in its context.
NOTE ON CITATION, DATES AND TRANSLITERATION

Citations in the book are translated into English by the author if not otherwise noted. Book and manuscript titles appear in italics with capitals, Arabic titles appear in transliteration in italics without capitals, except for proper names. The sect is referred to as Nuṣayrīs when dealing with the Middle Ages and as ‘Alawīs when discussing the modern period. In general accounts of the sect the name Nuṣayrī-‘Alawī is used. Dates prior to the nineteenth century are given in double hijri/Common Era form. Arabic transliteration follows the system used in the International Journal of Middle East Studies with contraction of the article (al- and ‘l) and tā’ marbūta indicated only in the construct state.
INTRODUCTION

I.

The study of the Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī sect in Syria is an essential part of the research concerning sects in Islam in general, as well as of the understanding of the evolution of Shīʿism in particular. Until the 1970s, research concerning the Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs was considered a marginal issue in Middle East studies. The sect was an isolated, poor and small society, regarded in the West as a strange split from Shīʿism with minor political influence. Even the mobilization of young members of the sect in the French Troupes Spéciales could not hint at the enormous change that this sect would experience. The fact that the ʿAlawī minority—12 percent of the Syrian population—became in the 1970s the dominant sect in this country, changed the importance of this field of research. The study of the sect regained the interest of Western scholars, as reflected in the studies published by Heinz Halm and later by Meʾir M. Bar-Asher, Arieh Kofsky and others.

The importance of the sect as a political power in the modern Middle East is reflected also in the number of books dealing with its identity published in the Arab world since the 1980s. This is perhaps an extraordinary phenomenon, considering the few publications in this field published prior to the ʿAlawīs’ emergence as a dominant group in Syria. However, the material in Arabic concerning the sect needs to be approached critically and cautiously, because it involves a considerable amount of hostility and apology. Nevertheless, it offers the researcher an opportunity to learn about opinions in the Muslim world and the abilities of the ʿAlawīs to integrate themselves within its society. The sources concerning the medieval period, which are the main focus of this volume, are also problematic. They contain hostility and apology as well, and their use also requires careful analysis in the evaluation of their credibility. The main instruments for such evaluation are an inter-textual criticism of the content, and a search for citations of the text concerned in other sources.
The most prominent addition of sources in the present research in comparison with previous studies is a series of Nuṣayrī sources printed recently in Lebanon:\(^1\)

Abū Mūsā and Shaykh Mūsā (eds.)

a. *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī: rasā’il al-ḥikma al-ʿAlawiyya*
   - Book 1
     1. Muḥammad ibn Nuṣayr al-Numayrī
     2. Al-Sayyid al-Jannān al-Junbulānī
   - Book 2
     3. al-Ḥusayn ibn Ḥamdān al-Khaṣībī
     4. Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Jillī
   - Book 3
     5. Abū Saʿīd Maymūn ibn al-Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī

b. *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī: majmūʿat al-Ḥarrāniyyīn*
   - Book 4
     1. al-Muʿallafāt al-khāṣṣa: abnāʾ Shuʿba al-Ḥarrāniyyīn
   - Book 5
     2. al-Muʿallafāt al-ʿāmma: abnāʾ Shuʿba al-Ḥarrāniyyīn

c. *al-Majmūʿa al-Mufaddaliyya*
   - Book 6
     al-Muʿaffaddal ibn ʿAmr [sic] al-Juʿfī

The pseudonymous editor Abū Mūsā [al-Ḥarīrī], signing himself A.M.H. in the introduction, is known for his previous publications, such as *al-ʿAlawiyyūn al-Nuṣayriyyūn: baḥṭ fiʾl-aqīda waʾl-taʿrīkh* (1980, no place or publisher). This last document, which is disseminated nowadays through bookshops outside Syria and the Internet, reveals the author’s great hostility towards the sect. Nevertheless, in spite of this negative attitude, his references and citations are usually exact and based on a variety of Nuṣayrī sources available in public libraries.

Regarding the case of the actual *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*, there is no doubt that the editor’s information concerning the Nuṣayrī works and the biography of their authors is baseless and lacks any references.

---

\(^1\) Abū Mūsā and Shaykh Mūsā (eds. and intro.), *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī: Rasā’il al-ḥikma al-ʿAlawiyya*, 6 vols. (Diyār ʿAql, Lebanon: Dār min Ajl al-Maʿrifa, 2006). The place and editors are fictitious: bizarrely, diyār ʿaql translates as “land of reason”; dār min ajl al-maʿrifa translates as “publishing house for the sake of knowledge”.

In this light, attention should be focused only on the question of the credibility of the Nuṣayrı sources printed in the six volumes of the Silsila, excluding the editor’s notes.

After careful reading and a comparison of the citations of these sources in other available documents of the sect, I was able to reach the definite conclusion that we are in possession of a large series of credible sources of the Nuṣayrı religion that have been unavailable until now. The editor, who does not reveal his sources for the manuscripts, printed the texts with care and accuracy in most cases. Moreover, I came to the conclusion that, regardless of the motives for their publication, these are the most important sources for the academic study of Nuṣayrı history, doctrine and identity. These texts, which certainly shed new light on the study of this sect, demand further research in the future. This book makes the first use of these medieval sources published in the Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī, excluding the editors’ additions and propaganda. Previously available sources of the sect are combined with and compared to the new material of the Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī.

II. The Sources

The primary sources used in the present book are a mixture of Imāmī-Shīʿī, Nuṣayrı and Sunnī sources. The Nuṣayrı sources include texts belonging to mystical Shīʿīs from Kufa (Iraq), who were considered by their rivals to be Ghulāt (exaggerators, sing. ghālī) because of their extreme admiration of ʿAlī (the Prophet Muḥammad’s cousin and son-in-law). It should be noted that the word Ghulāt is used not as a negative term, but as a definition of Shīʿī mystics who developed the esoteric Shīʿī tradition. In some cases, it is difficult to determine who the real authors of the Ghulāt literature are. In most cases it is possible only to know to whom the work is attributed. These sources include doctrines that were developed later in Nuṣayrı sources. Except for the Umm al-kitāb (see Appendix 1, item 1), all the Ghulāt sources were preserved by the members of the Nuṣayrı sect and served for initiation, study and prayer. A detailed description of these sources appears in Appendix 1, followed by a list of sources that are unavailable for research but that are mentioned in the Nuṣayrı literature.
III. Note concerning the Arabic language in the Nuṣayrī sources

The Nuṣayrī manuscripts are characterized by the use of Middle Arabic, which is a mixture of literary Arabic with the local dialect, mainly Syrian Arabic. The handwriting of the shaykhs is usually legible, but the texts contain numerous mistakes in spelling and syntax. This does not reflect the standards of the writers of the documents, who were learned scholars, but rather those of the copyists of these texts over the course of time. Following the Nuṣayrī sources throughout their history, a deterioration in the level of Arabic and a loosening of the application of the strict rules of grammar is noticeable. The explanation of this phenomenon is social: the transfer of the sect from an urban to a rural environment and from an intellectual group to a tribal society governed by a minority of semi-educated shaykhs. The poor state of the sect and its permanent state of oppression and impoverishment contributed to this deterioration. The historical circumstances that led to this change in the sect’s situation are discussed in Chapter 1.
CHAPTER ONE

HISTORY OF THE NUŞAYRİS

The Nuşayrî-‘Alawîs are a Muslim Shi‘î sect that split off from the major stream of the Shi‘a at the end of the ninth century. Although their doctrines represent a developed stage of syncretism, their history should be considered as part of Islamic studies.

The history of the Nuşayrî-‘Alawîs has been until now a marginal and undeveloped aspect in the research on the sect. Since the works of Dussaud and Massignon at the beginning of the twentieth century, publications concerning the medieval period of the sect have dealt mainly with the theological aspect (Strothmann, Halm, Bar-Asher and Kofsky, see Chapter 2). The majority of recent works in the field of history focus on the modern period, mainly since the emergence of the ‘Alawîs as a political power in Syria. This chapter aims to present as far as possible a detailed account of the history of the Nuşayrî sect between the ninth and the fourteenth centuries. Religious matters are discussed in Chapter 3. The study combines internal and external sources (Nuşayrî and non-Nuşayrî, that is Sunnî and Shi‘î) in order to present a balanced and objective account of the founders of the sect, their successors, and their less known disciples. The majority of the sources offer accounts of the main founder, al-Khaşîbî. There are only fragments of information concerning the rest of the prominent figures. In general, the information gathered here is scattered in a variety of sources. The synthesis presented has been elaborated with much caution and consideration.

Before beginning the account of the founders of the Nuşayrî sect, a few statements should be made concerning its historical origins. The Nuşayrîs were one of the last Ghulât sects in Iraq, and one of the few who have survived to our time. These groups of mystics were nicknamed Ghulât by their rivals because they were seen by their contemporaries as extremist admirers of ‘Alî and his descendants. In fact, their mysticism, which was not understood by most of the Muslim community, was seen as a deification of the Imams. This superficial understanding of the Ghulât concept of divinity resulted in an accusation of heresy by the Muslim authorities.
Louis Massignon and Heinz Halm, authors of the relevant articles in the two editions of the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, present clear evidence that the Nusayrī sect can be traced back to the Ghulāt of Kufa in the eighth century. Both agree that these mystics attributed their doctrines to the famous sixth Imām of the Shi’a, Ja’far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765). Massignon considers the Nusayrīs to be a sect preserving and developing the doctrines of the ghālī Abu ‘l-Khaṭṭāb,1 leader of the Mukhammisa (admirers of the five), a sect which deified the *ahl al-bayt* (the close family of the Prophet Muḥammad). The latter were the five members of ‘Ali’s family (‘Ali, his uncle the Prophet Muḥammad, Fāṭīma the daughter of Muḥammad who was ‘Ali’s wife, and their two sons Ḥasan and Ḥusayn).2 Halm points at al-Mufaddal ibn ‘Umar (d. 180/796), author of most of the Ghulāt literature, as the major figure in the creation of Ghulāt doctrines.3 The Nusayrī religion was a late development of the doctrines of both the activist Abu ‘l-Khaṭṭāb and the literary al-Mufaddal. As is explained later, al-Mufaddal, as opposed to Abu ‘l-Khaṭṭāb, was also considered an orthodox authority in Imāmī literature.

The majority of the Nusayrī traditions were transmitted by Ghulāt mystics as follows:

- eighth century: al-Mufaddal ibn ‘Umar (from the Imām Ja’far al-Ṣādiq) > Muḥammad ibn Sinān >
- ninth century: > Muḥammad ibn Jumhūr/ Muḥammad ibn ‘Abdallāh ibn Mihrān/ Ibn Shammūn/ Yaḥyā ibn Mu’īn (or Ma’īn) > Muḥammad ibn Nuṣayr >
- tenth century: > Numayriyya (or Namīriyya)/Nusayriyya mystics, disciples of Ibn Nuṣayr.4

1. *Ibn Nuṣayr*—“The Gate of God”

The eponym of the Nusayrī sect is Abū Shu’ayb Muḥammad ibn Nuṣayr al-‘Abdī al-Bakrī al-Numayrī. His name refers to his lineage

---

4 See a detailed explanation of the transmission of the Ghulāt traditions in ibid., pp. 219–266.
from the northern Arab tribes of Banū Numayr of the ʿĀmir ibn Šaʿṣaʿa (ibn Bakr) confederation. The Banū Numayr, who settled along the Euphrates, were important allies of the Banū Taghlib (Hamdanids in the tenth century). This tribal affiliation makes his sect’s name Numayriyya more favorable than Namīriyya, but more indications are needed. In some sources Ibn Nuṣayr is called al- Başrī, which indicates his place of living. We do not have information concerning the date of his death or his place of birth. Bakr may also refer to the name of his grandfather. Although he was called Abū Shuʿayb, we do not know if he had a son named Shuʿayb; there is information concerning only a son named Aḥmad in Shiʿī sources. It is possible that he had a son named Jaʿfar, because in one Nuṣayrī source, he was also called Abū Jaʿfar. From the available sources, two figures can be drawn. For his followers, he was a charismatic leader with supernatural powers and for his rivals, a heretical imposter.

Although the sources do not give us exact dates, it is possible to establish the period of his main activity in the second half of the ninth century. According to both Shiʿī and Nuṣayrī sources, Ibn Nuṣayr claimed he was in contact with the tenth and eleventh Imāms, ʿAlī al-Hādí (d. 254/868) and Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī (d. 260/873).

While Shiʿī sources are hostile and limited in information, Nuṣayrī texts provide details of Ibn Nuṣayr’s intimate relations with the Imāms.

---


6 See, for example, HK, p. 338. Theories concerning a Persian origin of Ibn Nuṣayr are baseless, and reflect a modern tendency to associate the sect with Iran. See, for example, M. Moosa, Extremist Shiites: The Ghulat Sects (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press 1987), p. 318.

7 HK, p. 338.


9 RR, p. 57. According to this source he was also called Abū ʿl- Maṭālib (in TDN, p. 209, Abū Ṭālib), and the messianic name Abū ʿl-Qāsim, which was the Prophet Muḥammad’s nickname (also in TDN, p. 209), because he was held to be his latest incarnation; see Chapter 2. According to Bar-Asher and Kofsky, Abū ʿl-Ḥasan and Abū Ṭālib refer to the Imām ʿAlī’s own appellation (as father of Ḥasan) and that of his father; see Bar-Asher and Kofsky, The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī Religion, p. 183 n. 109.
1.1 Excommunication

Shī‘ī sources report that Ibn Nūṣayr was cursed and excommunicated twice. The first time was when he claimed that he was a prophet sent by al-Hādī, to whom he attributed divinity, and taught the doctrine of transmigration. The second time was after the death of Ḥāsān al-ʿAskarī, when Ibn Nūṣayr claimed he was this Imām’s bāb (his intimate messenger). To this last argument he added his claim to represent the vanished twelfth Imām, the mahdī (guided one, Shī‘ī messiah), occulted since 260/873. Ibn Nūṣayr’s ambitions as well as his personal immoral behavior led to disaster. The wakīl (the Imām’s representative), Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn ʿUthmān, cursed him in public. Ibn Nūṣayr tried to prevent his excommunication by apologizing to him but was rejected. He ended his life ill and cursed by the Shī‘ī community.10 After his death three of his disciples argued that they were his successors, but they all failed to follow in his footsteps.11 Nevertheless, according to the version of al-Khasībī in his Hidāya al-kubrā, after the death of the eleventh Imām, it was Ibn Nūṣayr who received from the vanished Imām the rescripts, letters and proofs of his sanctity (tawqīʿāt, kutub, dalāʾil) during the “lesser occultation”. Only after Ibn Nūṣayr’s death did the occulted Imām transmit them to his grandmother (the mother of Ḥāsān al-ʿAskarī) and later to his “child” (disciple) Muḥammad ibn ʿUthmān.12

1.2 His mystical circle

Nūṣayrī sources give a different picture of the close relations between Ibn Nūṣayr and the Imāms. They offer an account of meetings in

---


The word bāb (door) in Shī‘ī terminology signifies the most intimate disciple of the Imāms. Ghulāt sects believed the bābs received divine knowledge and powers from the Imāms. See B. Lewis, “Bāb”, EI 1 (1960), p. 832.

11 Al-Majlisī, Bihār, vol. 51, p. 368; al-Ḥasan ibn Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī, Firaq al-Shī‘a (Beirut: Dār al-Adwā’, 1984), pp. 93–94. It is important to notice in the Bihār that Abū ʿl-Nasr Ḥibat Allāh reports that the ghulāw of Ibn Nūṣayr began only after al-ʿAskarī’s death, a matter which is not clear in al-Nawbakhtī’s Firaq.

According to the two sources, when Ibn Nūṣayr was ill and was asked who would take his place, he responded with his last strength: “to Ahmad”. According to that will, three followers considered themselves legitimate: Ibn Nūṣayr’s son Aḥmad, Aḥmad ibn Muhammad ibn Mūsā ibn Furāt and Aḥmad ibn Abī ʿl-Ḥusayn ibn Bishr ibn Yazīd.

12 HK, p. 367.
Samarra between the Imāms and Ibn Nuṣayr with his disciples. The older account goes back to the time of al-Hādī, concerning a meeting of Ibn Nuṣayr with some of his disciples in his house (no place is indicated). His disciples were concerned about the Caliph al-Mutawakkil’s threat against the Imām that he would excavate at the sacred site of the Imām Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī in Karbalā, an act which would desecrate his tomb. Knowing of this meeting, al-Hādī called Ibn Nuṣayr and his “brothers” (his community) to attend him. When they arrived the Imām calmed them, and is said to have performed a miracle, since after the Imām recited his prayers the Caliph regretted his decision and asked for his pardon.\(^\text{13}\) The excavation is echoed in other sources, according to which it took place in 236/850. Nevertheless, excavation work at the site did not stop as tradition suggests, and the tomb was ruined and covered with water.

Other meetings took place in the period of al-ʿAskarī. In one of them, Ibn Nuṣayr organized a religious session (majlis) near a palm tree in his garden in Basra, which turned into a ceremony when the Imām sent him a jar full of butter and milk. A messenger of al-ʿAskarī arrived, asking those present to plant their date kernels together in Ibn Nuṣayr’s garden, promising that one tree would grow from them. One of the members of the majlis, Ishāq ibn Muhammad al-Nakhaʿī al-Aḥmar (“The Red One”), tried to obtain kernels for himself alone.\(^\text{14}\) This ceremony symbolized the creation of a holy community, but also demonstrates the ambition of one member from Basra, Ishāq al-Aḥmar,
to obtain the Imām’s legitimacy to lead the community. This disloyalty of Ishāq is the background of Nuṣayrī traditions aiming to prove that al-ʿAskarī chose Ibn Nuṣayr as his bāb, and rejected Ishāq.

According to two traditions, the Imām al-ʿAskarī celebrated the Persian New Year, Nawrūz, with Ibn Nuṣayr and his community. Apart from the Nuṣayrī legendary traditions concerning the Imām’s transmission of supernatural powers to his bāb Ibn Nuṣayr, the historical background of the rejection of Ishāq results from his envy of and infidelity to Ibn Nuṣayr.15

An important part of Ibn Nuṣayr’s book, entitled al-Akwār wa-ʾl-adwār al-nūrāniyya,16 concerns his spiritual superiority over Ishāq. In the account of a conversation between Ibn Nuṣayr and his successor Muḥammad ibn Jundab, the former tells the latter that the Imām taught him the mystery of the cycles of light and that Ishāq, who had heard it too, was not permitted to transmit it. Muḥammad ibn Jundab responded that he acknowledged that Ibn Nuṣayr was the only authority to transmit the words of the Imām and to explain them.17 From this account, it seems that Ishāq took part in Ibn Nuṣayr’s majlis, but competed over its leadership.18

The last available accounts concern a meeting between Ibn Nuṣayr and the Imām Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī in Samarra, the place of the latter’s imprisonment. ‘Abbāsids, who emprisoned the Imām, appear in Nuṣayrī traditions as a symbol of evil.19 It seems that Ibn Nuṣayr had

---

15 In one tradition, the Imām ordered Ibn Nuṣayr to perform miracles. In one instance, he demanded that he resurrect a believer in China who had died a thousand years previously; MA, p. 180; AAN, p. 98.
16 See Appendix 1, item 8.
17 AAN, p. 58.
18 The biography of Ishāq by al-ʿAskalānī reveals interesting details concerning his activity. According to this biography, he was nicknamed al-ahmar (the red one) due to his color when he oiled his body to deal with his leprosy. His followers, the Ishāqiyya, had their center in al-Madāʾin. Al-Nawbakhtī accused him of “mad exaggeration” in the admiration of ʿAlī to the level of deification. Al-Nawbakhtī, cited by al-ʿAskalānī, attributes the Kitāb al-ṣirāt to Ishāq. The most valuable information in this biography is the mysterious visit by the Qarmatian leader Ibn Abī ʿl-Fawāris to Ishāq’s house in Baghdad at Bāb al-Kūfa in 270/883. The conversation took place in secret and its details are unknown. The only information which Ishāq shares with his disciples is that Ibn Abī ʿl-Fawāris predicted exactly the process of his future execution by the authorities. The execution took place seven years later. See Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalānī, Lisān al-mīzān (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī liʾl-Matbūʿāt, 1987), vol. 1, pp. 370–373.
19 See, for example, ARM, p. 18. In this source, again, the Imām al-ʿAskarī chose Ibn Nuṣayr, and rejected Ishāq al-Aḥmar, to perform a miracle by making ‘Abbāsid troops disappear from Samarra.
a permanent circle in Samarra, led by his disciple Yahyā ibn Muʿīn al-Sāmarrī, who is known only from the writings of the sect. According to these sources, Yaḥyā had a group of believers (muʿminūn) to whom he taught the doctrines he had learnt from his catechism (masʿala, pl. masāʾil) with Ibn Nuṣayr.\footnote{Yahyā ibn Muʿīn’s questions to Ibn Nuṣayr and the latter’s answers are mentioned in several sources; they concern the appearance of the divinity in human form (MN, fol. 144a), the mystical meaning of the isrāʾ (the Prophet Muḥammad’s night journey, see MN, fol. 177a.; here a community of “believers” is mentioned), the mystical meaning of the martyrdom in Karbalāʾ (MA, p. 117; here Ḥāmid, the uncle of al-Khaṣṣāḥ, heard the tradition). According to the late Kitāb al-majmūʿ (BS), Ibn Nuṣayr taught Yahyā a special prayer to help in situations of disaster (BS, pp. 7–8). Massignon claimed that this catechism was compiled in a book (Massignon, “Esquisse”, item 13) that was probably lost.}

1.3 The creation of a community

The group of believers that surrounded Ibn Nuṣayr was probably larger than his ten known disciples and those he inherited from ʿUmar Ibn al-Furāt. These believers were probably the leaders of a larger group that considered Ibn Nuṣayr to be the legitimate successor of the vanished Imām. According to the earliest heresiographers, this group was named Numayriyya/Namīriyya, after the nisba (lineage) of Ibn Nuṣayr to the Banū Numayr.\footnote{Shīʿī source: Ḥasan ibn Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī, Firaq al-Shīʿa (Beirut: Dār al-Adwāʾ, 1984), pp. 93–94; Sunnī source: ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, al-Farq bayna ʾl-firaq (Beirut: Dār al-ʾĀfaq al-Jadida, 1987), p. 239.} According to Nuṣayrī sources, the members of this group called themselves muwahhidūn or ahl al-tawḥīd (monotheists), because they believed that only by combining exoteric (zāhir) and esoteric (bāṭin) knowledge, can complete monotheism be achieved.

The Nuṣayrī poet al-Muntajab al-ʿĀnī referred to the sect of Ibn Nuṣayr as Banū Numayr/Namīr and not as Numīriyya/Namīriyya,\footnote{DMA, fol. 150a, 151a, 159a, 165a–166b, 186b. See also in the later poem of Makzūn al-Sinjārī, who calls the sect ʾl Numayr/Namīr, DMS, p. 92.} a tribal appellation rather than a sectarian one. This possible connection between the tribe of Ibn Nuṣayr and his sect may indicate the identity of his mass followers. These powerful tribal supporters, less known than the leading group, could have enabled the survival of the Nuṣayrī sect in a hostile environment. Moreover, the link between the Banū Numayr and the Ḥamdānid Banū Taghlib could explain the later
migration of the sect to Aleppo in the time of al-Khaṣībī. This hypothesis is backed by the explicit mention of an alliance of the tribes Bakr and Taghlib in al-Muntajab al-ʿĀnī’s Dīwān:

And Hālit is a cousin of al-Khaṣībī the exalted one/
Tomorrow everybody will scatter his grace
A generous one in amounts of noble acts and kindness/
As a rain of grace for everyone who needs
And we are cousins and there is no difference between us/
As do Bakr and Taghlib mingle in the battlefield\(^\text{23}\)

1.4 Financing

There is no doubt that Ibn Nuṣayr’s sect could not be maintained without strong economic backing under the hostile Sunnī–ʿAbbāsid rule. One of the Nuṣayrī texts refers to a fund owned by the Imām in Samarra from accumulated presents of his admirers. According to this tradition, a group of believers received a monthly stipend from the Imām al-ʿAskarī until the ghayba (occultation).\(^\text{24}\) Nevertheless, it is not clear if it was the Nuṣayrīs who were paid in this case. Such support of the notorious Ibn Nuṣayr could have been harmful to the Imām. In general, it is not clear whether the Imāms really supported the mystical circles, morally or financially.

It seems more likely that the sect was maintained by the Banū ʿl-Furāt family.\(^\text{25}\) Details in al-Khaṣībī’s Hidāya al-kubrā, written a century later, support Massignon’s hypothesis, which is opposed by Claude Cahen, that the Shīʿī vizier of the Caliph backed Ibn Nuṣayr.\(^\text{26}\) According to the Hidāya, Aḥmad ibn al-Furāt, the secretary and relative of the vizier of the Caliph al-Muqtadir (d. 320/932), attended the circle of Ibn Nuṣayr.\(^\text{27}\) In Nuṣayrī sources, his relative ʿUmar ibn al-Furāt is considered to be the previous bāb of the Imām (prior to Ibn Nuṣayr).\(^\text{28}\) This sanctification of the Banū ʿl-Furāt by the Nuṣayrīs

\(^{23}\) DMA, fol. 148b.
\(^{24}\) FRR, p. 155.
\(^{27}\) HK, pp. 338.
\(^{28}\) Concerning ʿUmar ibn al-Furāt’s consideration as bāb, see, for example, MA, pp. 6–7; BS, p. 255.
demonstrates the tie between religion and economics. The financial backing of the Numayriyya/Namīriyya by the Banū 'l-Furāt was known to the Shīʿī community and documented by their contemporary heresiographers.29

The revelation of the Banū 'l-Furāt's secret activity by the authorities, their economic corruption as well as their personal rivalries with Sunnī administrators, caused their liquidation shortly after the period of Ibn Nuṣayr. Nevertheless, the Numayriyya/Namīriyya could survive economically because the leaders were middle-class intellectuals. The sophisticated studies of the muwahḥidūn demanded a certain level of education that could be obtained only by learned people. Halm claims that the majority of the sect's members were middle-class Kufan mawālī (clients, converted Muslims), but in the circle of Ibn Nuṣayr two secretaries (kātib, pl. kuttāb) are mentioned, a fact that indicates the sect included some upper-class mawālī as well.30

1.5  *The nidāʾ of Ibn Nuṣayr*

The end of Ibn Nuṣayr is not considered a tragic one for the Nuṣayrīs. His excommunication was the result of his own choice. According to the sect's earliest sources, Ibn Nuṣayr performed the *nidāʾ*, a Nuṣayrī term for a public declaration of the Īmām's divinity. This act was a ritual performed by mystics who achieved such a high level of spirituality that they permitted themselves to abolish *taqiyya* (concealment of beliefs) and reveal their secret knowledge.31 According to Nuṣayrī

---


30 See H. Halm, "Das Buch der Schatten: Die Mufaddal-Tradition der Ġulāt und die Ursprünge des Nusairirtums," *Der Islam* 58 (1981), p. 85. Halm's hypothesis concerning the majority of mawālī can be supported by the fact that, among the members of the namīriyya, other than Ibn Nuṣayr, there is only one member with an Arab nisba, that of Ḥasan ibn Mundhir al-Qaysī, "who was standing [as a guardian ?] outside the majlis"; see HK, p. 338.

31 This ritual recalls the Sūfī *shahāt* (sing. *shatha*), the ecstatic declaration of the mystic Sūfī as a result of his claimed unification with the deity. While the Sūfī declares that he has reached a degree of divinity, the *nidāʾ* is a declaration of the bāb concerning the divinity of the Īmām, which is the *maʾnā*. 
sources, this ritual had, in previous periods, been performed by well-known Ghulāt who believed they were bābs of the Imāms. They all knew the consequences of their acts, but were ready to face death. They believed that the Imām would curse them only as an act of taqiyya, an act of concealment in order to prevent persecutions. In other world, the Imām must excommunicate the extremist bābs or else the whole Shi‘ī community would be accused of heresy by the Sunnī authorities. The Sunnī authorities would then execute mystics whom they considered to be heretics. But according to the Nusayrī tradition, the curse of the Imām was a blessing. The mystics believed that their execution would not take place in reality, but only apparently in the eyes of their enemies.

1.6 Successor

The Namīriyya lived permanently under taqiyya. Their meetings as well as their doctrines were kept secret because of the dangerous situation under the ‘Abbāsid caliphate, and particularly in Iraq where there were serial executions of viziers, rebellions by frustrated groups such as the Zanj slaves, attacks by the Qarmatī extremist sect against citizens and pilgrims, and imprisonment of Shi‘ī leaders, including the Imām in Samarra. This long state of instability during the ninth century and the first half of the tenth century was the result of a general socio-religious and economic crisis in the ‘Abbāsid caliphate.

The taqiyya was so effective, that Shi‘ī authorities could not guess who Ibn Nuṣayr’s successor was. Al-Nawbakhtī (tenth century) gives three names of possible candidates, one of them from the Banū ‘l-Furāt, but none of them was the real successor. Nusayrī sources reveal that Ibn Nuṣayr’s choice was not economic, but religious. From his disciples, he chose the most gifted, Muḥammad ibn Jundab, and not the wealthy Ibn al-Furāt.

The secret appointment of Ibn Jundab is documented in Ibn Nuṣayr’s al-Akwār wa-‘l-adwār al-Nūrāniyya. According to this book, Ibn Jundab was called by his master and bowed in front of him. Ibn


33 The ritual of the nidāʾ is stressed in al-Jillī’s Risālat al-andiya; see RA, pp. 330–331. The ritual is sometimes called tarīh (declaration); see, for example, RR, p. 114.

Nusayr told him that the Imām had chosen him to keep his esoteric knowledge. Ibn Nusayr gave Muḥammad ibn Jundab permission to write a commentary to the “two books” (see Appendix 1). These concern the mystery of the akwār (the cycles of light) and the mystery of the mithāl wa’l-ṣūra (the spiritual form and the material form). According to Ibn Jundab’s account, the period of study for these books was one year and seven months.

1.7 The tradition of Ibn Nusayr’s superiority over his predecessors

We have no additional information concerning the activity of Ibn Nusayr. It seems that he died shortly after the last Imām’s ghayba. According to the Nuṣayrī tradition, Ibn Nusayr was the personification of both the ism and the bāb (the name of God and his gate), the first two and most important emanations of the divinity. According to al-Khašībi, he was called Abū Shu’ayb because “the meanings of the ism and the bāb were split in him” (tasha‘abat fihi ma‘ānī ‘l-ism wa’l-bāb). The explanation of his superiority over the preceding bābs has a historical aspect. Since the life of Ibn Nusayr coincided with the lives of two Imāms, as well as with the appearance and the occultation of the last Imām, he played two roles. According to a later tradition by al-Khašībi, in the time of the Imām ‘Ali al-Hādī, who was the ma‘nā, ‘Umar ibn al-Furāt was the ism and Ibn Nusayr the bāb. The three aspects of the divinity then performed a transition (siyāqa), and the Imām Ḥasan al-‘Askari became the ma‘nā, Ibn Nusayr the personification of the ism, and the twelfth and last Imām, Muḥammad al-Mahdī, was the bāb. Illustration of al-Khašībi’s siyāqa:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bāb</th>
<th>Ism</th>
<th>ma‘nā</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muḥammad al-Mahdī</td>
<td>Ibn Nusayr</td>
<td>Ḥasan al-‘Askari</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

35 AAN, p. 58.
36 I thank Professor Paul Fenton for proposing this exact translation of the terms mithāl and ṣūra.
37 AAN, p. 205. Muḥammad ibn Jundab is sanctified as the one authorized to give his opinion (ra‘y) about Ibn Nuṣayr’s doctrines (BS, p. 27 in chapter 11 of the Kitāb al-majmū’).
38 FRR, p. 111. See also ARM, pp. 10–11.
39 RR, p. 55.
After what they believed to have been the last personification of the deity, the Nuṣayris were left without any charismatic leader, and the sect was excommunicated by the Shīʿī community. Ishāq al-Almar left the group to create a rival sect, the Ishāqiyya.40 At this moment of crisis Ishāq’s act probably weakened the sect severely. The Nuṣayris have cursed the Ishāqiyya in their writings ever since.

1.8 Literature

From the Nuṣayri sources it can be concluded that Ibn Nuṣayr was more a teacher than a writer. Other than his two most important works, his Kitāb al-akwār wa-ʾl-adwār al-Nūrāniyya and the Kitāb al-mithāl wa-ʾl-ṣūra (see Appendix 1), it seems that the books that were lost were few in number. There are some citations of two other books entitled al-Kāfī liʾl-dīd al-munāfī41 and Kitāb al-mawārid,42 both concerning the taʿlīq (initiation to the mystical circle of the sect). A rare citation from a poem he wrote may indicate that he was also writing poetry.43

1.9 Transition period

The period that followed that of Ibn Nuṣayr was characterized by the leadership of two intellectual mystics who lacked Ibn Nuṣayr’s charisma: Muhammad ibn Jundab and his successor ʿAbdallāh al-Jannān al-Junbulānī. Since in their period, the end of the ninth century, the sect seems to have been reduced to a small number of followers follow-

40 Concerning the Ishāqiyya, see H. Halm, “Das Buch der Schatten: Die Mufaddal-Tradition der Gulat und die Ursprünge des Nusairiertums,” Der Islam 55 (1977), pp. 245–253; al-Ghuntasiyya fi ʾl-Islām, pp. 195–196. Halm’s account of their history since the tenth century is based merely on al-Ṭawīl’s Taʾrīkh (TA). This source is quite problematic. This book uses for the first time an original source belonging to the Ishāqiyya, the Adāb ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib (AAM, see Appendix 1), which gives names of three members of his majlis: al-Hasan ibn Ḥammād and Mudrik ibn Yazid “the Armenian”, both unknown, who were probably his main followers, and the mystic Muhammad ibn ʿAbdallāh ibn Mihrān “the Persian” from Kufa, who was one of his teachers; see AAM, p. 262. Concerning Muḥammad ʿAbdallāh ibn Mihrān, see Halm, “Das Buch der Schatten”, pp. 237, 243–245. Here again, as in the above-mentioned list of Ibn Nuṣayr’s disciples, the origin of this person supports Halm’s hypothesis concerning the majority of mawālī among the Ghulat sects.
41 See: HIF, pp. 53, 105, 110, 112.
42 Ibid., pp. 49, 53. Another book, Aqrab al-asānīd, attributed to Ibn Nuṣayr, mentioned only once in Kitāb ʾidāḥ al-misbāḥ (Appendix 1, item 11), is a problematic source. See IM, p. 272; the citation deals with the prohibition of wine.
43 MN, fol. 100a in the bottom.
ing its excommunication, information concerning their background is lacking. It is possible that Ibn Jundab had a very high position in his small community, a fact that can be drawn from his sanctification in later texts. In those documents, he is seen as the last manifestation of the yatim al-akbar, the head of the five aytām (entities emanating from the bāb, charged with the creation of the universe).\textsuperscript{44}

Halm associates al-Jannān with the Persian influence that characterizes the Nuṣayrī religion.\textsuperscript{45} However, this influence is already present in Ibn Nuṣayr’s writings. Moreover, only his nickname al-zāhid al-Fārisī (the Persian ascetic) indicates al-Jannān’s Persian influence. His only available book, the Kitāb īdāh al-misbāh (see Appendix 1) contains no trace of Persian doctrines. However, al-Jannān, who lived in Junbulā’, a village between Kufa and Wasit,\textsuperscript{46} had a tremendous role in the survival of the sect. He had some connection with members of a local Shī‘i family, the sons of a certain Ḥamdān al-Junbulānī, who had personal ties with the eleventh Imām. From Ḥamdān’s family arose the most gifted leader in the history of the Nuṣayrī sect: al-Ḥusayn al-Khaṣībī.

2. \textit{Al-Ḥusayn ibn Ḥamdān al-Khaṣībī: the founder of the sect}\textsuperscript{47}

Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Ḥusayn ibn Ḥamdān al-Khaṣībī was born in Junbulā’ in the second half of the ninth century.\textsuperscript{48} He was nicknamed al-Khaṣībī after his grandfather, al-Khaṣīb.\textsuperscript{49}

\textsuperscript{44} Ibn Jundab, as the yatim al-akbar, is seen as the personification of al-Miqdād, the main supporter of Ḥālim ibn Abī Ṭālib; see, for example DMA, fol. 148b; TDN, p. 209. He is also called yatim al-waqt wa-l-sā‘a (unique of the time and the hour), a messianic title; see RMU, p. 178.

\textsuperscript{45} Halm, ibid., pp. 257–258.

\textsuperscript{46} Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, \textit{Mujam al-buldān} (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʻIlmiyya, 1990), vol. 2, p. 195. It seems that the Nuṣayrī cell in this region still existed in Yāqūt’s time (the end of the twelfth or the beginning of the thirteenth century) in the village of Shurtā, between Basra and Wasit; see ibid., vol. 3, p. 379.

\textsuperscript{47} The following biography is based on my article, with some corrections and additions: Y. Friedman, “Al-Ḥusayn ibn Ḥamdān al-Khaṣībī: A historical biography of the founder of the Nuṣayrī-ʻAlawīte sect”, \textit{Studia Islamica} 93 (2001), pp. 91–112. In some imprints and catalogues al-Khaṣībī is vocalized as al-Khusaybi, a mistake corrected by Massignon and Halm.

\textsuperscript{48} The dating of al-Khaṣībī’s birth in 260/873 is by al-Tawīl (TA, p. 259), who aims to connect this to the death of the Imām al-ʻAskārī in the same year and thus is not reliable.

\textsuperscript{49} Muhammad al-ʻĀmilī, \textit{A’yān al-Shī‘a} (Damascus: Maṭba‘at al-Itqān, 1947), vol. 15, pp. 345–346.
Hamdan, al-Khasibi’s father was a transmitter of Shi’i traditions, mostly connected with the sīra (biography) of the Prophet Muḥammad. His uncle Ibrāhīm ibn al-Khasib was a murābit of the Imām al-ʿAskari. Another uncle, Aḥmad ibn al-Khasib was one of the seventy faithful who went to Samarra to congratulate al-ʿAskarī on the birth of his son, the mahdī. Like his brother Hamdān, he seems to have excelled in sīra literature.

Al-Khasibī was raised in a Shī’i family that was close to the Imām and was thus exposed to religious experiences from an early age. In the Hidāya, he states that already in 273/886 he prayed with the congregation of the mosque in western Medina in which the Prophet Muḥammad and his cousin ‘Alī had prayed together. In another place in his book, he states that he performed the ḥajj (the pilgrimage in the holy months in 282/895, and before that had ascended Mount Abū Qubays, where he saw the Prophet’s footprints.

Al-Khasibī inhabited a broad spiritual world. His writings reveal a man with a rich command of Arabic, learned in the religious sciences (especially the Qur’ān, exegesis and Ḥadīth) and a talented poet equally knowledgeable about jāhilī (pre-Islamic) and Islamic poetry.

2.1 His first mystical guidance

While still young, his education took a radical turn when he met ʿAbdallāh al-Jannān, a fellow townsman, probably at the instigation of his uncle Aḥmad. Al-Jannān introduced him to the doctrine of Ibn Nuṣayr, as he received it from his teacher Muḥammad ibn Jundab. Thus

---

50 HK, pp. 54, 59, 60, 67, 69, 151–153, 159.
51 Ibid., p. 67. Here a translation error in my article is corrected: the murābit was the devoted assistant of the Imām, or the person who was in charge of tying his horse. See E. W. Lane, Arabic-English Lexicon (Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1867), vol. 1/3, pp. 1013–1014.
53 HK, p. 121.
54 Ibid., pp. 67–68.
55 For examples of quotations of jāhilī poetry in his book, see ibid., pp. 110, 111, 197; for Islamic poetry, see pp. 106–107, 406.
56 A connection between al-Khasibī’s uncle, Aḥmad, and al-Jannān is hinted at by their both appearing among the representatives of Junbulā’ in the group of 70 disciples who traveled to Samarra. Moreover, the Risālat ikhtilāf al-ʿalamayn gives an explicit account of the handing over of al-Khasibī in his childhood, by his uncle Aḥmad and his father Hamdān, to al-Jannān in order to initiate him into esoteric knowledge. See RIA, p. 300. Concerning this source, see Appendix 1, item 11.
the major Nuṣayrī isnād (chain of transmitters) was created. Although we find many isnāds passing through other Ghulāt, the main transmission of the mystical traditions was through the leaders of the sect:

Ibn Nuṣayr > Muḥammad ibn Jundab > 'Abdallāh al-Jannān > al-Ḥusayn al-Khašībī.57

Al-Jannān’s influence on al-Khašībī was decisive. Al-Khašībī decided to follow in his teacher’s footsteps, in the knowledge that this was not the path of the majority of Shiʿīs. This guidance was more than a teaching; it was an initiation to esoterical knowledge. Al-Khašībī’s relationship with al-Jannān was considered an adoption (akhḍh al-ubūwwa) and from now on, al-Khašībī was his “son” (walad), i.e. his particular disciple. Their relationship became the pattern for the attachment between Nuṣayrī shaykhs and their disciples in the future.58

It seems that al-Jannān’s death towards the end of the ninth century59 ended al-Khašībī’s initiation into the doctrines of the Numayriyya/Namīriyya. In the absence of a guide, al-Khašībī searched for someone else who would be capable of continuing his study of Ibn Nuṣayr’s mystical teachings. The members of the sect were so few, that there are no other accounts any meetings between al-Khašībī and a member of the Numayriyya/Namīriyya.

2.2 His second mystical guidance

It was only in 314/926 that al-Khašībī found an old mystic, named ‘Alī ibn Aḥmad, who lived in Ṭurbāʾ, a village near Karbala, and who claimed he was a direct disciple of Ibn Nuṣayr. According to a Nuṣayrī tradition, their meeting took place in the old shaykh’s garden, near the ‘Alqami, a river that branches from the Euphrates, on 10 Muḥarram. ‘Alī revealed to al-Khašībī the mystical meaning (bāṭin) of that day, the day of ‘āshūrā’. It is stated that 150 of the mystic’s pupils also participated in this meeting. ‘Alī ibn Aḥmad told al-Khašībī that in this place he met the two Imāms ‘Ali al-Hādī and Ḥasan al-‘Askari. They each gave ‘Alī ibn Aḥmad 17 date kernels and appointed him as

57 See, for example, BS, p. 15.
58 RIA, p. 297. Their connection was considered an “attachment” (ittiṣāl); see the discussion of initiation in Chapter 3.
59 According to TA, p. 258, al-Jannān died in 287/900, but no references are given.
safīr (representative) in Ṭurbā’. Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī gave him 35 dates, which he distributed to his 34 disciples. Then, according to ʿAli ibn Ahmad, Ishāq al-Aḥmar paid him a visit to ask for the remaining date, but the Imām told him to save it for Ibn Nuṣayr whom he named the “Gateway to God and Leader of the Faithful” (bāb Allāh wa-wali al-muʾminin).

This story repeats the symbolic motifs of the dates given by the Imām to his chosen followers as well as Ishāq’s attempt to steal Ibn Nuṣayr’s blessing. The importance of this tradition in this context is the transmission of esoteric knowledge to al-Khaṣībī, who from now on became the leader of the sect. The significance of the number 17 is dealt with in Chapter 2.

2.3 Becoming a leader

Al-Khaṣībī, equipped by Imāmī as well as mystical knowledge, was ready to lead the Numayriyya/Namīriyya. He did not regard himself as the leader of a Shiʿī splinter group, but rather as the guide of the community that followed the true path of the Shiʿa in accordance with the will of the Imām and his bāb, Ibn Nuṣayr. Convinced of his own righteousness, al-Khaṣībī refers in his poems to his disciples as “the true Shiʿa” (Shīʿat al-haqq). Moreover, from the Nuṣayrī tradition we learn that as a result of his mystical studies, al-Khaṣībī saw himself as a mediator between the human world of his disciples and the spiritual world. His poems are filled with religious enthusiasm. In a certain section of his Qasīda al-ghadīriyya, he describes a mystical experience of his, referring to himself in the third person:

All these are knowledge, grasping and understanding as well as traditions of a skilful transmitter /
Who transmitted the truth concerning the zeal to God [al-ghulūw ilā Allāh] not from his enemies [addād sing. didd] and people of perdition
He is one who believes in the Holy Salmān Bahman [salsālī muqaddas bahmani] who loves the tiger [namir, a clear reference to

60 MA, pp. 126–131.
61 See, for example, MA, p. 113. The subject of the self-definition of the Nuṣayrīs is emphasised in Chapter 4.
62 Concerning this interesting positive use of the term ghulūw, see Chapter 2.
Ibn Nuṣayr al-Numayrī/Namīrī]
Your Junbulānī is a descendant of Khāṣīb /
Worshipper of twelve moons [the Imāms]
His father [teacher, al-Jannān] was fed with the most secret of secrets /
From the exegesis of the Exegete [ʿAli or his last descendant Imām]
And [al-Khāṣībī] rose up to the hijāb [veil], the hijāb of God /
Until he cast anchor in the sea of hearts
And was watered with the fine wine of Salsal [esoteric epithet of Salmān al-Fārisī] /
And he was given to drink by the Lord of Sufficient Truth
And he swore to give the shortcomers [the Imāmī Shīʿīs] to drink /
In the name of the slaughterer, the drink of the slaughtered [the martyr al-Husayn]
And he will be seen by anyone who gazes upon him clearly /
While remains without being present [doctrine of Docetism]
And the glorious grandson of Khāṣīb will stand /
At the head of the holy ones in the impressive place [hint to al-Khāṣībī’s leadership]
When he tells those who wandered and strayed [again, hint at non-mystical Shīʿīs] /
About Abū Shabbir [al-Ḥusayn or his father ‘Ali] and the light of Shabīr
The verses of the qasīda show that al-Khāṣībī underwent a mystical experience that convinced him that he was right and caused him to feel that a higher being (the divine Salmān or his envoys had appointed him as leader of his community. Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad ibn Shu’ba al-Ḥarrānī, one of al-Khāṣībī’s followers, cites in his Risālat ikhtilāf al-ʿālamayn (see Appendix 1) other lines from the Dīwān al-Khāṣībī, describing mystical elevations, in order to prove his sanctity.

63 Concerning the use of this term for the non-mystic Shīʿīs, see Chapter 3. See also Bar-Asher and Kofsky, The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī Religion, p. 122, note 43.
64 Abū Shabbir is al-Ḥusayn’s epithet in a lament in his memory sung at Karbala; see al-Majlī, Biḥār al-anwār, vol. 42, p. 241. Abū Shabbir might be his father ‘Ali, as Shabbir and Shabīr are nicknames of his sons Hasan and Husayn. According to Shiʿī tradition, the two were given the same nicknames as Aaron’s sons (Hebrew, Shefer and Shafīr) before these names were translated into Arabic as Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. See M. Bar-Asher, “On the place of Jews and Judaism in the early Shiʿī religious literature” (in Hebrew), Peʾāmin 61 (1994), p. 29.
65 DKH, fol. 11 a, b lines 54–64. Compare with the almost identical version in MA, p. 59, the same lines.
66 The relationship between al-Khāṣībī and the ism/hijāb is hinted at in the first chapter of Kitāb al-majmūʿ; see BS, p. 9. The hijāb saved al-Khaṣībī from prison.
67 RIA, pp. 294, 302.
2.4 Open propaganda

It is possible that al-Khaṣībī, who wanted to follow Ibn Nuṣayr’s doctrine, decided to perform the ritual of nidāʾ and to sacrifice himself by revealing the mystical secret doctrines. According to the sect’s tradition, he began to spread his message via open propaganda, and thus placed himself and his disciples in severe danger. The center of the Muslim empire, Iraq, was extremely unstable, and this instability reached its height at the beginning of the tenth century. Yet even the execution of the Sūfī mystic Hallāj, the widespread arrests initiated by the authorities in Baghdad and the liquidation of those suspected of aiding the Qarmaṭīan rebels, were not enough to deter al-Khaṣībī.68

It would seem that the Nuṣayrī tradition, according to which the governor of Baghdad imprisoned al-Khaṣībī for openly preaching his message, can be dated to the period 314–333/926–945 (between his meeting with the old mystic in Ṭurbāʾ and the domination of the Buyids in Baghdad).69 This imprisonment, which is echoed through the Dīwān of al-Khaṣībī, ended with a mysterious escape. According to a Nuṣayrī tradition:

When he had the chance he ran away and spread among his disciples that Jesus had rescued him, and that he [Jesus] was [the reincarnation of the Prophet] Muḥammad and of the eleven sons of Muḥammad’s daughter [i.e. the Imāms descended from Fāṭima].70

---


69 Brockelmann assumed that al-Khaṣībī did not escape but was released when the Ḥamdānids conquered Baghdad for a short period. This mistake derives from al-Ṭawīl’s account in his Ṭāʾrīkh al-Alawīyyīn, according to which al-Ḥusayn ibn Ḥamdān al-Ṭaghlibī (not al-Khaṣībī!) released his father Ḥamdān from his imprisonment in Baghdad in 283/896. This error stems from the confusion between the two al-Ḥusayn ibn Ḥamdāns, the Ḥamdānid and the Nuṣayrī, as well as between the Ṭaghlibī father who was imprisoned and his son. See TA, pp. 306–307; C. Brockelmann, Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur (Leiden: Brill, 1937–1942), vol. 4, p. 326.

70 BS, p. 16. The hijāb himself saved al-Khaṣībī according to his Dīwān; see DKH, fol. 113b. One should take care not to identify this description with a similar story about the imprisonment of Ḥamdān Qarmaṭ, leader of the Qarmaṭīan sect. This mistake repeats itself among scholars; see, for example, M. Moosa, Extremist Shiites: The Ghulāt Sects (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1980), pp. 262–266, 504 note 56.
It would seem, then, that the cause of al-Khašībī’s imprisonment was his public preaching of his mystical beliefs, which were seen as heretical by Muslim authorities.

2.5 Immigration to Syria and creation of a new community

Al-Khašībī’s persecution and imprisonment on one hand, and his attraction to Jesus on the other, were probably the reasons for his decision to move to al-Shām (Greater Syria, including Jerusalem; henceforth Syria), where he acted with great circumspection, having learnt his lesson in Baghdad. In one poem he curses Syria and blesses Kūfā, claiming that it was there that the Prophet Muḥammad ascended to heaven, as opposed to the well-known tradition of the miʿrāj from Jerusalem.71 This shows that the Iraqi, of foreign origin and outlandish faith, was confronted by not a few difficulties. Syria also represented the Umayyads in Muslim memory, a dynasty cursed by all the Shi‘īs. The Nuṣayrī sources indicate that al-Khašībī succeeded in establishing a small community in the city of Ḥarrān.72

71 DKh, fol. 47b–49a; MA, p. 177. According to the Muslim tradition, the ascension (miʿrāj) of the Prophet Muḥammad to heaven, when he met all the prophets and received his revelation, took place after his nocturnal voyage (isrā) to the al-Aqṣā Mosque. Later commentators explained that this mosque was situated in Jerusalem. See B. Schricke and J. Horovitz, “miʿrāj”, EI² VII (1993), pp. 99–102. Nevertheless, although most of the Shi‘ī traditions follow this orthodox version, there is an account in traditional Imāmī literature in which the Prophet Muḥammad was ordered by the angel Gabriel to stop in the middle of his journey to al-Aqṣā at Kūfā and pray in [the place where there will be] the mosque of the town; see al-Majlisi, Bihār al-anwār, vol. 18, p. 384.

According to another version, which is similar to that appearing in al-Khašībī’s poem, after arriving at al-Aqṣā Mosque in Bayt al-Maqdis (Jerusalem) the Prophet was asked by Gabriel to continue his journey to al-Kūfā in order to pray where “Adam and all the prophets prayed”. Then the Prophet experiences the miʿrāj from there; see ibid., p. 308. It is interesting in this context to find another extraordinary tradition where the Imām Jaʿfar claims that al-Masjid al-Aqṣā is in heaven. When he is asked about the mosque in Jerusalem, he replies that the mosque of Kūfā is more important; see ibid., p. 385.

72 The city of Ḥarrān in northern Syria (southern Turkey today) was a center for philosophers and astronomers. It was inhabited by the Sabaeans sect as well as Shi‘īs. Dussaud claimed that the Sabaeans had great influence on the Nuṣayrīs, a difficult theory to prove; see Dussaud, Histoire et religion des Nosairīs, pp. 20, 44, 74. Concerning Ḥarrān in the medieval period, see Yaḥūṭ, Muʿjam al-Buldān, vol. 2, pp. 271–273. Yaḥūṭ’s comment that there is another village named Ḥarrān near Aleppo (wa-Ḥarrān aydan min qurā Ḥalab) is worthy of note. The Nuṣayrīs may already have settled near Aleppo at this stage, and this may be one of the reasons for al-Khašībī’s immigration to this city later. See also Fehervari, “Ḥarrān”, EI² (III (1971), pp. 227–230.
According to Nušayrī tradition, the members of this community were called *muwahhidūn* (monotheists) and they numbered 51, divided into 17 Iraqis, 17 Syrians and 17 “concealed and situated on the gate of the town”. The choice of the numbers 17 and 51 was not a coincidence. Al-Khasībī seems to have followed the mystical message of the symbolic 17 dates he was given by the old mystic ʿAlī al-Ṭurbaʿī. Moreover, this number has a special significance in Islam in general and in Nušayrī theology in particular. All Muslims (including the Nušayrīs are obliged to complete a total of 17 *rakāt* (sing. *rakā*, cycles of standing, sitting and prostrating) during the day’s prayers and 17 Ramadān is the day of the greatest victory of the Prophet Muhammad in Badr (2/624). In Nušayrī theology, there are 17 saints at the level of prophets (*munabbāʿūn*) and 51 personifications (*shakhs*, pl. *ashkhās*) of the optional prayers (*nāfīla*, pl. *nawāafil*). In this light, the choice of 17 March before the Persian New Year as the celebration of Ibn Nušayr in the Nušayrī calendar is not surprising.

Among the 51 members of the sect in Harrān were the future leaders of the community after al-Khasībī: Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Jilī and ʿAlī ibn ʿĪsā al-Jisrī.

The poet Abū ʿl-Fadl Muḥammad ibn al-Husayn al-Muntajab al-ʿĀnī, who was a member of the sect, praises the sect, calling them “Banū Numayr/Namīr who guard their religion in secret”. In his *Dīwān*,

---

73 See sūra 13 (**al-musāfira**) of Kitāb al-majmūʿ, *BS*, p. 29 and the same chapter at ibid., p. 17.
74 *KBS*, p. 255; *KHC*, fol. 11a, 14b-15a. See al-Khasībī’s explanations to 17 *munabbāʿūn* and 51 *ashkhās* in ibid., pp. 268, 270 and in *RR*, p. 71. See also the number of the *munabbāʿūn* in *TDN*, p. 215 question 69. The number of the prophets is 17 according to *KMA*, p. 235.
75 In his research concerning Jābir ibn Ḥayyān, Paul Kraus explains other significances of the number 17. Jābir ibn Ḥayyān considered the number 17 the basis of his theory of the balance of all the components of the cosmos in the material world. His theory was based on the writings of Greek philosophers, who gave a symbolic significance to the 17 consonants existing in classical Greek. In addition, Kraus refers to an Ismāʿīlī tradition that ʿAlī prayed 51 times each day, as well as to other examples of the mystical significance of this number. See P. Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān: Contribution à l’histoire des idées scientifiques dans l’Islam* (Hildesheim/Zurich/New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1989), vol. 2, pp. 187–223. Other mystical meanings of the numbers 17 and 51 can be found in A. Schimmel, *The Mystery of Numbers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 219–221.
76 *BS*, p. 17.
77 *DMA*, fol. 124b. Brockelmann determined the date of his death as 400/1009 without noting his references; see C. Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur* (Leiden: Brill, 1898), vol. 4, p. 327 (item 13).
al-Muntajab mentions another member of the Harrān community, a certain Hālit nicknamed *rabb al-ʿulūm* (master of religious sciences), who is identified as the “brother” of Jannān, and both are “sons” (i.e. disciples) of Ibn Jundad. As already noted, al-Muntajab refers to the sect as the tribe of Numayr/Namīr.

It is not clear whether it was an actual branch of the Arab Numayr tribe or a new “religious tribe”, such as the one the Prophet Muhammad tried to create at the dawn of Islam. The sect is described in many Nuṣayrī sources as a religious brotherhood, as is shown in Chapter 3. To sum up, al-Khaṣibī created in Harrān the first secret cell for his sect, which became an important center for the development of the Nuṣayrī theology.

2.6 *The return to Iraq*

Circumstances in Baghdad changed in 334/945, when the Persian–Shīʿī Buyid dynasty seized power. The new government provided an opportunity for al-Khaṣibī to return to Iraq. He returned to Ṭurbāʾ in 336/947 to visit the *muwahhidūn*. The old Shaykh ʿAlī had passed away, and 140 of his disciples were left. It is important to mention that a group of Ghulāt, whose beliefs were similar to those of the Nuṣayrīs, was arrested in Baghdad in 340/951, after the death of their leader al-Shalmaghānī. They addressed the Buyid ruler Muʿizz al-Dawla in the simple words: “We are the supporters of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib” and were released. This incident could indicate the intolerance towards Ghulāt sects under the Buyid regime as well as their encouragement

---

78 Ibid., fol. 124b, 155b, 247b.
80 MA, p. 131.
81 Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fi ‘l-taʾrīkh*, vol. 7, p. 34. Ibn al-Athīr’s assumption that al-Shalmaghānī’s doctrine is similar to that of the Nuṣayris and that he may have been one of them may be based on sources or information that are unavailable today. It is alluded to in one medieval source of the sect where there is a citation from a poem of al-Shalmaghānī concerning the impossibility of the maʿnā’s incarnation (*hulūl*); see ARM, p. 8.
of orthodox Imâmi Shî‘ism. It proves that al-Khâṣibî had to conceal his mystical activity in order to survive.

2.7 Al-Khâṣibî’s taqiyya: posing as an Imâmi scholar

Despite his activity among the muwahhidûn, surprisingly enough al-Khâṣibî appears in Shî‘î literature as an important transmitter of traditions. Shî‘î traditions on his authority were recorded in the voluminous canonical Bihâr al-anwâr composed by Muhammad Bâqîr al-Majîsî (d. 1267/1700). Traditions in which al-Khâṣibî appears in the isnâd deal, among other issues, with the transfer of divine light from one Imâm to another,82 the miraculous birth of the twelfth and last Imâm,83 and the importance of silence during prayer.84 Traditions in which he is the main tradent, i.e. the last in the isnâd before the matn (the content), include the tale of the journey of 70 disciples to Samarra to congratulate the Imâm Ḥasan al-‘Askarî on the birth of his son, the mahdî,85 and the date of al-‘Askarî’s death.86 Al-Khâṣibî’s Kitâb al-hidâya (see Appendix 1) is mentioned in the list of books “around which the millstones of the Shî‘a turn” and “there is no Shî‘ household from which they are absent”.87 In another volume, “the book of al-Husayn ibn Ḥamdân” is described by al-Majîsî as a praise-of-Imâms work, but here he adds that a number of biographers rejected it as unreliable (either the book or al-Khâṣibî himself).88

Al-Khâṣibî himself relates in his book that, during this period of the crystallization of the Imâmî Shî‘a, he supported the Twelver view of the succession to the Imâm. In a house in East Baghdad, in ‘Askar al-Mahdî, he tried through logic and analogy to prove to supporters of Ja‘far that the only legitimate Imâm after al-‘Askarî was his son Muḥammad, and not Ja‘far, the Imâm’s brother.89 Al-Khâṣibî also heard a tradition from Yaḥyâ ibn Muḥammad al-Kharqî (or al-Barqî)

---

82 Al-Majîsî, Bihâr, vol. 15, p. 4.
84 Ibid., vol. 82, p. 27.
85 Ibid., vol. 78, pp. 395–397.
86 Ibid., vol. 50, p. 335.
87 Ibid., vol. 102, pp. 37, 102.
88 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 39.
in east Baghdad on al-Khaṭṭābīn (or al-Haṭṭābīn, the district of the woodcutters, probably the right spelling) in Qatī’at Mālik. A certain Abū ‘l-Ṭayyib Ahmad ibn Abī ‘l-Ḥasan heard a tradition from al-Khaṣībī in his house (it is unclear if it is that of Abū ‘l-Ṭayyib or al-Khaṣībī) in the Bāb al-Kūfa road in Baghdad.

In 344/956, al-Khaṣībī arrived at Kufa where he gave an ijāza (teaching permit) to Hārūn ibn Mūsā al-Tālakbarī (d. 385/995), one of the most reliable and important of Shi‘ī scholars. Another respected Shi‘ī of Kufa, Abū ‘l-‘Abbās ibn ‘Uqda, transmitted traditions from al-Khaṣībī and praised him.

However, in later Shi‘ī literature al-Khaṣībī is considered less reliable. Al-Najāshī (d. 450/1058) in his biographical dictionary claims that al-Khaṣībī is not only an unreliable tradent, but also of corrupted theology (fadīd al-madhhab). This opinion was also shared by the sixteenth/seventeenth-century Mirza Muḥammad al-Astarābādī, who added that al-Khaṣībī was “a liar with a damned doctrine who should be disregarded” (kadhdhāb šāhib maqāl mal‘ūn lā yultaftatu ‘ilayhi).

The most severe accusations appear in Lisān al-mīzān by the Sunnī Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (d. 852/1449). Here al-‘Asqalānī cites a certain Shi‘ī named Ibn al-Najāshī (son of the above-mentioned al-Najāshī?), as saying of al-Khaṣībī:

He mixed [khallata, i.e. esoteric and exoteric traditions] and composed [books] of the Nuṣayrī religion and brought evidence for them. He [Ibn al-Najāshī] said: he [al-Khaṣībī] believed in the transmigration of the soul and the incarnation of the deity.}

---

90 See the first version in HK, pp. 328–331 and the second in ARM, pp. 18–19.
91 MA, p. 133.
95 Al-Astarābādī, Manhaj, p. 112.
This information, which is absent in other Shi‘i sources, was probably censored by orthodox writers in order to clear al-Khaṣībī of these harsh accusations. Nevertheless, al-ʿAsqalānī’s purpose was to embarrass his Shi‘i rivals by proving that they considered a ghāli an orthodox authority. 97 Nevertheless, the mystical activity of al-Khaṣībī was probably known to some medieval Imāmī scholars. In his Risālat ikhtilāf al-ʿālamayn, Abū ʿAbdollāh Muḥammad ibn Shuʿba al-Ḥarrānī (eleventh century) wrote that his master al-Jillī told him that the mystical knowledge of al-Khaṣībī belonged among the ahl al-taqṣīr (deficient Shi‘īs, i.e. Imāmī scholars). 98

Whether he was considered reliable or not, it can be concluded that al-Khaṣībī succeeded in constructing a new image for himself in Baghdad, the image of a learned Imāmī Twelver Shi‘ī. However, we should not jump to the conclusion that al-Khaṣībī abandoned his secret activity. Rather, his image should be seen as a useful cover for his activity (doubtless clandestine), intended to establish the muwahḥidūn sect, which he considered the right path of the Shi‘a. In other words, he adopted the Shi‘ī principle of taqiyya, according to which in time of danger the believer must keep his faith secret, while outwardly behaving as if he were one of his opponents. 99

2.8 Establishing the Iraqi center

Together with this orthodox Shi‘ī activity, al-Khaṣībī continued to nurture his community. The new atmosphere enabled him to become active in Baghdad once more, and he appointed his disciple ʿAlī ibn ʿĪsā al-Jisrī as head of the muwahḥidūn community there. The reason for the nickname “al-Jisrī” (who came from the bridge) is unknown. According to a popular tradition, ʿAlī ibn ʿĪsā was the inspector of the bridges of Baghdad. 100 Al-Khaṣībī’s teachings imparted to al-Jisrī were

97 The claims of al-ʿAsqalānī concerning al-Khaṣībī were rejected by the modern Shi‘ī scholar Muḥammad al-Amin al-ʿĀmili. In his Aʿyān al-Shī‘a al-ʿĀmili strongly condemned al-ʿAsqalānī for what he considered fabricated accusations. See Muḥammad al-Amin al-ʿĀmili, Aʿyān al-Shī‘a, vol. 15, pp. 347–348. This polemical argument is extraordinarily timeless: a Sunnī scholar from the fifteenth century uses a Shi‘ī source from the eleventh century. Then a Shi‘ī scholar from the twentieth century attacks his views, using a contradictory Shi‘ī source from the tenth century.

98 RIA, pp. 298–299.

99 See R. Strothmann, “Taqiyya”, EI (4) pp. 628–629. The subject of taqiyya (prudence) and kitmān (concealment) is dealt with in Chapter 2.

100 This nickname in the Risālat al-tawḥīd (see Appendix 1, item 27) is not explained;
recorded in the latter’s *Risālat al-tawḥīd*. In this epistle, al-Khašībi explained to him that the last manifestation of the deity included the *bāb* Ibn Nuṣayr and the Imām Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, who was the *ism*.101

### 2.9 The connection with the Buyids

With the decline of the Banū ʿl-Furāt in the first half of the tenth century, al-Khašībi was in need of a new source of funding for the sect. There are indications that the Nuṣayris were supported by the Buyid ʿIzz al-Dawla Bakhtiyār (d. 368/978), who was appointed after his father’s death in 357/967 to succeed him as the amīr (military commander) of Iraq. As early as 344/955, due to his father’s illness, he was appointed ruler of Baghdad. Because of his weakness as a leader, he seems to have backed several Shiʿī groups in order to gain their support.102 Two Nuṣayrī documents from this period show great gratitude to Bakhtiyār. The first is an epistle written by al-Khašībi entitled *Rāst bāsh* (Persian, Be righteous!). The combination of a Persian title with Arabic content is explained by the fact that this epistle was dedicated to the Daylamite leader Bakhtiyār but was also copied for other members of the sect for study purposes.103 The members of the sect, who did not understand the meaning of this title, corrupted it to quasi-Arabic, *Raʾs bāsh*, a title which the Nuṣayris used to praise ʿIzz al-Dawla Bakhtiyār, as evinced by the poet al-Muntajab’s panegyric dedicated to him.104

---

101 *RT*, fol. 44a.
103 The account of al-Ṭawīl that the title *Rāst bāsh* belonged to the greater Buyid leader, Bakhtiyār’s brother ʿAḍud al-Dawla, is baseless and meant to glorify al-Khašībi. See *TA*, p. 260.
104 The full name as it appears in the *Dīwān* of Muntajab is Rāʾs Bāsh ʿIzz al-Dawla Bakhtiyār ibn Maḥṣūr Shihāb al-Dīn ibn Malik [the son of King of] al-Daylam walad [the son, i.e. disciple of] Sayyidinā [our master] Abū ʿAbdallāh al-Khašībī; see *DMA*, fol. 167b, 191a. Bakhtiyār is also called Rāʾs Bāsh in a panegyric by the Nuṣārī Shaykh al-Suwayrī (fourteenth century, see below); see *SUR.*, fol. 216a–217b.
The details concerning these contacts with the Buyid dynasty are still vague. We can assume that they were on religio-economic rather than political grounds. As we will see later, the Nuṣayrīs praised the two Shīʿī rulers, the Buyid Bakhtiyār as well as the Hamdanid Sayf al-Dawla, regardless of their political rivalries.

2.10 The successor in Iraq

Before al-Khaṣībī left Iraq for the last time, he left a kind of will to al-Jisrī. It is recorded in the last part of the Risālat al-tawḥīd, in which al-Khaṣībī explains to al-Jisrī how to transmit traditions from him, and asks him to follow his path:

I command you, sir, to be in contact with your brothers [i.e. the other members of the sect] such contact that it would be clear to the brothers that it exceeds that of fatherhood. You should know that your study is the most superior one and the noblest spiritual ascent [irtiqāʾ]. You will say [when transmitting a tradition to them]: X son [disciple] of Y [fulān ibn fulān] told me, on the authority of Abū ʿAbdallāh al-Ḥusayn ibn Ḥamdān al-Khaṣībī, on the authority of ʿAbdallāh al-Jannān, known as the ascetic who was one of those who saw the Lords [mawālī, sing. mawlā, i.e. Ibn Jundab and Ibn Nuṣayr who are considered divine creatures] and transmitted from them without mediation. They [the mystics who contacted the Imāms] were in the presence of [the Imāms, the seventh to the eleventh]: Mūsā [al-Kāzīm] and ʿAlī [al-Riḍā] and Muḥammad [al-Jawād] and ʿAlī [al-Hādī] and Ḥasan [al-ʿAskari] the Ḥujja [the proof, usually one of the titles of the mahdī] and who transmitted from them without mediation until [the twelfth Imām] the Ṣāḥib al-zamān [Lord of the age]. [I would mention] from them [also]: Yahyā ibn Muʿīn, Muḥammad ibn Ismāʾīl al-Ḥasanī and ʿAbī Ḥusayn ibn Ḥamdān [father of al-Khaṣībī] . . . Do not polemicise through it [this epistle] with the ignorant [non-Nuṣayrī Muslims] and do not argue over it with the ignorants [non-Nuṣayrī Muslims] and do not argue over it with the mis-

---

105 The three tradents appear in al-Khaṣībī’s al-Hidāya al-kubrā. Concerning Yahyā ibn Muʿīn, see HK, p. 392. Muḥammad ibn Ismāʾīl al-Ḥasanī is mentioned in isnāds of traditions cited in al-Hidāya al-kubrā; see HK, pp. 37, 38, 304, 316, 392. As for ʿAskar ibn Muḥammad the Persian, he may be a person mentioned by al-Khaṣībī, a mawlā (here the meaning is client) named ʿAskar; see ibid., p. 349.

106 This familial terminology for disciple of a colleague exists in other texts. For example the mystic Hālit is considered the “uncle” of al-Khaṣībī. That is because Hālit is the “brother”, i.e. the colleague, of al-Jannān, al-Khaṣībī’s teacher; see DMA, fol. 124b.

107 The Nuṣayrī term juhhāl (sing. jāhil) used here refers to non-mystical Muslims, as opposed to ʿārifūn (sing. ʿārif) used for the mystical shaykhs of the sect. See, for
taken [i.e. Christians], and be as a fortress to them, do not hide what you know from your brothers, and do not suspect [that they will reveal] what you understand and beware of the thieves and from those who lack fatherhood [i.e. mystical guidance].

The last lines of this epistle, where al-Khaṣṣībī says: “you should continue to obey those whom I will die obeying”, may indicate that he was old when he left these orders to al-Jisrī. According to a Nusayrī source, the initiation of al-Jisrī to the mystical religion by al-Khaṣṣībī was shorter than the minimum of one year. Notwithstanding this, al-Jisrī was chosen as leader because of his extraordinary learning skills and probably because of al-Khaṣṣībī’s poor health and old age, which did not permit the completion of al-Jisrī’s guidance.

2.11 The successor in Aleppo

In his final years al-Khaṣṣībī returned to Syria, choosing to live in Aleppo. This decision seems to be based on the patronage of the Ḥamdanīd dynasty, which ruled in Aleppo from 333/945. Its strong ruler, the famous Sayf al-Dawla, was known for his patronage of scholars. Al-Khaṣṣībī was accepted in his court as a respectable Imāmī scholar. The direct patrons of the Nusayrīs were family members and subjects of Sayf al-Dawla, Dāwūd ibn Taghlib and Abū ‘l-ʿAshāʾīr al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn. Al-Khaṣṣībī dedicated to the Shīʿī

example, how al-Khaṣṣībī describes esoteric knowledge as najāt al-ʿārifīn (salvation of the mystics in MAHS, fol. 51b.

108 Al-dāllūn, and ahl al-dalāl, the term used here, are common names for Christians; see Qur’ān, al-Fātihā (1): 7.
110 Ibid., fol. 48b.
111 The case of al-Jisrī served as a model in the rules of initiation into the Nusayrī sect. Through his example, excellent disciples who have not completed their “breast feeding” (the minimum obligation of one year of initiation), are authorized to teach newer disciples; see HIF, p. 51. This explains how al-Jisrī could teach Hārūn al-Ṣāʾigh without completing his own studies. On the rules of initiation, see Chapter 3.
112 These two names are mentioned in the introduction of Diwān al-Khaṣṣībī. Dāwūd seems to be the brother of Ibrāhīm ibn Ḥamdān and his successor as governor of the Diyār Rabīʿa (middle Tigris valley) from 309/921. The other patron mentioned in this Diwān is al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn Ḥamdān Abū ʿl-ʿAshāʾīr, whose nickname was corrupted to Abū ʿl-Shaʿāʾīr; see DKH, fol. 4a. Abū ʿl-ʿAshāʾīr was the nephew of Sayf al-Dawla and was in charge in 345/956 of two fortresses in the region of Aleppo, ʿArindās and Barzāmān; he was later captured by the Byzantines who held him prisoner until his death. See ʿUmar ibn ʿḤamd ibn al-ʿAdīm, Bughyat al-talab fī taʾrikh ḥalab, ed. S. Zakkār (Damascus: Ḍār al-ʿĀth, 1988), vol. 6, pp. 2527–2532.
ruler his book, *al-Hidāya al-kubrā*, which summarizes his exoteric (zāhir) Twelver-Imāmī work, as well as the *Kitāb al-māʿida*, which is unavailable to us. This information, preserved in Nuṣayrī traditions, was totally censored in Shiʿī literature because of the problematic identity of al-Khaḥībī. However, this matter was preserved by the Sunnī Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, who wrote in his biography of al-Khaḥībī: “It is said that he [al-Khaḥībī] used to frequent Sayf al-Dawla”.

We learn from Nuṣayrī sources that al-Khaḥībī used his Imāmī identity for *taqiyya*, or in other words, as a cover for his secret activity among the *muwahhidūn*. From his disciples in Ḥarrān, al-Khaḥībī chose Muhammad ibn ʿAlī al-Jillī to lead the sect in Aleppo. Although this appointment is recorded only in popular traditions it becomes obvious from the transmission of al-Khaḥībī’s major doctrines and traditions by al-Jillī. Examples of such transmission could be found until lately only in the *Akhbār wa-riwāyāt ʿan mawālīnā ahl al-bayt minhum al-salām*. These traditions mainly concerned mystical allegorical interpretations of the Qurʾān, the three aspects of the divinity, Docetism and the transmigration of souls. However, newly available Nuṣayrī sources prove that the majority of al-Jillī’s books, dealing with all the doctrines of the sect, were based on al-Khaḥībī’s teaching. For example, at the end of his *Bāṭin al-ṣalāt*, al-Jillī wrote to one of his colleagues:

> This is what occurred to my mind in this epistle for you, dear brother, from the mystical knowledge, as I could attain in my understanding and knowledge and which I learned from my shaykh and father [i.e. teacher] al-Khaḥībī.

From one source it is known that al-Khaḥībī was blind in the last year of his life, but it is not possible to determine at what stage of his life he could no longer see. According to al-Ṭawīl, al-Khaḥībī died in

---

113 *TA*, p. 260. It is noted also in the anonymous introduction to *Dīwān al-Khaḥībī*; see *DKH*, fol. 4a, b.
115 *TA*, p. 259.
116 *ARM*, pp. 1, 2, 6, 12, 13. See also Appendix 1, item 43.
117 *KBS*, p. 271.
118 In the rules of initiation into the Nuṣayrī sect, this example served to authorize the teaching of blind shaykhs; see *HIF*, p. 61. In this last source al-Khaḥībī is compared to one leader of the Ghulāt, Muḥammad ibn Sinān, who continued to guide his disciples despite his blindness.
346/957, while the Ḥamdanids still ruled Aleppo. \(^1\) Shīʿī sources give an even later date, 358/969, \(^2\) which seems more likely because there is an account of a transmission of a tradition from al-Khaṣibī to al-Jillī in Aleppo in 357/967. \(^3\) According to the popular Nuṣayrī tradition, his tomb, called Shaykh Yābrāq, is situated north of Aleppo. It was still venerated in the time of al-Ṭawīl (beginning of the twentieth century). \(^4\)

Al-Khaṣibī played a central role in the creation of the Nuṣayrī sect. Without his appearance, the mystical circle of Ibn Nuṣayr would have disappeared, as happened to most of the Ghulāt groups in the post-ghayba period, with the crystallization of the Imāmī Shīʿa. He created a network of Nuṣayrī cells on both sides of the Euphrates. In Iraq, Basra was the old center of Ibn Nuṣayr, which probably disappeared because we do not have any information about it after the tenth century. New secret cells were established in Baghdad, Kufa and the village of ʿṬurbāʾ. On the western side, in Syria, al-Khaṣibī created two new centers of the sect, in Ḥarrān and Aleppo. He found an alternative source of funding, collected the traditions of the sect on his travels and, as we can conclude from his writings, formulated them into doctrines. He left for his followers a collection of compilations that became the sect’s canon and guided them in his absence.

2.12 *Al-Khaṣibī’s writings*

Unlike his predecessors, who left few books, al-Khaṣibī was a vigorous penman. His writings reflect his double identity, Nuṣayrī and Imāmī. Among his Nuṣayrī work, three epistles are known, the *Rāstbāshiyya* and its *Fiqh* (explanation), the *Siyāqa* and a *Dīwān* (see Appendix 1).

---

\(^1\) *TA*, p. 259.


\(^3\) *RMU*, 177.

\(^4\) *TA*, p. 259. An interesting account is provided by Nibras Kazimi, an Iraqi writer who visited the site recently. According to Kazimi, the grave of al-Khaṣibī is inside a white domed mausoleum, which is locked, situated in the northern reaches of Aleppo behind an Ottoman mosque built at a later period. Neither the dome nor the mosque carries an inscription. According to Kazimi, “Most of the Sunnis know this tomb as that of Sheikh Yabruq [sic!], a holy man of the 15th century, whose real name, according to their texts, was Shamseddin al-Ahmadi, and has nothing to do with Khasibi”; see N. Kazimi, “Islam and the city”, *New York Sun*, Editorials and Opinion, 25 August 2006.
Al-Khasibī is also the author of some hymns for prayer (tarnima, pl. tarānim).

Among his Imāmi-Shīʿī books is his main work, al-Hidāya al-kubrā, also called Taʿrīkh al-aʿimma, and al-Hidāya fī taʿrīkh al-aʿimma wa-muʿjizātihim. This is his only complete Imāmi work to have survived to the present day. The fact that its contents are almost free of any mystical elements backs the hypothesis that al-Khasibī used an Imāmi identity as taqiyya. If he had not needed to keep his Nuṣayrī identity secret, he could have allowed himself to write mystical documents dedicated to the Ḥamdānid leader, as he did with the unorthodox Bakhtiyār. Other books by al-Khasibī are not available to present researchers and their contents are unknown: al-Ikhwān, al-Masāʾil, Asmāʾ al-Nabī wa-ʾl-aʿimma and a certain Risālat takhlīt.

Al-Khasibī was without a doubt the most charismatic leader of the sect and its main founder. His lifetime is considered the golden age of Nuṣayrī history. His way of life became a legacy for the Nuṣayrīs until the present, and his taqiyya served his followers as a crucial means of survival. After his death, his successors concentrated their effort in preserving his teachings.

3. Crystallization and the editing of books

The post-Khasibī period was characterized by the crystallization of the Nuṣayrī doctrines. The followers of al-Khasibī were busy in editing the accumulated materials taught by their master. In Baghdad, as well as Aleppo, the leaders of the sect wrote down al-Khasibī’s doctrines and traditions, and added their commentaries. They cited older books from the Ghulāt literature, previously canonized by al-Khasibī,

---

123 BS, pp. 51–52.
125 Al-ʿĀmilī, Aʿyān al-Shīʿa, vol. 15, p. 347; al-ʿAsqalānī, Lisān al-mīzān, vol. 2, pp. 343–344. The takhlīt (confusion) mentioned only in Shiʿī sources is a biographical term for syncretism or confusion of esoteric and exoteric doctrines; see Modarressi, Crisis and Consolidation, pp. 22–23. Another unknown source of al-Khasibī, entitled al-Farq bayn al-Rasūl wa-ʾl-mursal, appears only once in the sect’s sources; see RN, p. 304.
in order to back their claims. Nuṣayrī texts from the end of the tenth century show that the *muwahhidūn* developed a responsa literature of questions and answers.

3.1 *Al-Jisrī and the theological circle in Baghdad*

The *Risālat al-tawḥīd*, as well as popular tradition,\(^{126}\) provides the main evidence for the theological circle, led by Abū Muhammad ʿAlī ibn ʿĪsā al-Jisrī, active in Baghdad. As early as 340/951, al-Jisrī compiled the answers of al-Khāṣibī, who was still alive, to his disciple Hārūn al-Sāʿīgh and also wrote a treaty concerning the relationship between the three aspects of the divinity. Unfortunately, there is no additional information concerning the Nuṣayrī communities in Iraq. Al-Ṭawīl’s logical assumption that this community was destroyed by the Mongols is backed by the information in the colophon of the *SJ* manuscript.\(^{127}\)

3.2 *Al-Jillī inherits the leadership*

The Nuṣayrī leadership of the community was passed on to Abū ʿl-Ḥusayn Muhammad ibn ʿAlī al-Jillī, and not to al-Jisrī. He came originally from the small village of al-Jilla, near Antioch\(^{128}\) or from the Iraqi al-Jill, a village near Najaf.\(^{129}\) Until recently, the only available information concerning al-Jillī was an unreliable account from al-Ṭawīl’s *Taʾrīkh*.\(^{130}\) Newly available sources enable us to trace the

\(^{126}\) *TA*, p. 325.

\(^{127}\) This document was copied only 20 years before the Mongol invasion and a later copy of the manuscript was made in Syria. This transfer of the document from Iraq to Syria may hint that a migration of members of the sect took place in the mid-thirteenth century. Such migration, if it really took place, could serve as one explanation for the temporary strengthening of the Syrian Nuṣayris in that period.

\(^{128}\) Al-Jillī is mentioned in al-Adhānī’s *Bākūra* as one of the villages of the ‘Alawī Shamāliyya near Antioch; see BS, p. 56. Halm proposed that his origin was Jīliyya, a village by the ‘Āsī river in Syria. See Halm, *al-Ghunūsiyya fī ‘l-Islām*, p. 210.

\(^{129}\) See Muhammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh al-mam wa-l-mulūk* (Beirut: Dār Sādir, 2003), vol. 2, pp. 604, 610 (events of the year 13–14/634–5). Al-Jill served as one of the bases for the Muslim forces in the preparations for the battle of Qādisiyya against the Persian Sassanids.

\(^{130}\) Al-Ṭawīl gives a bizarre account of al-Jillī, according to which he performed the *hajj* every year of his life after attaining his manhood, fought in the *jihāds* (holy wars in which he was captured by (apparently Byzantine) Christians. But al-Jillī was freed after converting his Christian holder in Acre to Islam; see *TA*, p. 260. This account seems unreliable because the Nuṣayris give allegorical interpretation to the obligations of the *hajj* and the *jihād* and we do not have details about any of these facts in other sources. Al-Khāṣibī’s *hajj* was performed only before his mystical initiation.
biography of al-Jilli along general lines. From these documents we can conclude that al-Jilli was a well-educated scholar with wide theological knowledge. Some of his poetry was preserved in Nuṣayrī sources, but there is no indication that he had a Diwān. His background included Imāmī education and mystical initiation received directly from al-Khaṣībī by oral study as well as written material.

The nature of al-Jilli’s writings is educational. Most of them are epistles and letters to his followers in which he explains a variety of theological issues he learnt from his master al-Khaṣībī. It is due to his extraordinary ability to memorize al-Khaṣībī’s traditions and to give them clear explanations, that he was nicknamed al-shaykh al-thiqa (the reliable shaykh). We assume that his Bāṭin al-ṣalāt and Risālat al-bayān were sent to the Banū Shu’ba in Ḥarrān (see Appendix 1). Two other letters, the Risāla al-Masīhiyya and the Risāla al-Nu’māniyya, show that al-Jilli included Christian terms in the Nuṣayrī religion. Nevertheless, it is important to note that these writings do not reflect a Christianization of Nuṣayrism, but on the contrary, an Islamization of Christian terms, as is shown in Chapter 2.

Lacking enough references to draw definite conclusions as to the purpose of the above-mentioned letters, it is at least possible to describe their historical background, which was a massive Christian population in Syria, the emergence of the Byzantines as a powerful force in the region, and the need of the Nuṣayrīs to strengthen their community after the death of al-Khaṣībī. The period of al-Jilli was characterized by dramatic events that endangered the survival of the sect. It is certain that the Nuṣayrīs were shocked when Aleppo was captured and burnt by the Byzantine emperor Nicephorus Phocas in 351/962. But the most severe event for the sect was the fall of their main defender and sponsor, the Ḥamdanid dynasty. In 350/967, Sayf al-Dawla died and his principality was gradually weakened by invaders from all directions: Fatimids from the south, Byzantines from the north, Ikhshids from the west and Buyids from the east, until its final fall in 396/1005. This turbulent situation was probably the background of the Nuṣayrī endeavor to spread the message of the sect to other territories.

---

131 One line from al-Jilli’s poem is cited in RMHM, p. 191.
132 KBS, p. 271.
3.3 Signs of propaganda and conversion

Since the Sunnī population of Syria was hostile to any kind of Shi‘ism, it is reasonable to assume that the Nuṣayrīs tried to spread their message to non-Muslim populations. There are some indications that in this period an attempt was made to convert populations to Nuṣayrism in rural territories in Syria. A contemporary Sunnī scholar, Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī (d. 456/1064), wrote in his book on religions:

> Among the Saba‘iyya [admirers of ‘Abdallāh ibn Saba‘] who attribute the divinity to ‘Alī there is a sect called the Nuṣayriyya that already in our time [eleventh century] took control of the Jund al-Urdunn [north of present-day Israel and Jordan] in Syria, especially of the town of Tiberias.135

It is possible that Christian communities on the Syrian coast were the target of Nuṣayrī conversion. Apart from the strange story of al-Ṭawīl concerning al-Jīlī’s conversion of a Christian in Acre, al-Jīlī’s Risāla al-Mashihiyya seems to be a document designed particularly for Nestorian converts.136 The strengthening of Byzantine power exposed the Nestorian community, considered heretical by the Greek Orthodox Church, to severe danger. This hypothesis could explain why al-Jīlī’s successor al-Ṭabarānī forced himself to celebrate an additional Nawrūz (Persian New Year) holiday on “Great Thursday”, a holiday of the eastern churches.137 However, the question of conversion still demands further study.

---


136 In this source al-Jīlī cites Nestorius, the Greek Patriarch of Constantinople from the fifth century and the apparent originator of the Nestorian church. Nestorius is venerated in the Assyrian church, which maintains a community in Syria until the present. The choice of al-Jīlī cannot reflect a Nestorian influence, because he does not adopt the main ideas of the Nestorian theology, especially the dual identity of Jesus, the human and the divine. It seems more reasonable that al-Jīlī’s purpose was to convert Nestorian Christians. On Nestorianism, see C. D. G. Muller, “Nestorians”, The Encyclopedia of Christianity (Leiden: Brill, 2003), chap. 3, pp. 721–722.

137 Al-Ṭabarānī’s association of Nawrūz with “Great Thursday” seems a strained effort to add this eastern Christian holiday to the Nuṣayrī calendar. The Nuṣayrī explanation for this day has nothing to do with the original Christian observance of Maundy Thursday before the Last Supper. The content of this holiday is replaced by a tradition transmitted by Ibn Nuṣayr to Ibn Jundab concerning the appearance of the deity in fire and light. This text reflects a Zoroastrian rather than a Christian influence. See MA, pp. 212–219 and Strothmann’s notes concerning the changing of the original date of this holiday, in R. Strothmann, “Festkalender der Nusairier: Grundlegendes Lehrbuch im syrischen Alawitenstaat”, Der Islam 27 (1946), pp. 5–6. See more details in Chapter 2.
Another unresolved question concerns the nature of al-Jillī’s relationship with the famous Imāmī Shaykh al-Mufīd. Massignon guessed that al-Jillī’s *Risāla al-Nu’māniyya* was directed at al-Mufīd.\(^{138}\) Although this source is available (see Appendix 1) it does not back Massignon’s theory decisively. Massignon suggested that this letter was sent by al-Jillī’s disciple al-Ṭabarānī, based on his sources. His assumption seems chronologically logical because al-Mufīd was a contemporary of al-Ṭabarānī (al-Mufīd died in 413/1022) and al-Mufīd’s *Risāla al-muqni’a* is cited in one of al-Ṭabarānī’s books.\(^{139}\) According to Imāmī sources, al-Mufīd used Ḥasan ibn Shu’ba’s *Tuḥaf al-ʿuqūl*, which was not a mystical book.\(^{140}\) Although Ṣuyūṭī sources show respect towards Shaykh al-Mufīd, they cannot prove the existence of relations between the Imāmī scholar and the Ṣuyūṭī sect.\(^{141}\)

### 3.4 Al-Jillī’s net

Al-Jillī’s groups of followers in Syria lived in several centers in towns that surrounded the rural area meant for conversion, such as Aleppo, Harrān, Beirut and Tiberias. Unfortunately, we do not have much information about these cells. We know only the contents of the traditions that were transmitted in those places from Ṣuyūṭī literature. Since the region was invaded by several armies and ruled by various dynasties, we can assume that the Ṣuyūṭīs felt permanently endangered and kept their doctrines secret in order to prevent persecution. Their sources from this period repeat al-Khaṭṭābī’s obligation of *kitmān*, i.e. the concealment of their religion.

The main center was in Aleppo where al-Jillī was living and teaching. This center was still active at the beginning of the eleventh century.\(^{142}\)

---

\(^{138}\) Massignon, “Esquisse”, p. 644 item 55.

\(^{139}\) *MA*, p. 80, the citation concerns the *yawm al-ghadîr*.


\(^{141}\) The nature of al-Jillī’s *Nu’māniyya* is apologetic in some places, where he explains the differences between Ṣuyūṭīsm and Christianity; see, for example, *RN*, p. 304. Nevertheless, no accusation of Christian heresy pointed at the Ṣuyūṭīs is evident in al-Mufīd’s writings. Whether it was sent to al-Mufīd or not, its purpose seems to be the correction of a wrong impression of Christian influence in the *Risāla al-Masihīyya*.

\(^{142}\) Ḥasan ibn Shu’ba said he received a tradition from al-Jillī in Aleppo in 397/1006; see *MHAD*, p. 184. Al-Ṭabarānī received from al-Jillī in Aleppo the tradition of the
The Nuṣayrī sources give some names of disciples about whom we have no information, but their nicknames and their nisba indicate that they belonged to the urban middle class and probably were mawālī.¹⁴³ In the north there was the oldest cell at Ḥarrān, established by al-Kḫāṣibī and now led by the Banū Shuʿba. We know of another cell that existed on the west coast: in the Masāʾil Bayrūt there is an account of a catechism between al-Jillī and his successor al-Ṭabarānī that took place in Beirut in 370/980.¹⁴⁴ In the south, there was a cell in Tiberias mentioned above in the account of Ibn Ḥaẓm al-Andalusī. A tradition was transmitted here by the brother of al-Jillī, Abū Mālik al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī al-Jillī in 391/1000.¹⁴⁵ It is from Tiberias that the most gifted disciple and the future leader of the sect, Maymūn al-Ṭabarānī, would come.

Al-Jillī’s theological books and epistles were meant for education. His Risālat al-fatq wa-ʾl-ratq and Risālat al-ḥurūf (see Appendix 1) are examples of his short and clear educational compositions for his disciples. Al-Jillī’s writings were the result of two kinds of communication between members of the sect: the old mystical majlis, where a sort of catechism took place in the master’s house, and the new series of responsa that was developed between the shaykhs of each cell and their master in Aleppo.

3.5 Judicial activity

New sources reveal another genre of al-Jillī’s work—the judicial responsa. We find decisions of al-Jillī concerning prohibited food.¹⁴⁶ The main judicial work, the Kitāb al-ḥāwī fī ʿilm al-fatāwā, where his successor al-Ṭabarānī compiled al-Jillī’s decisions and answers, concerns tawḥīd in 384/994; see ARM, p. 6, and the Diwān al-Kḫāṣibī in 399/1008; see DKH, fol. 3a, b. We do not have any information concerning later Nuṣayrī activity in this city.

¹⁴³ Two disciples of al-Jillī’s are mentioned in Aleppo: Abu ‘l-Tuḥaf Hibat Allāh ibn Muʾammar and his father Abū ʿl-Faraj Muʾammar; see ARM, pp. 9, 12, 13. In their meeting the discussion concerned the appearance of the deity in human form. Other names of al-Jillī’s unknown disciples are mentioned in another source: ‘Abd Allāh ibn Qaḥṭān from Tripoli, Abū Aḥmad al-Mashshāt and Abū Qāsim al-Bazzāz. The three are mentioned as examples of leaders who had difficulties in their initiation and who needed more time for studying the Qur’ān by heart; see HIF, p. 96. Since none of the disciples mentioned here possessed a nisba to an Arab tribe, we assume they were mawālī (clients of non-Arab origins).

¹⁴⁴ See Appendix 1, item 37.

¹⁴⁵ RMU, p. 177.

¹⁴⁶ ARM, 23. In this source al-Jillī in Aleppo prohibits the eating of camels and eels.
several aspects of initiation to the sect. The judicial activity, concerning which we have only these two examples, prove that the ties between the Nuşayrî cells were strong and that al-Jillî’s authority was accepted by all members of the sect. The great number of questions concerning initiation shows the success of Nuşayrî propaganda and conversion in this period.\(^{147}\)

4. Maymûn al-Ṭabarānî and the book of the holidays

Maymûn ibn al-Qâsim al-Ṭabarānî, was nicknamed Surûr (happiness) after his most important book, the \textit{Sabıl râhat al-arwâh wa-dalîl al-surûr wa-l-afrah ilâ física al-āsbâh} (the original name of the \textit{Majmû’ al-a’yād}, see Appendix 1, item 32). In Nuşayrî sources he is called \textit{al-shabb al-thiqa} (the reliable young man), probably because he became an authority in his field at a young age. His writings reflect wide intellectual knowledge in esoteric and exoteric Shi‘ism, Christian religion, Greek philosophy and the Persian religions. Al-Ṭabarānî had a great ability to organize his vast knowledge and to add his own interpretations and, moreover, to transform the sect’s ideas from study materials into active cultic practices. Al-Ṭabarānî was the first and maybe the only Nuşayrî mystic to use secret ciphers and magical letters in his writings.\(^{148}\)

His \textit{Majmû’ al-a’yād} is the most important Nuşayrî source concerning the sect’s holidays. Al-Ṭabarānî was concerned with practical issues: to each holiday he added a \textit{khutba} (sermon) or a \textit{du’ā’} (prayer), and some were followed by a prayer for a \textit{ziyâra} (visit to a holy tomb).\(^{149}\) In some prayers he explains how and when the believer has to prostrate or to turn his face and his hands towards the sky.\(^{150}\) These practical

\(^{147}\) Chapter 9 in the \textit{Kitâb al-hâwî} may hint at a process of conversion, mainly that of Christians. According to this chapter, Christians or Jews could participate in the sect’s prayers only if they were converted to Islam. In such case the convert had the right to conceal his conversion from his family. In general, the attitude towards Christians is less negative than that towards Jews. Al-Jillî asks for respect of the \textit{ahl al-kitâb} (people of the book, i.e. Jews and Christians) but not to forget that in the Qur’ân the Christians are praised 7 times and the Jews only 3. According to al-Jillî, the Jews are condemned in 180 places in the Qur’ân and the Christians in only 80. See \textit{HIF}, pp. 88–93.

\(^{148}\) See Appendix 3.

\(^{149}\) \textit{MA}, pp. 123–124, 158.

\(^{150}\) Ibid., pp. 122–123, 145.
additions serves as an additional indication that the sect’s propaganda was successful and that there was a broadening Nusayri community of believers in need of more and more rituals. Al-Ṭabarānī’s works are a result of a combination of all the Nusayri literature available in his time. Some of his books are edited works, as in the case of al-Khashibī’s Rāṣt bāṣh to which he annexed the Siyāqa and the Fiqh and added his own notes, the Baḥth wa-l-Dalāla, at the end of each chapter (see more details in Appendix 1). It is al-Ṭabarānī who wrote down the Dīwān of al-Khashibī, which was transmitted to him orally by al-Jillī. The fact that al-Ṭabarānī wrote more books than any other Nusayri scholar not only shows his great talent, but also the need to preserve the sect’s literature in a time of instability.

4.1 Leadership in a time of danger

The conditions of the sect in Aleppo were worsening. We do not have any account of the Nusayri center after the period of al-Jillī and it seems that the sect’s activity was restricted after the Imāmī Mirdasid dynasty took over the city in 416/1025. This explains why the Nusayris curse the Mirdasids in one of their sources.

Al-Ṭabarānī probably succeeded to the leadership of the sect at the beginning of the eleventh century, since there is no information concerning al-Jillī after 399/1008. This transfer of the leadership is proved by the Wasiyyat al-Jillī li-ʿAbī Saʿīd (see Appendix 1).

As in the case of al-Jillī, the exact dates of birth and death of al-Ṭabarānī are not given in the sect’s sources. Al-Tawīl’s biography of al-Ṭabarānī in the Taʾrikh al-ʿalawīyīn is more detailed than that of al-Jillī, but seems equally unreliable.

---


152 The bibliography of al-Ṭabarānī contains 12 items (Appendix 1, items 32–43) and Massignon’s bibliography contains 17; see Massignon, “Esquisse”, p. 644, items 41–57.

153 As Halm noted, the prophecy of the Imām Jaʿfar, concerning the disaster that will fall upon the Mirdasids after their war against the mahdī, is probably a late addition to the Kitāb al-ḥaft wa-l-aẓīla, by al-Ṭabarānī; see H. Halm, “Das Buch der Schatten”, Der Islam 55 (1978), p. 261; in the source, see HA, p. 133.

154 Al-Tawīl claims that al-Ṭabarānī was born in Tiberias in 357/967 and went to Aleppo in order to study under al-Jillī. Because of the permanent wars in Aleppo...
It is important to note that the city of Lādhiqiyya is not mentioned in any of the medieval sources. This puts in question the hypothesis concerning al-Ṭabarānī’s migration to this city, which is repeated by Western researchers, based merely on al-Tawīl’s Taʾrikh al-ʿAlawiyyīn. There is no evidence in any source that such migration took place in the eleventh century. Al-Ṭabarānī mentions Tripoli (in present-day Lebanon) rather than Lādhiqiyya in his writings. If he did migrate, it would have been to the surrounding rural territories, not to the city. The first tradition in Majmūʿ al-aʿyād is transmitted in Tripoli in 398/1007. Tripoli is also mentioned as a Nuṣayrī cell in the Ḥāwī fi ʿilm al-fatāwā. Although a great part of al-Ṭabarānī’s writings is extant, there is a paucity of information concerning his biography. Not even the year of his death can be determined. It is supposed he died in the first half of the eleventh century. Also uncertain are important questions, such as when exactly the Nuṣayrī migration began to the mountains between Lādhiqiyya and Maṣyāf, known today as Jabal Anṣariyya (henceforth the Jabal). According to our sources, in the eleventh century there were already Nuṣayrī communities in the Jabal. Most likely they were a combination of the immigrants from Aleppo, which later became the khāṣṣa (spiritual leaders, initiated into the secrets of the sect) and local peasants converted to Nuṣayrism who later were to become the ʿāmma (the mass of believers who follow the shaykhs).

5. Rival sects: Ishqis and Druzes

The success of the Nusayris propaganda in the time of al-Jillî and al-Ṭabarānî did not solve the sect’s problem of security. The Nusayrs were not the only persecuted sect in the region that took refuge in the mountainous regions of western Syria. In the south, the Druze da’wa (propaganda) was spread by Ḥamza ibn ‘Alî, centered in the Wādî ‘l-Taym (present-day south-east Lebanon, western foot of Mount Hermon). According to the historian Ibn al-Athîr, both Nusayrs and Druzes dwelt in the Wādî ‘l-Taym. The Druzes were a sect of Egyptian Ismā‘îlî Shi‘ism, and spread their propaganda in Syria in the name of the Fatimid Caliph al-Ḥākim bi-Amrillâh (disappeared in 412/1021). The Druzes were probably not serious rivals, because Nusayri medieval sources never mention them. The main rival sect was the Ishqiyya, which was headed at this time by Ismā‘îl ibn Khallâd Abû Duhaiba from Ba‘labak. Al-Tawîl wrote about the popular tradition of the rivalry between the pious scholar al-Ṭabarânu and the rich and corrupted Ibn Khallâd, as preserved during his time and which was probably based on historical events.

Even if we do not accept the accuracy of al-Tawîl’s account of this rivalry, it reflects a long struggle between two rival sects in the same territory, which became part of the popular legacy of the Nusayris. This popular tradition is backed by al-Ṭabarânu’s explicit demand to curse Ismā‘îl ibn Khallâd, which appears in his Majmû‘ al-a’yâd in the prayer of Nawrûz. As for the Druzes, the fact that there is no account of them in medieval Nusayri writings shows that they were not a threat to the sect. On the contrary, it was the Druzes who felt threatened by the Nusayrs who were in the eleventh century much more influential in Syria. The contemporary Ḥamza ibn ‘Alî, the actual founder of the Druze sect, wrote his well known epistle against the Nusayris, al-Risâla al-Dâmigha li-l-fâsiq al-Nusayrî.

---

162 TA, p. 262.
163 MA, p. 222.
164 Many versions of this epistle are available in manuscript form. Here the Ms. Jerusalem Arab 184, Rasâ‘îl Ḥamza, no. 1109 is used (henceforth Ḥamza ibn ‘Alî,
Since previous studies concerning this epistle have not answered the question concerning its historical context, I will try to propose a logical hypothesis regarding this matter. Not only did the Druze propagandist Ḥamza have to spread his message in a territory already under the influence of the Nuṣayris, it seems that the Nuṣayrī writings shocked him. The similarity of the terminology and the theology could not leave him indifferent. Both Nuṣayrīs and Druzes were Shiʿī sects deeply influenced by Neoplatonism and Gnosticism. Both called themselves muwḥhidūn, and considered the study of esoteric knowledge as the true path to monotheism. Ḥamza focused his attack against the Nuṣayrīs in a book entitled Kitāb al-ḥaqāʾiq wa-kashf al-mahjūb by “one of the Nuṣayrī heretics”, directed to the “real muwḥhidūn”, i.e. to the Druzes, not the Nuṣayrīs.165 The only Kitāb al-ḥaqāʾiq to be found in the Nuṣayrī literature is Abū Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan ibn Shuʾba al-Ḥarrānī’s Ḥaqāʾiq asrār al-dīn (See Appendix 1), which appears also in Catafago’s list as Kitāb al-ḥaqāʾiq.166 Nevertheless, according to Massignon’s bibliography, the author of this book is none other than Ḥamza ibn Shuʾba al-Ḥarrānī,167 called in the Nuṣayrī sources Ḥamza ibn ʿAlī ibn Shuʾba al-Ḥarrānī (The confusion between the authors of the Banū Shuʾba’s writings is discussed in Appendix 1).

To conclude, it is very possible that the Druze leader found out that not only was his rival sect called muwḥhidūn, as was his own sect, but also that one of the Nuṣayrī authors had the same name as his. This could be the reason why he chose to attack the book of this specific author, from all the vast Nuṣayrī literature. This similarity endangered the Druze daʿwa and required a warning to prevent possible confusion.168 However, in the following periods, the Nuṣayrīs and the Druzes probably found a way to coexist, since there is no trace of hostility between them except this Risāla al-dāmīgha.

---

165 Ḥamza ibn ʿAlī, al-Risāla al-dāmīgha, fol. 5a.
168 Indeed, this epistle concludes with a warning: “Beware, beware, oh believers! From the sin of lust and brutish passions... you must worship him [al-Ḥākim, the Druze divine incarnation] alone without the other [Nuṣayrī] elements which I mentioned previously”; see Ḥamza ibn ʿAlī, al-Risāla al-dāmīgha, fol. 16a–17b.
6. The Banū Shu’ba of Ḥarrān

The Nuṣayrī center in Ḥarrān was the oldest cell of the sect in Syria. We assume that members of the older Banū Shu’ba were among the 51 disciples of al-Khaṣībī in this town, who later became the leaders of the sect. Ḥarrān was a convenient place to spread the Nuṣayrī message because it had long ago been a center of philosophy and mysticism. It was the first Muslim center of translations of Greek sciences, philosophy and astronomy into Arabic. Indeed, the Nuṣayrī writings in general and those of the Banū Shu’ba in particular were influenced by Greek thought.

The main figure among the Banū Shu’ba was al-Ḥasan ibn Shu’ba, whose full name was Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn Shu’ba al-Ḥarrānī. We do not have the exact dates of his life, but according to newly available sources we know that he was a disciple of al-Khaṣībī and al-Jillī and a contemporary of Shaykh al-Mufīd, which means that he lived in the second half of the tenth century. Al-Ḥasan’s Ḥaqāʾiq asrār al-dīn (see Appendix 1) is the most important theological work of the Banū Shu’ba. From its introduction we know about the family’s personal library that contained some 300 hundred mystical as well as Imāmī Shī’ī books. Al-Ḥasan had an Imāmī background as is evident from his Tuhfat al-ʿuqūl (in Imāmī sources Tuhfat al-ʿuqūl), which was included in the Shi’ī canon. Nevertheless, it was probably not an act of taqiyya, as in the case of the Hidāya of al-Khaṣībī, but a book he wrote before he was initiated into the secret of the muwahhidūn. It is not clear if al-Ḥasan needed the use of taqiyya as much as his Syrian “brothers” in the south and their Iraqi colleagues, because Harrān was distant from the strongholds of the Muslim orthodoxy. It seems also that the Banū Shu’ba did not suffer from the struggle with the rival Ishāqiyya, a fact that explains why they permitted themselves to cite the writings of Ishāq al-Aḥmar much more than the other members of the sect. Nevertheless, in the books of the Banū Shu’ba there are attacks against the local Ṣābi’a (the Sabeans), who were probably their main intellectual rivals.

---
169 In his Ḥaqāʾiq asrār al-dīn (Appendix 1, item 44–45), al-Ḥasan wrote that he studied the Rāst bāsh epistle directly from al-Khaṣībī; see HAD, p. 141. In another place he added that he received from al-Khaṣībī a tradition from al-Jannān “the Persian”; see ibid., p. 151.
170 HAD, p. 11.
171 See HA, pp. 257, 259. Possible influences of the Sabean religion on Nuṣayrism are discussed in Chapter 2.
The next generation included two main writers: ‘Ali ibn Ḥamza ibn ‘Ali ibn Shu’ba, probably the nephew of al-Ḥasan ibn Shu’ba, and Abū ‘Abdollāh Muḥammad ibn Shu’ba who was perhaps his son. The only work of ‘Ali ibn Shu’ba’s we know about is the *Hujjat al-ārif*. One manuscript attributes a chapter of this book to his father, Ḥamza ibn ‘Ali.\(^{172}\)

It should be noted that there is confusion between the authors of the Shu’ba family books. According to the sources of Massignon, Ḥamza ibn ‘Ali was even the writer of the *Ḥaqā’iq asrār al-dīn*.\(^{173}\) Thus, the possibility should not be excluded that some of these books were written by one of the Banū Shu’ba, and that other members of the family completed these works by adding their notes. From their writings it seems that they shared the same materials. A rare document, which is cited only by the Banū Shu’ba, is a two-page table of the *ahl al-marātib* in the heavenly world and the material world (see Appendix 4)\(^{174}\) that is discussed in Chapter 2. At the beginning of the *Hujjat al-ārif* Ali ibn Shu’ba wrote that he dedicated a copy to a certain amīr, Abū ’l-Ḥasan ‘Ali ibn Ja’far, who was probably the patron and defender of the family, in 408/1017.\(^{175}\)

The last member we know about is Abū ‘Abdollāh Muḥammad, author of the *Kitāb al-usāyfir* (see Appendix 1). He is also the author of the important *Ikhtilāf al-ʿālamayn*, which includes the sanctification of al-Khašībi.

The following diagram describes the structure of the Banū Shu’ba family:

```
  al-Ḥusayn ibn Shu’ba al-Ḥarrānī
    \  / \\
  ‘Ali ibn al-Ḥusayn
      /  \ \
         /  \ \
Abū ‘Abdollāh Muḥammad  ‘Ali ibn Ḥamza
```

The Banū Shu’ba were the last charismatic leaders of the Nuṣayrī sect who could unify the sect and take decisions for all the members and

\(^{172}\) See Ms. Paris 1450, fol. 51b.


\(^{174}\) This table appears twice in an identical form: *HAD*, pp. 88–89; *HA*, pp. 275–276.

\(^{175}\) *HA*, p. 240.
cells. Their disappearance after the eleventh century marks the end of the period of the founders of the sect that had begun with the ninth-century eponym Ibn Nuṣayr.

7. The end of the golden age

After the period of the founders of the sect came a difficult time when the sect lacked charismatic leadership and was divided between the shaykhs of every village and region. This division was characterized by theological debates, which led to accusations of heresy and the divergence of several groups from the mainstream. This process led to a significant weakening of the Nuṣayrī sect.

This deterioration is well described in the introduction of ʿAlī ibn Shuʿba al-Ḥarrānī to his Hujjat al-ʿārif (eleventh century) and in the late Munāzarat Shaykh al-Nashshābī (see Appendix 1) which depicts the situation in the twelfth century, with some valuable notes concerning previous periods. According to this last source, the Nuṣayrī leader in Aleppo in the twelfth century, al-Jazari, explained in his epistles that after the time of al-Ṭabarānī, the leadership passed from the scholars (arbāb al-ʿilm, owners of the knowledge) to the dignitaries (arbāb al-manāṣib wa-l-ḥusūn owners of the positions and fortresses). The mainstream of the sect, which is called al-ʿisāba al-Khaṣṣibiyya (the group following al-Khaṣṣibī), was led by three shaykhs about whom little is known: ʿIsmat al-Dawla, succeeded by Ṣidq al-ʿAlam (or al-ʿIlm) and the amīr ʿAlī ʿAlam al-Dawla.

The only available information concerns ʿIsmat al-Dawla, who was a direct disciple of al-Ṭabarānī. He was initiated when he was 14 years old by a certain Abū ʿl-Fath to the mufawwida, a mystical stream of Imāmī Shīʿism. At a certain stage of his studies he decided to leave his shaykh and learn the ʿilm al-tawḥīd, i.e. the Nuṣayrī theology.

---

176 In the Munāzarat Shaykh al-Nashshābī (see Appendix 1, item 52), the Banū Shuʿba, together with Abū ʿAbdallāḥ al-Khaṣṣibī, al-Jillī and al-Jisrī are regarded as the “owners of the mystic knowledge” before the transmission of the leadership to the amirs; see MN, fol. 140b.

177 HA, pp. 240–241. Ali ibn Shuʿba wrote that his purpose in his book was to present the ḥujja (proof) that would guide the rival shaykhs, whom he calls ʿulamāʾ (religious scholars), in the right way and put an end to their dispute.

178 MN, fol. 138a.

179 Ibid., fol 141a. On the mufawwida, see Chapter 2.
In the period of these three shaykh, the sect was backed by three local families, the Banū Muḥriz, the Banū Ḥ-Aḥmar and the Banū Ḥ-Arid, in exchange for their total submission. These families were the owners of fortresses in the Jabal in the eleventh century. The Banū Ḥ-Aḥmar were the owners of the Balāṭunos (or Ablāṭunos) fortress in the rural region of Lādhiqiyya in 421–422/1030 before they handed it over to the Byzantines. The Banū Muḥriz were the owners of the Marqab fortress south of Tripoli, until the Crusaders took it over in 511/1117. As for the Banū Ḥ-Arid, they belong to a later period.

After losing the patronage of these two amīrs, the Nuṣayris were left defenseless under Crusader rule, between the kingdom of Jerusalem in the south and the district of Tripoli and the principality of Antioch in the north. This situation, which lasted a century and a half, ended with the conquering of the Jabal by the Ayyubid Salāḥ al-Dīn in 584/1188.

8. Shaykh al-Nashshābi’s travels

In the thirteenth century, a prominent leader emerged named al-Makzūn al-Sinjārī, who saved the Nuṣayris from their enemies. Such an important event, which probably changed the situation of the sect dramatically, could not have been omitted from the Munāẓarat Shaykh

---

180 MN, fol. 140a–141b.
182 Ibn Muḥriz, the owner of the fortress, negotiated with the Crusaders to let them rule if his family could stay there. But he was deceived and was removed with his family; see J. Richard, “Note sur l’archidiocèse d’Apamée et les conquêtes de Raymond de Saint-Gilles en Syrie du Nord”, Syria—Revue d’art oriental et d’archéologie, 25 (1948), p. 236. The fortress was built by a certain Muḥriz ibn Ḥ-Akkār around the year 391/1000; see H. Kennedy, Crusader Castles, p. 20. See also in the narrative history of Elyane Gorsira, Les reines de Jérusalem et les princesses de Terre Sainte: Cécile de France (Paris: Le Manuscipt, 2003), p. 306. According to her story, lacking references, Tughtekin, atabek (Turkish commander) of Damascus (d. 626 /1128), gave the Banū Muḥriz the order to hand over the fortress to the Crusaders.
al-Nashshābī, if, as Bar-Asher and Kofsky maintain, this document was written in the thirteenth century. In addition, the Munāẓara describes attacks against the Ishāqiyya, who were supposed to have been eliminated by al-Makzūn’s army. These problems stem from the deceptive date that appears in the Munāẓara, 685/1286, the only year mentioned in the document. This date, which is probably an error of the author or later copyists, is misleading. The indicator for the correct dating is the name of the ruler of the area, Zayn al-Dīn Qarājā, mentioned during the debate between two shaykhs at Asfīn.

The location of this village is uncertain, but since it is next to Ribāḥ, the Munāẓara must belong to the region of Ḥoms. Indeed, according to historical sources, Qarājā (d. 604/1207), an important Ayyūbid commander, was the amīr of this region. Thus, it can be assumed that the right date is 585/1189 and the mistake occurred during the long period of copying of this text.

The places mentioned in the Munāẓara, which were visited by the Aleppan shaykh and his disciple, who is the narrator, may indicate the location of the Nuṣayrī communities left under Muslim rule in the period described in this document. In the east the shaykh traveled to the Dayr al-Zawr near the Euphrates (al-Manāsif, Marīḥ), and in the west he reached the regions of Ḥoms (Ribāḥ, Asfīn), Ḥamāt (Qurmus, Suwayda, Rabīʿa), and Aleppo (Qulayʿa, Jarīs). It is important to note that al-Nashshābī never entered the territories ruled by the Crusaders in the west. We may conclude that the Munāẓara is a document describing events from the beginning of the twelfth century, beginning with a situation of the Nuṣayrīs when they were divided in Syria between the Christian domination of the Crusaders in the west and the Muslim principalities in the east, and ending with their unification under Ayyūbid rule.

---

185 Ibid., fol. 121a, b.
187 MN, fol. 111a.
188 Ibid., fol. 112b.
190 MN, fol. 69a, 69b, 70b, 72b, 144a. Most of the villages can be found because they still exist today and their locations correspond to the course traveled by the disciple of al-Nashshābī. I do not share the opinion of Bar-Asher and Kofsky that these villages cannot be located; see M. M. Bar-Asher and A. Kofsky, “The Nuṣayrī doctrine of Ali’s divinity and the Nuṣayrī trinity according to an unpublished treatise from the 13th century”, Der Islam 72 (1995), p. 262, n. 25.
The travels and debates of Shaykh al-Nashshābī reflect the disconnection between the Nuṣayris of Aleppo, the Khaṣṣībiyya, and the other communities in Syria. According to the Munāzara, al-Nashshābī’s disciple heard that the “people of the Jabal” deviated from the right path of the founders of the sect (Ibn Nuṣayr, al-Khaṣṣībī, Banū Shu’ba and their three followers) and adopted heretical doctrines. In addition, he witnessed his master’s attack against the heresy of the Nuṣayris of Asfin (Ḩomş). One Nuṣayrī faction that is repeatedly named in the Munāzara is the Ḥātimīyya, followers of a leader of the sect named Ḥātim al-Ṭawbānī (or Ṭūbānī, i.e. from Ṭūbā near Aleppo) al-Jadīlī, from a previous period, about whom we lack information. His followers are accused of the personification of the deity. Catafago’s list contains one book written by al-Ṭawbānī, entitled Kitāb al-tajrid, which is not available to us.

The Nuṣayris of the Jabal, who were condemned in the Munāzara, were left under Christian rule for more than a century. They were not only isolated from their leaders in Aleppo and Ḥarrān, but also influenced by other sects in their region. According to Dussaud’s hypothesis, the Ismā’īlī sect of the Nizārīs (called by the locals Ḥashishīyyūn) took control of the Nuṣayris of the Jabal at the beginning of the twelfth century. This seems very logical, considering the fact that the Nizārīs took possession of several fortresses in the Jabal in this period. The disconnection between the Nuṣayrī communities and the theological disputes between them weakened the sect and put its survival in danger. In the sect’s documents from the twelfth century onwards, no more is heard about the community in Tiberias. According to Ibn al-Athīr, Nuṣayris and Druzes shared the region of Wādī ‘l-Taym at the beginning of the twelfth century. The existence of the Rajar vil-

---

191 See in detail ibid., pp. 258–292.
192 MN, fol. 82b, 83a, 116a, 150a. We know that at the time of the Munāzara Ḥātim al-Ṭawbānī was no longer alive because he was blessed qaddasahu ‘llāh (may God sanctify him); see ibid., fol. 112b. Al-Ṭawil’s account of al-Ṭawbānī does not fit our dating. He makes him live in the thirteenth century as the teacher of amīr Abū ‘l-Fidāʾ of Ḥamāt. According to his unreliable account, al-Ṭawbānī was born in 677/1278, an illogical date even if we accept the date that appears in the Munāzara (685/1286).
195 Ibn al-Athīr, al-Kāmil fi ‘l-ta’rikh, vol. 10, p. 656. According to the account of the year 522/1128, the sects of Wādī ‘l-Taym were under the protection of the amīr of the region, al-Ḍāḥḥāk, who was killed by the amīr Bahrām the same year.
lage on the present border between Israel and Lebanon is the last rem-
nant of a Nuşayrî community that existed until the eleventh century
between Tiberias and the Golan.

9. Al-Makzûn al-Sinjârî and the Nuşayrî awakening

The Nuşayrî legacy was preserved in a popular story of a savior amîr
named al-Makzûn, who came to the Jabal from Sinjâr (northwestern
Iraq near the present-day Syrian border), united the sect and saved it
from its rivals. The dating of these events is problematic. Al-Ţawîl’s
Taʾrikh al-ʿAlawiyyîn was until recently the only source referred to by
modern researchers of the biography of Hasan ibn Yûsuf al-Makzûn
al-Sinjârî. This amîr converted to Nuşayrîsm and invaded their region
in 617/1220.196

9.1 A detailed biography

The biography of al-Makzûn should be reviewed in the light of an
important source which is cited in the research of Asʿad Ṭalî, enti-
tled Taʾrikh al-Makzûn, written in 1913 by the ʿAlawi Shaykh Yûnus
Hasan Ramaḍân from Jabala.197 This biography is more detailed than
al-Ţawîl’s Taʾrikh. It was written some 20 years before al-Ţawîl’s book
and according to its contents it is very possible that it was his major
source. Unlike the history of al-Ţawîl, Shaykh Yûnus gives references
concerning his sources.198 Nevertheless, these facts cannot indicate that
this biography is more credible than that of al-Ţawîl, because there is
no evidence for al-Makzûn and his activity in medieval sources. The
following account summarizes the main biographical details.

196 Muhammad Amin Ghâlib al-Ţawîl, Taʾrikh al-ʿAlawiyyîn (Lâdhîqiyya: Dâr al-
197 ʿA. Ṭalî, Maʿrifat Allâh wa-ʿl-Makzûn al-Sinjârî (Beirut: Dâr al-Râʾid al-ʿArabi,
198 The biography entitled Taʾrikh al-Makzûn, was written in 1913 by the ʿAlawi
Shaykh Yûnus Hasan Ramaḍân from Jabala. Shaykh Yûnus asked the help of other
ʿAlawi shaykhs, who gave him private documents concerning his biography. Most of
them were copied in the eighteenth century, except one from the seventeenth cen-
tury and three older manuscripts from the fifteenth century. At the beginning Shaykh
Yûnus presents his sources, which are all manuscripts kept in private family librar-
ies. One of them is presumed to have been by an al-Makzûn descendant; see A. Ṭalî,
Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan ibn Yūṣuf al-Makzūn al-Sinjārī was a descendant of a certain amīr Rāʾiq ibn Ḥaḍr (or Khidr), an ‘Alawī (i.e. Ṣuṣayrī) contemporary of al-Khaṣībī, from the Banū Ṣaḥki and Banū Fāḍl of Yemeni origins. Al-Makzūn was born in 560/1164 or 564/1168 and received a fine education in poetry and in Shi‘ī Islam. He studied by heart the Nahj al-balāgha (the famous collection of speeches of ‘Alī ibn abī Ṭālib, by al-Sharīf al-Radī) and the Qur‘ān.

He succeeded as the amīr of the principality of Sinjār after his father’s death in 602/1205. During the time of his father, Amīr Yūṣuf, the twelfth century, the first migration began from Sinjār to the fortresses of the region of Lādhiqiyya, led by the “philosopher” Shaykh Ahmad ibn Jābir ibn Abī ’l-‘Arīd. The latter was probably the leader who ruled the Banū ’l-‘Arīd, the third family mentioned in the Munāẓarat Shaykh al-Nashshābī as patrons of the Nuṣayrīs. Other significant migrations of Nuṣayrīs from Aleppo, ‘Āna, and Baghdad took place in the same period.

In the time of al-Makzūn, in the year 615/1218, Nuṣayrīs from the region of Banyas and Lādhiqiyya sent a letter to al-Makzūn asking for help against their rivals, the Kurds (brought to their region by the Ayyūbid and the Ismā‘īlīs (probably Nizārīs).

It was a massacre of the Nuṣayrīs in the Šahyūn fortress during their celebration of Nawrūz that persuaded al-Makzūn to intervene. He came from Sinjār with some 25,000 warriors to fight the Kurds and the Ismā‘īlis. But he returned to Sinjār in order to double his forces, and brought some 50,000 warriors in 619/1222. He took over the fortresses in the region of Ḥamāt (Abū Qubays) and Tripoli (al-Marqab, ‘Ulayqa), where he celebrated his victory with the Nuṣayrī villagers, married his cousin Faḍḍa, and granted lands (iqtāʿats, sing. iqtāʿ)

---

199 The names of family members of al-Makzūn were added to the Dīwān of al-Muntajab al-ʿĀnī (see Appendix 1, item 53) in a later period for an unknown reason. We suppose that al-Muntajab lived in the time of al-Khaṣībī, according to the contents of his poems. The lines mentioning the Banū Ṣaḥki and Banū Fāḍl, ancestors of al-Makzūn, which appear in the titles and at the beginning of some poems, seem out of context. See DMA, fol. 123b, 128b–129b, 144a, 144b, 147b.


201 Ibid., p. 341.

202 MN, fol. 140a–141b.


204 Ibid., p. 343.

205 Ibid., pp. 343–346.
to her brothers. He continued his battles until the Kurds and the Īsmāʿīlīs fled from the Jabal. In 620/1223 he wrote his book Risālat tazkiyat al-nafs. There was only one last rivalry to settle. His personal involvement in the Nūṣayrī theology led him to organize a theological debate (munāzara) against the Ishāqīyya and the Duhaybiyya (followers of Abū Duhayba, Ishāqī leaders and rivals of al-Ṭabarānī). At the end of this debate he massacred them and burned their books. In 630/1232 he wrote his Adʿiya (book of prayers, not available to us) and in 638/1240, on his way back to Sinjār, he fell ill and died in the village of Talʿafar near Hāmāt.

9.2 Al-Makzūn’s innovations

Al-Makzūn’s Risālat tazkiyat al-nafs (see Appendix 1) does not add historical information to his biography, except for the date of its composition, 620/1223. His Dīwān, like his other works, reflects his charismatic personality, which was a combination of a military commander and a mystic poet. Al-Ṭawīl’s biography contains one element that is missing from Shaykh Yūnus’s book. According to al-Ṭawīl, al-Makzūn began a tradition that was considered a “revolution in the religion”. From his period onwards the secrets of the sect were known not only by a minority of the initiated group. Poets could also write religious poems for all the members of the sect, in which they included the secret doctrines, but they used personal terms and expressions that only the initiated Nūṣayrīs could understand. Another important innovation of al-Makzūn is the addition of jihād as a religious obligation. In accordance with the difficult circumstances of the sect, he made obligatory the jihād al-zāhir, the exoteric meaning of the term, which is war against the infidels and the enemies of Islam. He also ordered the jihād al-bātīn, the esoteric battle of the believer against

---

206 Ibid., p. 354.
207 Ibid., p. 346. Compare with the account of al-Makzūn’s wars against the Kurds, the Īsmāʿīlīs and the Ishāqīs, abridged in TA, pp. 359–362. The dates and places are almost identical but the historical account omits many details.
208 A. A. ‘Ali, Maʾrifat Allāh, vol. 2, p. 347. According to al-Ṭawīl, he was buried in Kafarsūsa, near Damascus; see TA, p. 363. Shaykh Yūnus did not specify the place of his burial.
209 RTN, p. 268.
210 TA, p. 363.
personal sins, lusts, but mainly doubts concerning God.211 Shaykh al-Ṣuwayrī’s Urjūza, of the fourteenth century, contains an element of jihād al-ẓāhir, the fidāʾ (sacrifice), a term which is not found in later sources.212 Al-Makzūn’s Diwān contains typical military terminology such as jihād, thrūr (front camp), naṣr/fath (victory), and jaysh (army).213 Apart from the jihād, another innovation is typical of his poetry. If we accept the credibility of the available copy of his Diwān, it seems to reflect significant Ṣūfī influence. Al-Makzūn explicitly defines his religion as ʿilm al-tashawwuf (science of Sūfism), which is for him a synonym of ʿilm al-tawhīd (science of monotheism, Nuṣayrīsm).214 In his poetry, the element of love for the divinity as a means of getting closer to God is prominent. His comparison between God and a beloved and desired woman is extraordinary for the Nuṣayrī anti-feminist approach. Typical Nuṣayrī religious poetry deals with the divinity in the third person and rarely speaks of the spiritual experience of the writer in the first person. But most of al-Makzūn’s poetry is personal and the divinity is in the background. Al-Makzūn focuses on his personal feelings and experiences and his love for the members of the sect and for God, using three levels for affection, love and passionate love: ḥubb/mahhabba, gharām, and ẓabāba or ʿishq.215 These levels are known in Ṣūfism as an important means to attain unity with God (ittihād),216 but for al-Makzūn ittihād is a heresy and love is an aid to the Gnostic return to heaven, but the divinity remains transcendental. Paul Nwyia sees the the writings of al-Makzūn as a combination of Nuṣayrism and Ṣūfism. Nevertheless, in his poetry al-Makzūn tries to alienate himself from Ṣūfism, cursing Ḥallāj and attacking his declaration of unity with God (anāʾ ʾl-ḥaqq, I am truth) as heresy.217 We may assume that al-Makzūn, like other Ṣūfī mystics, was attracted to mysti-

211 RTN, pp. 302–304. The jihād al-bāṭin is discussed in Chapter 2.
212 SUR, fol 218b, 233b.
213 DMS, pp. 94, 107, 113.
214 Ibid., p. 102.
215 Paul Nwyia noted that some of al-Makzūn’s poems are even erotic, but this should be understood as a typical mystic relation between the believers and God, a view well known in Judaism in the context of the biblical Song of Songs (Shīr ha-shirīm). See a general explanation of the connection between eroticism and mysticism in D. Abrams, Sexual Symbolism and Merkavah Speculation in Medieval Germany (Tubingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1997), pp. 1–2 and the bibliography in note 4.
cal Shi‘ism and converted to Nuṣayrism. This Şūfi tendency towards Shi‘ism was more characteristic of the Şūfi orders of Iran and central Asia in later periods. The best example is the Safawid dynasty in Iran in the sixteenth century. Thus, the case of al-Makzūn seems to be one of the earliest examples of the complex connection between Şūfism and Shi‘ism.²¹⁸

As for the issue of the elimination of the rival Ishāqiyya sect by al-Makzūn, a comparison of two Muslim texts, written before and after the period of al-Makzūn, may shed some light. In the book of al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153), al-Mīlāl wa-l-niḥal, there is a chapter explaining the beliefs of the Nuṣayriyya and the Ishāqiyya.²¹⁹ But in Kitāb al-rāwḍatayn of Abū Shāma (d. 666/1267) mentions among the sects in Syria the Nuṣayrīs, the Druzes and the Ḥashishīyya (the Nizāris), but not the Ishāqiyya.²²⁰

Although medieval sources are silent concerning al-Makzūn, there is no doubt that circumstances enabled his success. The permanent wars between the Ayyubids and the Crusaders, as well as the terror of the Nizāris, devastated all three warring sides. It is this chronic instability in Syria and the absence of a strong Muslim control in the regions conquered by Salāḥ al-Dīn that permitted a certain degree of autonomy of the Nuṣayrīs in the Jabal. According to Nuṣayrī popular tradition, al-Makzūn brought a thousand of his warriors to Syria. These people, who enlarged the sect’s population considerably, are regarded as the ancestors of most of the present-day ‘Alawī clans in Syria.²²¹ According to al-Ṭawīl, most of the clans that came from Sinjār


settled in Jabala. These people were characterized as brave warriors. These facts would later on have a significant impact on the events of the fourteenth century in this specific town. The brief revival of the sect in the time of al-Makzūn ended with the invasion of the Mamlûks led by Baybars (d. 676/1277).

10. Oppression under the Mamlûks

The events of the beginning of the thirteenth century marked a new era of stability in the Muslim world. The new ruling power that arose in Egypt, the Mamlûks, gained a strong grip in the region of Syria. After repelling the Mongol invasion at ʿAyn Jālūt in 659/1260, Baybars put an end to the Ismāʿīlī–Nizârī presence in Syria and also to that of the Crusaders in the coastal regions by the end of the century. Nevertheless, the Mamlûks granted stability only to those who followed their own religious beliefs. They defended Sunnī Muslims, while Shīʿī groups were severely persecuted. The most vulnerable were the Shīʿī sects that had survived up to this period, mainly the Druzes and the Nuṣayrîs.

10.1 First attempt to convert the Nuṣayrîs

The conclusion of the historical survey describes the Mamlûk attempt to liquidate the Nuṣayrîs, the response of the sect to that attempt, and the reasons for its eventual survival. In contrast to the issues dealt with thus far, Mamlûk policy towards the Nuṣayrî sect has been well covered in previous studies. René Dussaud and Samuel Lyde both give interesting explanations for the exceptional events of this period. The more recent studies of Urbain Vermeulen and Sato Tsugitaka concerning the town of Jabala contribute to the covering and comprehension of the events. Tsugitaka notes that the Mamlûk conquest of Syria was followed by a cadastral survey, to enable preparation for the distribution of the ĭqtāʾ to the leading warriors. The conclusions of the survey were economic as well as religious. The territory was to be divided into districts, and the local sects had to embrace Sunnī Islam. Baybars himself ordered that mosques should be built in every Nuṣayrî village.

Taxes were to be raised from the local villagers and the drinking of wine was prohibited. Initiation into the Nusayri religion, the khitāb, was forbidden. The Nusayris were thus divided into separate districts and were obliged to use the new mosques for public prayer instead of practising their intimate secret cult in private houses. They had to pay heavy taxes to their new iqṭā’ landlords and could not use wine for their mystical prayers. The most severe edict of all was the abolition of the khitāb, which meant the end of initiation into the esoteric religion or, in other words, the elimination of the Nusayri sect.224

The attempt of Baybars to convert the Nusayris seems odd if we compare it with his determined elimination of the Nizāris. The Nusayris could not stand against the power that had defeated the Mongols. One should therefore ask why the Mamlūks preferred to convert them rather than liquidate them in one raid. In order to answer this question, we should complete the account of the relationship between the Nusayris and the ruling Mamlūks.

The enforcement of mosque building in the Nusayri villages was not enough to convert the members of the sect. It seems that Baybars underestimated the devotion of the Nusayris to their religion. Since the orders to convert the sect were renewed following the cadastral survey of 717/1317, it is reasonable to assume that the attempt of Baybars some 50 years earlier was unsuccessful. The account of Ibn Baṭṭūta, according to which the Nusayris used the mosques for their cattle,225 may not be historically accurate; no other historian of that period mentions it. This is an example of Ibn Baṭṭūta’s well-known ironic style used as means to denounce the Mamlūks and to explain their failure to convert the Nusayris.

10.2 The uprising of the Nusayri mahdi

The second attempt to convert the Nusayris and to raise taxes from their lands took place in the wilāya (district) of Tripoli, which

---


included the regions of Jabala and Lādhiqiyya. This Mamlūk initiative was counteracted by a strong uprising led by a Nuṣayrī leader from the region of Jabala in 717/1317. While Tsugitaka sees the religious prohibitions as the main reason for the Nuṣayrī uprising, Vermeulen tends to view it as a social revolt of the peasants against the landlords. We can assume that both reasons, religious and economic, played an important role in this uprising. Nevertheless, a review of the sect’s development requires a preliminary investigation as to the reason for this outstanding phenomenon in Nuṣayrī history. Since the time of the Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq in the eighth century, most of the Shīʿīs, including the Nuṣayrīs, believed in quʿūd (a passive expectation of a savior) and entrusted the khurūj (the war against the infidels) to the mahdī at the end of time. Indeed, al-Makzūn’s expedition was an exception. It should be seen as the external intervention of a foreign leader who had been converted to Nuṣayrīsm. It was not viewed by the sect as an attack initiated against the sect’s enemies, but as a migration process followed by a defensive military expedition.

Dussaud proposes that the mahdī uprising was the result of the influence of the violent and messianic natures of the Nizārīs who ruled in the Jabal for a decade. However, his logical hypothesis cannot explain where the Nuṣayrī warriors came from. It was perhaps rather that the uprising took place specifically in Jabala because it was the main place in which the warriors of al-Makzūn al-Sinjārī had been concentrated a century before. The local members of the sect not only shared a tradition of fighters but were probably closer to the jihād ideology of al-Makzūn than Nuṣayrīs in other regions.

According to several Muslim sources, the mysterious mahdī came from the castle of Qiṭṭāwūs near Jabala. The Christian Syriac historian Bar-Hebraeus (d. 685/1286) was the only one to claim that the Nuṣayrī mahdī appeared from Balāṭunos (in the source Beladnoos). This last account proves that a Nuṣayrī community, which had lived

---


there from the period of the Banū ʿl-Aḥmar in the eleventh century, still existed in this place and probably joined the rebellion of 717/1317.

The uprising was most likely a local event, because Nuṣayrīs from other regions did not join it. It seems that it was not backed by a majority of the sect’s shaykhs, which is the reason that it was not recorded in any of the Nuṣayrī sources or in the popular tradition. The sect’s religious leaders were probably shocked by the public declaration of secret beliefs and the violent means of the mahdī, who brought disaster to the community in Jabala. The contemporary historian Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) described the events as follows:

In this year (717/1317) the Nuṣayriyya became disobedient, and among them was a man whom they called Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan, the mahdī, executor of Allāh’s orders [al-Qāʾim bi-Amrillāh, identical to the Fātimid Caliph’s title] and sometimes they called him ʿAbī ʿAbī Ṭālib creator of heavens and earth… At other times he claimed that he was [the Prophet] Muhammad ibn ʿAbdallāh, Lord of the Land. He rebelled, claiming that the Muslims were infidels and the Nuṣayrīs possessed the truth. This man had influence upon many of the leading Nuṣayrīs, to whom he gave command over a thousand [warriors], lands and positions. They raided the town of Jabala, entered and killed a certain number of its habitants, and left it declaring that: “There is no God but ʿAlī, and no veil [hijāb] but Muḥammad and there is no gate [bāb] but Salmān”. They took two [Muslim] shaykhs and the inhabitants of the city cried: “Alas to Islam, oh sultan! oh amīr!” But on that day they did not have any savior and they cried and begged the mighty and exalted God. This heretic collected his spoils and distributed it to his commanders and his followers, may God curse them all! He told them that there is nothing left of the Muslims… He ordered his commanders to ruin the mosques and to turn them into wine taverns. When they caught a Muslim they forced him to say: “There is no God but ʿAlī and bow to your Lord the mahdī who gives life and puts to death”, or else they would kill him… They equipped themselves [for another raid] but troops were launched against them, defeated them, killed a great number of people among them, and the mahdī was killed.231

The account of a later historian, al-Maqrīzī (d. 846/1442) adds more odd details:

On 17 [a sacred number in Nuṣayrī theology] Dhū ʿl-Qaʿda a man from the village of Qirtāwūs in the district of Jabala claimed that he was Muhammad ibn Ḥasan, the mahdī, and that while he was plowing in his field, suddenly a white bird came to him and made a hole in the side

of his body through which he took out his soul and inserted the soul of Muhammad ibn Ḥasan [al-ʿAskarī, i.e. the twelfth and last Imām]. Some 5,000 Nusayris joined him [3,000 according to al-Dhahabī]. He ordered them to prostrate themselves before him, which they did. He permitted them to drink wine and to abandon prayer. He declared that: “There is no God but ʿAlī, and no veil but Muhammad [the third aspect is missing here]”. They held red flags and a big candle with burning flames, which was held by a young man who claimed he was Ibrāhīm ibn Adham and that he [the mahdī] resurrected him, and he called his brother al-Miqdād ibn Aswad al-Kindī, and called another person “[the Angel] Gabriel”…he attacked Jabala in Friday, killed, took captives and revealed his heresy, and he cursed [the two first caliphs] Abū Bakr and ʿUmar, God bless them. Then the governor of Tripoli, Amīr Shihāb al-Dīn Qirtāy sent an army of 1,000 cavalry headed by Amīr Badr al-Dīn Bīlīk [or Baylīk]. He fought them until he [the mahdī] was killed. His uprising [khurūj] took five days.

The mystical symbols in the story of the Nusayri mahdī have never been studied, perhaps because some of them are strange even according to the sect’s own doctrines. The abolition of Islamic law is known from the history of the Ḥashshiyūn. Other symbols in the story of the Nusayri mahdī do not belong to Ismāʿīlī mysticism. The tradition of the white bird carrying the mahdī’s soul can be traced to two different traditions: Zoroastrian–Muslim syncretism and Ṣūfī mysticism.

---


233 Since there does not seem to be a suitable translation for bi-ʾl-hār, it is possibly an error of the copyist in the last letter and it was originally bi-alhāb. This translation seems more logical than Tsugitaka’s proposal, “burning as brightly as day”, supposing that bi-ʾl-hār was originally bi-ʾl-nahār.


236 In the *Shahnameh* of the Seljuk Sultan Niẓām al-Mulk (d. 485/1092), there is an account of a rebellion by one of Abū Muslim’s followers who tried to revenge his murder. The rebel, a certain magician called Sinbādh, claimed that when the ʿAbbāsid caliph was about to execute Abū Muslim, commander of Khurasan, he escaped by turning into a white dove and soaring to the heavens, where he was seated by the mahdī and Mazdak (founder of a sixth-century Zoroastrian proto-socialist philosophy). See H. Darke (trans.), *The Book of Government or Rules for Kings* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 207; P. Holsworth, *A History of Persia* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 560–561. On Mazdak and Mazdakizm, see E. Yarshater, “Mazdakiza”, *Cambridge History of Iran*, III (1983), pp. 991–1024.

237 The story of the mahdī’s uprising contains two Ṣūfī elements. In his account of the uprising, al-Maqrīzī noted that one of the mahdī’s followers claimed to be Ibrāhīm ibn Adham, one of the early Ṣūfis of the eighth century from Balkh who was buried
The Nusayrī use of the white bird could be a negation of the symbol of the black raven in the tradition of the Ghurābiyya (sect of the ravens, a rival Ghulāt sect.238

There are traces in Nusayrī writings of other accusations of heresy mentioned in the account of the uprising. The *shahāda* (declaration of belief) repeated by the *mahdi*’s followers concerning the three divine aspects, the consideration of ‘Alī and his follower al-Miqdād as parts of the divinity, and the curse of the first two caliphs, all reflect a superficial Sunnī understanding of some Nusayrī doctrines. A typical example of this facile understanding of the sect’s mystical doctrines is the *fatwā* of Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), which is discussed in detail in Chapter 3. The fact that such doctrines were revealed means that the *mahdi* permitted himself to abolish the *taqiyya*, as if the end of time had come.

In the account of Ibn Batṭūta, we find significant additional information about the uprising. The *mahdi* said that the angels would defend him. Then he promised his followers that when they fought, their branches of myrtle would turn into swords.239 This promise can be traced back to a well-known Ghulāt tradition from the time of Abū ‘l-Khaṭṭāb’s uprising in Kufa in the eighth century.240

---

238 The Ghurābiyya were a Ghulāt sect who claimed that the Angel Gabriel was sent by God to ‘Ali but confused him with Muhammad, because they were as similar as two ravens. Thus, they curse Gabriel and the Prophet Muhammad as well. See al-Baghdādi, *al-Farq bayna l-firaq*, p. 239. This sect still existed in Syria in the time of Ibn Jubayr (d. 614/1217), the Andalusian traveler. According to his description of Syria, the Shi‘īs were more numerous than the Sunnis during the time he traveled there. Among the Shi‘ī groups, those he considered most heretical were the Ismā‘īliyya, the Nusayriyya (“who regard ‘Ali as God”), and the Ghurābiyya; see Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Jubayr, *Risālat i’tībār al-nāsik fi dhikr al-āthār al-karima wa-l-manāsik* (Beirut: Dār wa-Maktabat al-Hilāl, 1986), p. 227.


240 In Abū ‘l-Khaṭṭāb’s uprising, he promised his followers that when they fought their canes would turn into lances and the enemy’s swords and lances would not harm them; see al-Nawbakhti, *Firaq al-Shī‘a*, p. 70.
10.3 A deadly fatwā of Ibn Taymiyya

Ibn Taymiyya, a respected but controversial theologian of the Ḥanbali school\(^\text{241}\) of Sunnism, was the first to issue a fatwā (see in detail in Chapter 3 and Appendix 8) against the Nuṣayrīs and to determine that they are not Muslims and should be annihilated. His fatwā was the only one issued in the Middle Ages and it was not echoed by others. It is true that the negative opinion concerning the sect was shared by other Sunnis and Shi‘is, as shown in Chapter 3. Nevertheless, we should ask ourselves why such a dramatic step was taken specifically in this period, five decades after the emergence of the Nuṣayrī sect.

The historical background bears the answer to the question. The policy of the Mamlūks was extreme in many aspects. They had liquidated the Nizārīs and removed the Mongol menace. Finally, they put an end to the Crusader presence in Syria, even at the cost of the destruction of every Crusader castle, settlement and port in the coastal territories, to prevent their reconquest.\(^\text{242}\)

The policy towards the Nuṣayrīs was extreme as well. Orders arrived from the Sultan in Egypt to eliminate them following the mahdī’s uprising. We do not know if this order was meant to be executed in Jabala, in the Tripoli district, or even in all of Syria. Ibn Baṭṭūta reported that after the uprising a punitive attack was initiated by the Mamlūk amīr of Tripoli, in which some 20,000 members of the sect were killed and others fled to the Jabal.\(^\text{243}\)

It may be assumed that the mahdī’s policy was not accepted among the majority of the sect, which did not join him. It seems that the Nuṣayrī shaykhs decided to take responsible measures in order to save the sect from total extermination. Knowing that they were not considered Muslim by the Sunni authorities, the Nuṣayrī leaders asked at least to be included among the ahl al-kitāb, i.e. monotheist communities under Muslim rule. As such they would pay the jizya (poll tax), but because of their low economic status, they would be asked to pay the minimum tax obligated by the sharī‘a, of one dinar per person.\(^\text{244}\)

---


\(^{242}\) See, for example, C. Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 445–446.


\(^{244}\) For the regulations of the jizya, see, for example, J. E. Lindsay, *Daily Life in the Islamic World* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2005), p. 121.
Indeed, according to Ibn Baṭṭūṭa the Nuṣayrīs (he does not specify who exactly) wrote to the amīr of Tripoli, promising they would pay a poll tax of one dinar per person if he would spare their lives.245

Dussaud’s hypothesis that in his fatwā Ibn Taymiyya forbade the relationships that were taking place in everyday life between Muslims and Nuṣayrīs means that we can learn from these prohibitions about the reality of the time. The fatwā reveals that the Nuṣayrīs were a productive and devoted community, cultivated their lands, fought together with the other Muslims against foreign invaders, and even married local Muslims and were buried beside them. Thus, the fatwā’s application was not realistic.246 Dussaud’s hypothesis is supported by Bar-Hebraeus’s account of the resistance of the sect against the Crusaders at the end of the eleventh century. In their passage between Mount Lebanon and Tripoli, the Franks killed a great number of Nuṣayrīs.247 Dussaud’s view is also backed by Ibn Baṭṭūṭa’s explanation of the survival of the sect after the uprising of the mahdī:

A pigeon post transmitted the news [concerning the uprising in Jabala] and al-Malik al-Nāşir [Mamlūk Sultan of Egypt, d. 741/1341] sent his answer that they were all to be liquidated. Then the great amīr [of Tripoli] wrote to back him explaining that they [the Nuṣayrīs] were working for the Muslims by plowing the land, and if they were killed it would weaken the Muslims. Thus he [the Sultan] ordered their lives to be spared.248

Ibn Taymiyya’s efforts were in vain since economic interests were more important to the Mamlūks than religious obligations. Moreover, Ibn Taymiyya was seen as a fanatic scholar by the Mamlūk authorities themselves. We are told, for example, by the historian Ibn al-Wardī that twelve years before the uprising, in the events of the year 705/1305, Ibn Taymiyya was asked by the Mamlūks to accompany an attack against the Nuṣayrīs of al-Zānīnayn and to launch a fatwā against them. Nevertheless, immediately after that task, he was called to Damascus to be investigated by a committee of ‘ulamāʾ who accused him of anthropomorphism (tajsīm). He was jailed as a result.249

245 Ibid.
Little is known of the history of the sect after the fifteenth century and prior to the nineteenth century. We know about other Nuṣayrī leaders from their poetical works, but we do not have enough information to date their activities. One example is Shaykh Ḥasan al-Ajrūd from ‘Āna, who lived in the fifteenth century, according to the problematic book of al-Ṭawīl. Massignon thought that this poet lived around 836/1433. However, we have no additional information concerning him. A study of these obscure four centuries is yet to be undertaken.

11. *Nuṣayrī medieval history—a chronological table*

Second half of the ninth century
- Claim of Ibn Nuṣayr from Basra that he is the bāb of the tenth and eleventh Imāms, ʿAlī al-Hādī (d. 254/868) and Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī (d. 260/873). Backing of his community by Banū Ḥ-Furāt
- Split of Ishāq al-Aḥmar from the Numayriyya/Namiriyya

End of the ninth century
- Transmission of the leadership of the sect to Muḥammad ibn Jundab, then to ʿAbdallāh al-Jannān from Junbulā'
- Initiation of al-Khaṣībī to the Numayriyya/Namiriyya by al-Jannān
- 314/926
  - al-Khaṣībī’s second mystical guidance by ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad in Ṭurbā’
- 314–333/926–945
  - al-Khaṣībī’s public preaching in Baghdad and his arrest
  - His mysterious escape and his immigration to Syria
  - Foundation of the first center of the sect in Ḥarrān, including 51 members
- 334/945
  - The Buyids seize power in Baghdad, al-Khaṣībī’s return to Iraq

---

250 TA, pp. 376–378. His only available poems are in Ms. Paris 1540, fol. 175b-176b. They are studied in C. Huart, “La poésie religieuse des Nuṣayris”, *Journal Asiatique* 14 (1879), p. 255.
Izz al-Dīn Bakhtiyār is praised in a panegyric of al-Muntajab al-ʿĀnī
Dedication of al-Khaṣībī’s *Rāst Bāsh* to Bakhtiyār

336/947
al-Khaṣībī’s visit to his 140 disciples in Ṯurbaʾ

340/951
al-Jisrī’s compilation of his catechism with al-Khaṣībī in his *majlis*,
containing Hārūn al-Ṣāʿīgh

344/956
al-Khaṣībī’s use of *taqiyya* to pose as an Imāmī scholar
al-Khaṣībī’s *ijāza* to Hārūn ibn Mūsā al-Tāl’akbarī in Kufa

Middle of the tenth century
al-Jisrī’s appointment as leader of the sect in Baghdad
Return of al-Khaṣībī to Syria and establishment of a new center of
the sect in Aleppo, backed by the Ḥamdanids
Dedication of *al-Hidāya al-kubrā* to Sayf al-Dawla
al-Khaṣībī’s appointment of al-Jillī as his successor in Aleppo

358/969
Death of al-Khaṣībī in Aleppo

370/980
Catechism between al-Jillī and his disciple al-Ṭabarānī in Beirut

First half of the eleventh century
al-Ṭabarānī’s leadership of the sect
Theological activity of the Banū Shu’ba of Ḥarrān

398/1007
Transmission of the first tradition from *Majmūʿ al-a’yād* to al-
Ṭabarānī in Tripoli

421–422/1030
Patronage of the Banū ’l-Aḥmar of Balṭūnos to the Nuṣayrīs of the
Jabal
Middle of the eleventh century
Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī reports about a Nuṣayrī center in Tiberias
The Druze leader Ḥamza ibn ‘Alī’s epistle attacking the Nuṣayrīs

Beginning of twelfth century
Patronage of the Banū Muḥriz of Marqab to the Nuṣayrīs of the region of Tripoli (until 511/1117)
Travel and theological debates of Shaykh al-Nashshābī in Muslim territories of Syria

584/1188
Salāh al-Dīn’s conquest of the Jabal, after a century of separation of the Nuṣayrīs between Frankish and Muslim territories

End of eleventh century–beginning of twelfth century
Nizārī dominance over the Nuṣayrīs of the Jabal

619–638/1222–1240
Raid of Amīr Makzūn al-Sinjārī and his army in order to save the Nuṣayrīs from the Nizāris and the Kurds. Makzūn’s liquidation of the rival Isḥāqiyya

659/1260
Baybars’s conquest of Syria and the first attempt to convert the Nuṣayrīs to Sunnism

717/1317
A Mamlūk order to convert the Nuṣayrīs is repeated following the cadastral survey of the district of Tripoli. Augmentation of taxes and prohibition of initiation into Nuṣayrīsm
Failure of the uprising of the Nuṣayrī mahdī in Jabala, crushed by the commander of Tripoli

Fourteenth century, before 728/1328
A fatwā of Ibn Taymiyya against the Nuṣayrīs, determining that they are not Muslims
Nuṣayrī leaders’ correspondence with the amīr of Tripoli to spare their lives and to pay a poll tax
A Mamlūk decision to let the Nuṣayrīs live in order to cultivate the lands
The Nusayrī-ʿAlawī religious system is a crystallized mixture of ideas that was developed for two centuries in mystical circles of the Shiʿa. It was created in a region in which Islam and the Hellenistic and Persian cultures came into contact with each other. The understanding of their syncretistic theology demands an artificial organization of their traditions, since there is no systematic order in the majority of the sect’s religious writings. This organization is based on ideas repeated in the available Nusayrī manuscripts, which basically consist of disparate collections of traditions. There are some exceptions, such as the important Majmūʿ al-aʾyād, in which the traditions are arranged by holidays. Most of the material from the Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī is edited in a disorganized manner. The sources included in the Silsila enable us to take a significant step towards a better understanding of the Nusayrī religion and its sources.

Significant progress has been made in the research on Nusayrī doctrines during the past decade. The most remarkable work in this field was made recently in Bar-Asher and Kofsky’s The Nusayrī-ʿAlawī Religion. But their study represents merely a collection of articles, each one focusing on one specific manuscript. Despite the undoubted contribution of their work, it cannot be seen as exhaustive. The study does not cover the totality of the Nusayrī writings, and in most cases it also lacks a broader religious context. The aim in this chapter is to complete the important work of Bar-Asher and Kofsky by presenting the Nusayrī religion based on all the available sources of the sect, with the significant addition of the new sources of the Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī. In addition, an attempt is made to trace the components of the syncretistic beliefs of the sect, which can be found in some of the surrounding religions, mainly Islam, Judaism, Christianism, Greek philosophy and Zoroastrianism, as well as other mystic groups in the medieval Muslim world.
1. Western research on the Nuṣayrī religion

Since the publications in Arabic concerning the Nuṣayrīs represent negative and positive (or apologetic) propaganda rather than objective research, the focus here is on the evolution of the main Western works in this field.

The pioneers in the study of the Nuṣayrī religion in the nineteenth century were scholars, members of the French Société Asiatique and of the American Oriental Society, diplomats who served under European representatives in the Middle East, and Christian missionaries. Earlier, some brief reports on the sect were written by adventurers and travelers who passed through Jabal Anṣariyya. The first researchers of the sect published academic papers every time they discovered a new text of the sect. Their research was a combination of their discovery with their previous knowledge of Muslim heresiography. Most of the studies in this field were made by French researchers. Antoine Sylvestre de Sacy wrote a chapter concerning the Nuṣayrīs, in his Exposé de la religion des Druzes, based on a polemical epistle written by the main Druze propagandist, Ḥamza ibn ʿAli.1 The British Reverend Samuel Lyde based his work on Kitāb al-mashyakha, the original of which is lost today.2 René Dussaud relied mainly on Sulaymān al-Adhanī’s Bākūra.3 Sylvestre de Sacy and Lyde tended to view Nuṣayrī syncretism as a combination of Greek and Persian influences. According to their hypothesis, the Muslims inherited the doctrines of the two conquered civilizations: the Hellenistic–Byzantine in the west and the Sassanid–Persian in the east.4

However, Dussaud preferred to emphasize the influence of pagan societies that had been situated since antiquity in the region where the sect’s members were concentrated. Since there is a lack of information regarding the precise number of conversions to Christianity and Islam in the medieval period, the possibility of the existence of a

---

1 De Sacy, Exposé de la religion des Druzes, II pp. 559–586.
4 Lyde, Asian Mystery, pp. 54, 76–77.
pagan society even in the tenth—eleventh centuries cannot be excluded. Dussaud’s assumption was that the sect had existed in the Jabal Anṣāriyya long before the emergence of Islam, and that even after converting to Shiʿism, it preserved Phoenician doctrines that were influenced by Greek philosophy. In order to back his theory, he tried to prove the influence upon the sect of the mysterious Sabeans of Harrān, another society that survived until the late medieval period.

Another theory concerning the origins of the Nuṣayrī religion was proposed by Christian priests and missionaries who dwelt in Syria during the nineteenth century. Lyde cites missionaries who claimed that the Nuṣayrīs adopted a Gnostic Christianity, which the Orthodox churches considered heretical. Henri Lammens regarded the sect as a lost isolated Christian community which, over the centuries, had lost its original beliefs and adopted instead mystical Shiʿism and local Syrian superstitions.

In the twentieth century, important progress was made in research on the Nuṣayrī sect, again by a French researcher. Louis Massignon’s work in this field marks a fundamental change in the use of sources. From his period onward, the system of basing a study on one single source was discarded. In his article in the first Encyclopedia of Islam and his Bibliographie nusayrie, Massignon mentions almost all the Nuṣayrī sources known today. Moreover, he never relied on oral testimony, as did his predecessors. In this way he avoided being misled.

---

5 Dussaud, Histoire et religion des Nosairîs, pp. 14, 17–18, 82. This hypothesis of pagan influence was maintained also by R. Basset; see his entry “Nuṣayris”, in J. Hastings (ed.) Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1955), vol. 9, pp. 417–419.

6 Dussaud, Histoire et religion des Nosairîs, pp. 20, 44–45.

7 Lyde, Asian Mystery, pp. 49–50.


9 See Massignon’s bibliography in: “Nuṣairî”, EI vi, p. 966; L. Massignon, “Esquisse d’une bibliographie nusayrie”, Opera Minora I (1936), pp. 640–649. Although Massignon mentions the majority of the Nuṣayrī sources we know today, it seems that he did not use most of them since he cites only a few in his large four-volume series La Passion de Husayn ibn Mansūr al-Hallāj: martyrre mystique de l’Islam exécuté à Baghdad le 26 Mars 922: étude d’histoire religieuse, trans. H. Mason, The Passion of al-Hallāj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982). Although in his “Esquisse” Massignon claims to be at an advanced stage of his “Guide to Alawī literature”, it seems that French political involvement in Syria in the 1920s and 1930s prevented the eventual fulfillment of his goal, as evidenced by his cautious promise not to publish his future project without the prior permission of the ʿAlawi shaykhs; see Massignon, “Esquisse”, p. 640.
by the sect’s members who were following the obligation of taqiyya. The most important change in Massignon’s system is the adoption of what may be called an internal attitude. By this is meant an approach that regards Nuṣayrī syncretism as the result of a development inside the Shi’a, rather than what may be termed an external attitude, which sees it as an influence from some external, non-Muslim religion or from paganism.

The next step in this research was led by German scholars such as Rudolf Strothmann, followed by Heinz Halm, who contributed tremendously to the definition of the Nusayrī religion system. Strothmann’s critical edition of al-Ṭabarānī’s Majmūʿ al-a’yād (see Appendix 1) and Halm’s studies of the transmission of Nuṣayrī traditions10 and the Gnosticism of the Ghulāt,11 are crucial tools for any research in the field. The work of these two researchers promoted the internal attitude, to the point of considering all Nuṣayrī doctrines as a final development of the Shi’ī mysticism of Kufa. However, a different approach was advanced lately in the works of two Israelis, Meir Bar-Asher and Arieh Kofsky. Their study, which focuses on Ms. Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale), fonds arabe 1449 and 1450, raises new assumptions. Their research led to the conclusion that Christianity had a major influence on the sect’s doctrines.12 In a recent paper, Bar-Asher also emphasizes the Iranian influence on the early Nuṣayrī traditions.13 The work of Bar-Asher and Kofsky may indicate a new trend of research, which marks a return to the external attitude.

The aim here is to combine several systems of research and views concerning the origins of the Nuṣayrī religion rather than rejecting old trends. The existence of Persian, Christian, as well as pagan elements, in the Nuṣayrī manuscripts is undeniable, but equally they display internal religious evolution within the Shi’ī Ghulāt of Kufa. The historical account of the sect is the main tool in understanding the development of the Nuṣayrī religion: Nuṣayrīsm is a mystical version.

---

12 See, for example, Bar-Asher and Kofsky, The Nusayri-’Alawi Religion, pp. 73–74.
of Shi‘ism advocated by the Numayriyya/Namīrīyya of Ibn Nuṣayr in the ninth century, renewed by another group led by al-Khašābī in the tenth century. The sect was born in Basra, Kufa and Baghdad, a milieu that was subject to Persian influence. Some members of the sect played a role in linking the sect with Persian thinkers in the period of al-Khašābī, such as the unknown Abū ʿAlī al-Bāṣrī who is cited in Nuṣayrī sources as transmitting mystical traditions in Shīrāz\textsuperscript{14} and the poet al-Muntajab who seems to have had contacts with the Buyid leader Bakhtiyār. The strong Iranian influence on the texts of the sect from the tenth century is not only a result of a Shu‘ūbī tendency among the Nuṣayrīs, as proposed by Bar-Asher.\textsuperscript{15} It is also a result of the coincidence of the creation of the sect with the renaissance of Iranian culture in the Buyid state, which Adam Mez called “the renaissance of Islam”.\textsuperscript{16} Moreover, some older Persian religious groups were not yet converted in the tenth–eleventh century. In Persia and Iraq, Zoroastrianism and Mazdakism were still prominent in that period. Many Persian groups merged Islamic teaching with Iranian religions. This was the case with many Iranians who had converted to Ismāʿīlism.\textsuperscript{17} The Shi‘i scholar al-Nawbakhtī (d. 310/912) wrote:

\begin{quote}
All these sects of extremism [ghulūw] who claim they were supporters of ʿAlī, their source is the Khurramdīniyya, the Mazdakiyya, the Žindiqīyya and the Dahriyya, may Allāh curse them.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

Syncretism, which characterizes almost every religion and sect, is a result of two major factors: the converts import their previous beliefs and doctrines into their new religion, which in this case is Shi‘ī Islam; at the same time, the religious group is permanently influenced by the beliefs that surround it. The Nuṣayrī religion was created by the combination of the two: a great number of the Ghulāt and Nuṣayrīs were mawālī, as were the majority of the Shi‘īs; there are also indications of

\textsuperscript{14} Al-Ṭabarānī, \textit{Majmū‘}, p. 28. Although al-Ṭabarānī refers to Abū ʿAlī, it is unlikely that he was born in his period. Abū ʿAlī’s transmission is dated 327/938, in the period of al-Khašābī’s activity; see M. Bar-Asher, “The Iranian component”, pp. 223, 228; Lyde, \textit{The Asian Mystery}, pp. 137–138.

\textsuperscript{15} Bar-Asher, “The Iranian component”, pp. 219–222.


\textsuperscript{18} Nawbakhtī, \textit{Firaq al-Shī‘a}, p. 46. The first two sects mentioned here are branches of Zoroastrianism, which existed in Iraq and Iran; see Daftary, ibid., pp. 31, 54, 58.
an endeavor to convert people to Nuṣayrism after the sect’s migration to Syria. The sect’s passage from Iraq to Syria entailed a fundamental change in the two factors that produce syncretism: the original religion of the converts and the external influences. The transition was from a Persian milieu to a Byzantine and Christian scene.

2. The nature of the divinity

The understanding of the spiritual world demands from the Nuṣayrī mystic a long process of study of what is called ʿilm al-tawhīd (science of monotheism), since monotheism is the fundamental notion of the Nuṣayrī religion.

The Nuṣayrī concept of divinity reflects Neoplatonic thought. A similar view is held in the Ismāʿīlī religion, which is also based on Neoplatonism. It is an extremely abstract God, from which all creation emanates as light from the sun. The emanations are represented as a series of gradual regressions of created beings, from the more exalted to the more inferior. The further the created being is removed from the source of creation, which is God or Allāh in the case of the Nuṣayrīs, the more it loses perfection. Even inside the divine world there is hierarchy, in accordance with the order of the creation.

The divinity is defined in the Nuṣayrī sources as anẓāʾ baṭīn, meaning an abstract and mysterious being, incapable of being defined by any human characteristic. He is often called al-ghayb (the absence). Thus, the sect’s mystics use a negative description of God in order to determine his nature: he has no form, no boundaries, he is not created or incarnated and he never changes his purely spiritual nature; thus all his appearances are in his own essence (bi-dhātihī).

God’s abstract nature was explained in detail in Mufadḍal’s Kitāb al-usūs and Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ and in the lost Kitāb ādāb al-dīn, by

---

19 RMUF, p. 11; MS, pp. 223–224; DKH, fol. 5a, 5b, 6a, 9b.
20 See, for example, RN p. 303; DKH, fol. 47a.
21 Concerning the theologia negativa, called nafy al-sifāt (annulment of the descriptions), see RTN, p. 275; or salb al-sifāt (denial of the descriptions, in MN, fol. 186b. See also Bar-Asher and Kofsky, The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī Religion, p. 39.
22 HAIIH, pp. 242–253, 258; MS, pp. 208; HAD, pp. 15, 17, 35, 37; US, fol. 3a–4b. In most cases, according to Nuṣayrī tradition, the maṅa, God’s most exalted aspect, had seven appearances in time, always in his own essence; see RMU, p. 173. One tradition speaks of twelve appearances; see MB, p. 205.
Mufadḍal’s son Muḥammad. In their discussion of the nature of the divinity, Nuṣayrī writers also often cite Muḥammad ibn Sinān’s Kitāb al-tawḥīd and Ibn Nuṣayr’s al-Mīthāl wa-ʾl-ṣūra. This purification (tanzīh) of the divinity of all attributes emphasizes the Nuṣayrī effort to attain the state of extreme monotheistic belief. However, the sect’s theological writings also contain positive characteristics of the divinity, emphasizing that he is the one and only God, the all-powerful and eternal ruler of the cosmos created by him. He is the most exalted spiritual being in that cosmos, al-ʿālī al-aʿlā (the most exalted superior), a term which includes the name of ʿAlī, himself considered the most exalted personification of the deity.

The Nuṣayrīs adopted a typical Neoplatonic explanation of a creator who was never created, hence the comparison of the divinity with the sun, spreading endless light without diminishing anything of itself. This concept of a shining God creating the entire cosmos with his light appears in Risālat al-Mufadḍal ibn ʿUmar and is repeated later in Nuṣayrī sources. The attributes given to God are expressed in detail in the khutba (speech) genre that existed among the mystic Shīʿī circles of the Ghulāt. According to this literature, God introduces himself to humanity by declaring his virtues.

2.1 The divine triad

The concept of the divinity is based on the doctrine of emanation. Since the first emanations of God were close to the source of creation, they were the most exalted and powerful spiritual beings who were given the divine task of creating other beings and thus continuing the chain of emanation, of testing the belief of the created beings, and of revealing parts of the mystery of the divinity and concealing others. The first two emanations of the divinity were inferior to the source of creation but were still pure and abstract enough to be considered aspects of the divinity itself. The emanations that came after the source

---

23 See KU, fol. 8b–9a and its citation in KHA 157–158. The Ādāb al-dīn is mentioned in HAD, p. 37.
26 KHA, p. 204; DKH, fol. 18b. See Dussaud’s theory concerning this title in Histoire et religion des Nosairīs, pp. 51–52.
27 RMUF pp. 11, 12, 16, 17. In Nuṣayrī sources, RN, p. 304.
of creation and its first two direct emanations still contained creative abilities transmitted by the divine light but were far inferior to the preceding emanations.

Since the mystical sources preserved by the sect from previous periods, that is proto-Nuṣayrī sources, did not speak of a triad at all, it may be assumed that it was a doctrine established by the Nuṣayrī sect. Older sources conserved by the sect, which were composed by the Ghulāt of the eighth and ninth centuries, speak clearly of two aspects only, the abstract God and his first emanation, a dual concept known also from the Ismāʿīlī doctrine. The first is the šāmit (silent) and the second is the nātiq (speaking), who is his representative and his outward aspect. The Nuṣayrīs added a third element to the two aspects of the divinity, which is the bāb (door). The addition of this third element is in reaction to the rejection of the mystic role of the bāb in Imāmī Shiʿism, a historical process that needs some explanation.

The term bāb was used in Shiʿī doctrine to describe the most intimate disciples of the Imāms such as Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar and Abū ʿl-Khaṭṭāb. Some of them became charismatic leaders of Shiʿī groups, claiming they were the most worthy to interpret the Imām’s words. They were never legitimized by the majority of the Shiʿīs but their message was preserved in mystical circles of the Ghulāt. The Imāms kept silent concerning the truth of their bāb’s message, or in some instances even excommunicated him openly, if we accept the Imāmī heresiography as reliable.

After the occultation of the twelfth and last Imām, called al-ḥayba al-ṣuhhrā (the lesser occultation), between the years 260/874 and 329/941, a struggle began between the new sufarāʾ (sing. saffīr, representative) claiming to represent the hidden Imām and the old mystic bābs. The former represented the moderate stream, the Shiʿat al-ẓāhir and the latter the mystical Shiʿat al-bāṭin. In this struggle, the winner was the first group headed by the class of the wukalāʾ (sing. wakīl), the juridical and fiscal representatives of the last Imāms, the Banū ʿAmrī and Banū Nawbakht. They then excommunicated those considered

---

28 Khaṣṣibī speaks of maʿnā šāmit and ism nātiq; see FRR, p. 108. The ism, the first emanation is “his [God’s] speaking tongue” (lisānuhu al-nātiq); RB, p. 274. Concerning these terms in Ismāʿīlī doctrine, see F. Daftary, A Short History of the Ismailis, pp. 53, 219.

“exaggerators” (Ghulāt), led by the bābs. Their denunciation was part of the general rejection of the Mufawwīda movement and of the belief in tafwīd (delegation of God’s powers to the Imām), and the triumph of the Muqāṣṣira (moderate/deficient Shi‘a) in Shi‘ism.30 From now on, the attribution of divine qualities to the Imām or his bāb was limited to the ability to comment on the Qur‘ān. In the absence of the Imām there was no room for internal controversies, the Imāmī leadership was the only legitimate head of the Shi‘īs, and the Buyid authorities maintained this rule de facto. To sum up, at the political level the safir took the place of the bāb, at the theological level the ‘ulamā’ (scholars) held authority over the Shi‘ī community and rejected the ‘ārifūn (mystics), and the Muqāṣṣira triumphed over the Mufawwīda.

Muḥammad ibn Nuṣayr was one of the last mystics who claimed to be a bāb, and as such he was excommunicated by the Imāmī safarī. His mystical circle was condemned as heretical. The reaction of the Numayriyya/Namirīyya, that continues the legacy of the bāb, was the rejection of the legitimacy of the Imāmī sufārā’ and the declaration of twelve well-known bābs of the twelve Imāms as “doors of God”. Indeed, Ibn Nuṣayr appears in the sect’s writings as bāb Allāh wa-walī al-mu‘minin (the gate of God and leader of believers. Even in his quasi-Imāmī al-Hidāya al-kubrā, al-Khaṣībi insists that Ibn Nuṣayr is the bāb of the Imām Ḥasan al-‘Askarī, a view which is rejected in orthodox Shi‘ism.31 Since the twelve Imāms were viewed in Nuṣayrī doctrine as personifications of the deity, the twelve chosen bābs were elevated to the level of the gate to the divinity itself. The Nuṣayrīs did not abolish the status of the safir, but declared Ibn Nuṣayr their own safir and attributed to him all the qualities of the bāb. The Nuṣayrī safir was more than the Imāmī mediator between the Shi‘ī community and a human Imām who had vanished. He was a mediator between the muwahhidūn and a divine Imām.32

The addition of the third aspect to the divinity may also have had a socio-geographic dimension. Although we cannot speak of dualism or trinity in the monotheistic Nuṣayrī religion, this change from two main aspects of the divinity to three could also reflect the result of the passage from the Iraqi–Persian milieu to the Christian milieu of Syria.

30 Concerning the relations between Muqāṣṣira and Mufawwīda, see Modarressi, Crisis and Consolidation, pp. 19–51.
31 HK, p. 323.
In other words, the possibility cannot be excluded that the evolution of a dual aspect divinity into a divine triad is the result of the migration of the sect from Iraq to Syria—from a zone influenced by Zoroastrianism to a zone influenced by Christianity within the Muslim world.

The three first chapters of *Kitāb al-majmūʿ*, an important book for prayer and initiation (see Appendix 1 and 7), may preserve this theological process of the creation of the Nuṣayrī triad. According to al-Adhānī, the first sūra, al-Awwal (the first), which is attributed to al-Khaṣībī, mentions only the maʿnā ʿAlī. The second sūra, Taqdisat [sanctification of] ibn al-Walī, which is attributed to al-Jīlī, speaks of the maʿnā and the ism. Only the third sūra, Taqdisat ibn Saʿīd, attributed to al-Ṭabarānī, mentions the three divine aspects: the maʿnā, the ism and the bāb. This structure of the three first chapters of *Kitāb al-majmūʿ* may indicate that a clear concept of a divine triad existed from the time of al-Ṭabarānī who lived in a region influenced by Christianity.

The terminology used to define the aspects of the divine triad seems to derive from existing Shīʿī groups that maintain the cult of three elements in Shīʿī mysticism, the ʿayn, the mīm and the sīn, each representing a subject of adoration: ʿAlī, Muḥammad and Salmān. The main source that indicates the existence of such groups is a mystical book called *Kitāb al-mājid*, written by the ninth-century Shīʿī polymath and philosopher Jābir ibn Ḥayyān. Massignon developed an interesting theory concerning three groups in Kufa, each one promoting the divinity of one of the three divine aspects: the ʿAynīyya, the Mīmīyya and the Sīnīyya. The combination of the three elements was not made prior to the tenth century. In this light, Matti Moosa’s hypothesis of “the Ghulāt trinity” seems anachronistic since a “trinity” is not to be found prior to the emergence of the Nuṣayrīs and it was not even defined as a trinity (thālūth) by the sect before the twelfth century.

---

33 BS, pp. 7–9, 10–13.
36 Moosa, *Extremist Shiites*, pp. 50–65. Moosa cites the Sūfī Bektashi and Shabak sources written in later periods. None of his examples from the period of the Ghulāt refer to a triad.
Thus, a divine triad (and not a Christian trinity) was created in the Nuṣayrī religion. The Nuṣayrī sources, without exception, call the three most exalted parts of the divinity: maʿnā, ism (also called ḥijāb) and bāb:

a. The maʿnā
Its translation is “meaning”. It is the essence (dhāt) of the divinity and the source of all emanations. It is the most abstract part of the divinity, on such a high level that it is impossible to determine its nature. Its supremacy is explained by the fact that it is the only entity that was never created. The other two aspects are held to be as eternal as their source, but not pre-existing.37

b. The ism
The “name” of the divinity is the first emanation of the maʿnā. It was created from the divine light of the maʿnā. Its first role was to give the creator a definition. It is also called the ḥijāb (veil) because of its second role, which is to keep the creator veiled and secret. This task was added to the ism in order to punish more inferior creatures after they committed the first sins in the “world of light”. The ism is separated but not disconnected from the maʿnā. According to the Nuṣayrī doctrine, based on Neoplatonism, it flows from the maʿnā as “the beams from the circle of the sun” (ka-ʿl-shuʿāʾ min al-qurs). By using this explanation, the Nuṣayrīs wish to prevent belief in a dual divinity.38

c. The bāb
The “gate”, the second emanation of the maʿnā, was created from the divine light which flowed (tasalsala) from the ism, and this is why the bāb was also called salsal.39 It is the outward aspect of the divinity and is called the “gate” since this is the entity that links the divinity with the mysteries. It is through the bāb that the Nuṣayrīs could get the maʿrifa (gnosis, deep grasp of the spiritual world). The role of this part of the divinity is not clear in the pre-Nuṣayrī Ghulāt texts. For example, in al-Risāla al-Mufaddaliyya, the bāb does not appear as the third of a divine triad, but as aʾlāʾ ʿl-marāṭib (the most exalted of

37 See, for example, the citation of Ibn Nuṣayr in KHA, p. 203.
38 DMA, fol. 133a, b. Al-Jilli explains that the ism is “not connected or separated” (lā muttaṣil wa-lā munfasil) from the maʿnā; RN, p. 304; compare with the similar explanation in BS, p. 18.
39 RMUF, p. 12.
the ranks, which are the more inferior emanations of light. In *Kitāb al-širāt*, the bāb is the most exalted rank that can be attained by the mystic, the “gate” to divinity, but it is not part the divinity itself, which is inaccessible.

### 2.1.1 Relations between maʿnā and ism

Most of the Nuṣayrī writings deal with the nature of the relations between the three aspects of the divinity. Abū Ḭaṭṭāb and Muḥafḍal ibn Ḥumar appear in the Nuṣayrī writings as the oldest mystics to claim that the ism was created from the light of the maʿnā. The most discussed issue concerning the nature of the divinity is the relations between the maʿnā and the ism. The first is the passive being that motivates the second, which is its active aspect. The two are compared to “the silent and the speaking” (*al-sāmit wa-l-nātiq*) or “the one who speaks and his speech” (*al-nāṭiq wa-l-nutq*). In some cases, the relationship between the first two divine aspects is compared to *al-ḥaraka wa-l-sukūn* (activity and inactivity). They are also explained, as in Ismāʿīlism, as the two letters of the word of creation (k and n from *kun*, be!), repeated eight times in the Qurʾān in the context of the divine creation. Some sources speak of the emanations as numbers. According to this principle, at the beginning of time, *al-ahād* (the Single) created *al-wāḥid* (the One). However, it is difficult to understand how a passive essence can create at all.

Al-Jillī dedicated his epistle, the *Fatq wa-ratq*, to the explanation of this process. He claims that it is a result of a permanent pattern of *al-fatq wa-l-ratq* (dismantling and attaching) of the particles of light, shining from their source. The divine light that flows and connects the aspects of the divinity maintains the delegation (*tafwīd*) of some divine abilities. Al-Khaṣibī explains that this transmission of powers is initiated by inspiration (*wahy*) that is transferred to the ism from the

---

40 Ibid.
41 KS, fol. 94b–99a. The same principle, that the “gate” is the spiritual peak of the mystic, appears in US, fol. 13b–16a.
42 HUA, p. 20; BS, p. 18; DMA, fol. 132b.
43 These terms are repeated in several writings of the sect; see, for example, RFR, p. 310; RB, p. 274.
44 RMUF, p. 17.
46 RFR, p. 310.
47 RN, p. 304.
According to the Nuṣayrī tradition, whenever an aspect of the divinity was created, it declared a *shahāda* (testimony) acknowledging that he was emanated from the one and only God and as result was obliged to obey him.49

2.1.2 *Addition of the third aspect of divinity*

The creation of the third aspect of the divinity, the *bāb*, is explained in Nuṣayrī theology as the result of God’s pity for humanity and of his grace. There was a need to create an inferior aspect of the divinity, since the divinity was too transcendental, and the *maʾnā* appearing as its veil could easily confuse the inferior emanations of light and would be impossible for a human being to grasp. The “gate” is the mediator between the divinity and its creation. It is only through him that the mystic can know God and worship him.50 This doctrine is linked to the consideration of Ibn Nuṣayr as the last *bāb*.

2.1.3 *The ism and the bāb*

The relations between the *ism* and the *bāb* are an important part of the theological discussion of the sect, though still secondary to the issue of the relations between the *maʾnā* and the *ism*. The *bāb* is the outward (*zāhir*) aspect of the *ism* and his will (*mashīʿa*).51 Al-Tabarānī defines these two aspects using Jewish terminology: the *ism* and the *bāb* are *Adūnay Isbaʿūt* (Hebrew, *Adonay Tzevaʿōt*), i.e. God and his armies.52 Other Nuṣayrī sources use a terminology taken from Christianity and later absorbed into Islamic theology. In these texts the *bāb* is identified with *al-rūḥ al-qudus* (the holy spirit) or *al-rūḥ al-amīn* (the faithful spirit), which is the angel of revelations in the Qurʿān.53 Just as the *maʾnā* can appear in his *ḥijāb*, the *ism* can appear in his *bāb*. In Chapter 1 it was noted that Ibn Nuṣayr was considered the personification of both the *ism* and the *bāb*. This appearance of an aspect of the divinity in an inferior one is dealt with next.

---

48 RR, p. 17; repeated by his disciple al-Jillī, see RA, p. 326.
49 AAN, p. 56; KBS, p. 232, RA, p. 323.
50 RB, p. 275; AAN, p. 62.
51 RA, p326; AAN, pp. 128–129. Al-Makzūn al-Sinjāri also defines the *ḥijāb* as the *mashīʿa* of the *maʾnā*; see DMS, p. 57.
2.1.4 The appearance of the triad according to the principle of the siyāqa

The transition of each of the three aspects of the divinity from superior to inferior is explained by al-Khaşiﬁ in his Siyāqat al-zuhūrūt. According to the doctrine of the siyāqa (transition) the triad appeared in human history in a cyclic order in which the aspects of the divinity changed roles according to a fixed pattern: the maʿnā appears in his hijāb/ism and the latter appears in the bāb. The transition never occurs in the opposite direction, based on the logic that a holy being cannot appear in the form of a more exalted entity. In other words, an inferior emanation could never appear in a superior one. Thus, for example, the bāb could never appear in the ism or the maʿnā but only in inferior emanations. The ism can appear in the bāb but cannot appear in the maʿnā.54 Al-Khaşiﬁ deﬁnes two kinds of appearances of the triad: zuhūr ifrāj (appearance of release or remoteness)—the appearance of maʿnā in the hijāb, in which the essence of God is veiled by taking the form of the ism, without merging with it, since God always remains the most abstract being and is extremely remote from his creations and superior to it; and zuhūr mizāj (appearance of amalgamation)—when ism takes the form of the bāb by amalgamating with him. The siyāqa is discussed further in connection with the personiﬁcation of the deity in human history.55

2.1.5 The mystical meaning of the Āyat al-nūr

The appearance of the maʿnā to his creatures is a very complicated aspect of the Nuṣayrī doctrine. How could the most abstract aspect of divinity come into contact with his creation? This phenomenon is explained by the Kufan mystic Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Sinān (d. 220/835), a contemporary of Muﬁd ibn ʿUmar.56 In his Anwār wa-ʾl-ḥujub and Ḥujub wa-ʾl-anwār, he explains that the maʿnā appears to his creatures by wrapping himself with the hijāb. This appearance is similar to the soul speaking through the body; thus the part of the divinity that is veiled by the hijāb is called al-rūḥ al-lāhūtiyya (the divine soul).57 This appearance is deﬁned as ghilāf fi jawf ghilāf (an

---

54 RR, p. 17; RMU, pp. 164–165; DKH, fol. 5b.
55 WJAS, p. 44; MHAD, pp. 183–184.
57 HUA, p. 47.
envelope inside an envelope)\(^58\) and is explained in most of the Nuṣayrī writings by the Qurʾānic Āyat al-nūr (verse of light)\(^59\) describing the divinity as light inside lights:

Allāh is the light of the heavens and earth. The similitude of His light is as a niche wherein a lamp is. The lamp is in a glass. The glass is as it were a shining star. [This lamp is] kindled from a blessed tree, an olive neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil would almost glow forth [of itself] though no fire touched it. Light upon light, Allāh guides unto his light whom he will. And Allāh speaks to mankind in allegories, for Allāh is knower of all things.

Qurʾān, al-Nūr (24): 35.

This verse is essential for the understanding of the appearance of God in Nuṣayrī doctrine. In his Risāla al-Mufadḏaliyya, Mufadḏal transmits the words of the Imām Jaʿfar, giving an allegorical interpretation to this verse. He explains that the niche is the abstract form of the appearance (al-šūra al-maʿrūya al-anzaʿiyya) of God and the lamp within his eternal light. This light is formed of three layers: The nūr, the enlightened essence of God is veiled by the ḍayāʾ, the light that shines from it. These two layers are veiled by the ḥil, the shade. The three layers never change from eternity to infinity and are considered the essence of the maʿnā. The outward aspect of this divinity is a form of appearance that does change its nature when the maʿnā appears in different forms, yet even this outward aspect is neither human nor material.\(^60\)

This interpretation, from the Mufadḏaliyya epistle, was embraced by the Nuṣayrīs and is repeated whenever the description of the divinity is discussed.\(^61\) This allegorical interpretation for the Verse of Light leads to the inevitable conclusion that the abstract God would appear to his inferior emanations of light and to his human creatures merely as an illusion.

2.2 The doctrine of Docetism

The Nuṣayrī cosmos consists of the ideal, illuminated heaven and the material world, which is the symbol of evil. The divine and the material,

\(^{58}\) HAD, p. 29; MN, fol. 84b.
\(^{59}\) See, for example, in DKH, fol. 19b, 45b, 69b.
\(^{60}\) RMUF, pp. 15–16.
\(^{61}\) See, for example, KHA, p. 170; RMHM, pp. 181, 185; HAD, p. 29.
the pure and impure, never mix. Thus, the Nuṣayrīs, as opposed to most of the Ghulāt sects, reject the doctrine of ḥulūl (incarnation), the presence of the Creator in a human body, and consider it an extremely heretical belief. According to a Nuṣayrī source from the nineteenth century, the members of the sect are asked to curse anyone who believes that ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib ever ate, drank, had children or was married. This indicates that the belief in incarnation remained through the history of the sect a prohibited heresy. Mufaddal, in his epistle, transmits the explanation of the Imām al-Bāqir to his disciple Jābir ibn Yazīd al-Juʿfī (d. 128/745) concerning al-ṣūra al-marʿiyya al-anzaʿiyya (the abstract form of appearance). According to him, it is not the total divinity, which cannot be seen by human eyes. However, this form is not something other than God, because all his aspects and forms are one: “It [the form] is not the entirety of the Creator and the Creator is no other than it”. In another place he writes: “it is not him but He is not other than it” (lā hiya huwa wa-lā huwa ghayruhā). More simply, since the divinity remains abstract, it creates a human form which represents it and is not separated from it. But how can a normal human being grasp this form? According to the logic of the Nuṣayrī doctrine, the only divine appearance that could be understood by a human being is that of a human form.

In Nuṣayrī doctrine the divinity appeared in a human form but not as a human being. Thus, the alternative to the incarnation was the concept of Docetism (from the Greek dokein, to appear, seem), which was an important component in Gnostic churches in the East in the first two centuries and was considered heretical in the orthodox churches.

62 RZB, p. 17; MHIS, p. 188, DKH, fol. 6a; DMS, p. 56. See also Bar-Asher and Kofsky’s explanation concerning al-Nashshābī’s rejection of “heretical Nuṣayrīs” who believe in incarnation: The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī religion, pp. 15–28.

63 BS, p. 45.


66 HAIH, p. 246. This doctrine is stressed in al-Makzūn al-Sinjārī’s poetry; see Nwyia, “Makzūn al-Sinjārī, poète mystique alaouite”, pp. 101–102, 104.

The concept of an illusion is a well-known element in Arab culture: for example, the Fata Morgana (ṣarāb), caused by the heat of the desert (Qurʾān, al-Nūr [39]:24). The Nuṣayrīs were not the first to adopt the doctrine of Docetism. The idea was used in the Qurʾān in order to deny the crucifixion of Jesus:

And they [the Jews] say: We killed Jesus [al-Masiḥ ʿĪsā ibn Maryam] the messenger of God. Nevertheless, they did not kill him or crucify him, but so it appeared to them and those who were confused about him [about whether he was really dead] had doubt [ṣakk] about him [i.e. did not believe in his holiness]. They do not have knowledge [ʿilm] concerning him [his true nature] but they follow their imagination and he was surely not crucified. Moreover, God raised Jesus to him.


This verse, cited by Nuṣayrī theologians,68 contains the important terms ṣakk and ʿilm, which are discussed later. The Qurʾānic Docetism of Jesus is the foundation of this doctrine in Nuṣayrī theology. Since analogies between Jesus and ʿAlī and between Jesus and al-Ḥusayn were common among Shiʿī sects,69 Docetism was associated with both of them and extended by the Nuṣayrīs to all the twelve Imāms. According to the Nuṣayrī belief, all the Imāms were personifications of the deity. Docetism is a concept of illusion used as a means of veiling sacred or divine beings. Thus, Jesus was not crucified and the Shiʿī Imāms were not murdered in reality, but only seemed to have been in the eyes of observers. The mystics (ʿārifūn, sing. ʿārif) could observe the ṣūra, the spiritual form, while the mass of non-believers could only see the mithlāḥ, the material form, which appeared in history as an illusion.

In Nuṣayrī tradition, the human form “bestowed its outward image” (alqā shibhahū)70 on one of the martyr’s enemies, who replaced him and was killed instead of him. Thus, it was not Jesus who was crucified, but Judas who took his place.71 The case of Ḥusayn is more complicated. He was not killed in Karbalā’, but was replaced by his follower Ḥanẓala al-Shibāmī. Nevertheless, since Ḥanẓala did not deserve to be killed, he was “ransomed” and replaced by ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, the enemy of the Shiʿīs.72 This doctrine of illusion, or Docetism

---

69 Ibid., p. 130, note 94 and the bibliography suggested there.
70 The translation for this phrase is taken from Bar-Asher and Kofsky, The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī religion, p. 129.
71 RM, p. 295.
72 MA, pp. 9–10; FRR, pp. 85–87; DKH, fol. 29a. Bar-Asher and Kofsky, The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī religion, p. 129. The discussion is completed in ibid., p. 130, concerning the
in Gnostic terminology, is applied to other cases in the Jewish and Muslim traditions, such as the murder of Abel by Cain, the sacrifice of Ishmael and the transformation of the stick of Moses into snakes. Even the marriages of the caliphs ʿUthmān and ʿUmar to Ruqayya and Umm Kulthūm, the daughters of the Prophet Muḥammad, were illusions, when in reality they were replaced by the caliphs’ daughters. Docetism is also applied to Shiʿī martyrs. According to this doctrine, it was one of the enemies of the Shiʿa who died instead of the saint. In his Bātin al-ṣalāt, al-Jillī gives some examples: Rashīd al-Hijrī was not executed by Caliph Muʿāwiya for supporting ʿAlī, he was replaced by ʿUbaydallāḥ ibn Ziyād, the Umayyad ruler of Iraq who was killed in reality. Abū ʾl-Khaṭṭāb was not executed, but was replaced by ʿĪsā ibn Mūsā, the ʿAbbāsid governor of Kufā.

2.2.1 Possible sources of inspiration

Although Docetism derives from Gnosticism, and even has roots in orthodox Islam, this doctrine was never explicitly presented in Shiʿī writings prior to the time of al-Khaṣībī. It was only in his Risāla al-rāstbāshiyya that this doctrine was crystallized; it was later developed by his successors, al-Jillī and al-Ṭabarānī, and used on the day of ʿāshūrā. There is no development of the doctrine of Docetism in Muslim theology beyond the Qurʾānic Docetism of Jesus, and the doctrine was rejected by the Christian church. Since the Christian Gnostics disappeared after the second century, possible sources of inspiration for the Nuṣayrī sect perhaps lie in other Gnostic groups that survived to the time of al-Khaṣībī.

The doctrine of Docetism was preserved only in Persian Manichaeism, which was created in the third century and combined Zoroastrian beliefs with Gnostic Christianity. According to Halm, Gnostic sects were persecuted by the Byzantines in Syria and Egypt and escaped

connection between Ishmael and Ḥusayn. As al-Khaṣībī explains, according to the āmma (the masses, i.e. the Sunnis), Ishmael was ransomed by a sheep and according to the Imāmiyya and the Mufawwadiyya, he was ransomed by Ḥusayn. But according to the doctrine of Docetism, Ḥusayn was not killed; thus al-Khaṣībī claims that Ishmael was ransomed by ʿUmar. Concerning the Mufawwida, a Shiʿī sect believing in the delegation of powers from God to the Imāms, see Modarressi, Crisis and Consolidation, pp. 21–29, 38–49.

73 KBS, pp. 257–258; DHK, fol. 10b, 11a, 28b, 31a, 38a; MN, fol. 114b–115a; ARM, fol. 1–2, 21–22.
74 KBS, p. 257.
to the east where they were tolerated. They enjoyed freedom under Muslim rule and the members of the sect were scattered among the villages of Iraq. Nevertheless, the Manichaeans began to suffer persecution under the ʿAbbāsid Caliph al-Mahdi (d. 169/785) and most of them migrated to Persia and Central Asia.75

Another origin could have been a different Gnostic group, closely related to the Manichaeans and founded approximately at the same time, the Mandaeans. They were more tolerated under Islam because their religion was considered monotheistic. The Mandaeans were held to be ahl al-kitāb (people of the book), as were Jews and Christians, and as ahl al-dhimma, their religion was protected. They were scattered in Iraq and in north Syria, where the Muslims called them al-Ṣābiʿūn or al-Ṣābiʿa (the Sabeans). Al-Khaṣṣībī migrated to Ḥarrān, which makes the Sabean sect in that city a possible source. However, since reliable information is lacking concerning the Sabean doctrines and the sect’s true identity, it is not possible either to reject or accept Dussaud’s interesting hypothesis concerning the connection between them and the Nuṣayrī sect.76 The only concrete information concerning the Sabeans in Nuṣayrī sources is a rare description of their pagan ritual in ʿAlī ibn Shuʿba’s Ḥujjat al-ʿārif. The Nuṣayrī Ḥarrānian leader accuses the Ṣābiʿa of worshipping the stars and offering sacrifices to them, in the belief that the smoke of burning animals reached them.77 Al-Makzūn al-Sinjārī mentions them few times in his Dīwān, only stressing their inferiority, along with the Jews and the Christians, to the muwahhidūn.78

2.3 The five aytām

The five aytām (sing. yatīm, unique, orphan) are five emanations of the triad, named because of their special role as sub-creators of the world.79 It seems that the real reason for this nickname was forgotten by the founder of the sect. No explanation for this name is found in Ghulāt texts or in the writings of the first founders of the Nuṣayriyya. Al-Jilli,
who was asked to explain the meaning of the word yatīm in his Risālat al-bayān, bases his explanation on an incorrect root. He explains that the term aytām expresses the order of the emanations: “They followed the bāb and with them ended the creatures of the rank that were [created] after them” (i’tammū bi-’l-bāb wa-atamma bihim man kāna ba’dahum min ahl al-marātib). Thus, he gives the roots a.m.m. for i’tammū (to follow) and t.m.m. for atamma (to end), while the correct root is y.t.m. (to be unique or an orphan). The Qurʾān expresses great sympathy towards orphans in general, since Muḥammad himself was an orphan adopted by his uncle Abū Tālib, the father of ʿAlī. However, the use of the word aytām in the Qurʾān does not help in understanding its meaning in the Nuṣayrī doctrine.

According to one of Ibn Nuṣayr’s teachers, ʿAbdallāh ibn Ghālib al-Kābulī, the five aytām were created by the ism from the “essence of his essence, which is the bāb” (dhāt dhātihī wa-huwa al-bāb). This explanation seems to be a later addition by the editor, while the original text does not seem to include the bāb at all. Even without omitting it, this text shows a marginalization of the role of the bāb, which supports the hypothesis that the divinity of the Ghulāt contained only two elements and the third aspect of the divinity was added later on by the Nuṣayrīs.

The doctrine of the five creators of the world is known from the Mukhammisa (Pentadist) sect in Shiʿism, which deified the ahl al-kisāʾ (people of the mantle), the close family of the Prophet Muḥammad, whom he covered with his coat as a symbol of sanctification. According to Shiʿī tradition they were Muḥammad, his cousin ʿAlī, his daughter Fāṭima and his two grandsons al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn. This sect from the eighth century the Mukhammisa was a group of Ghulāt from Kufa with close ties to the Khaṭṭābiyya of Abū ’l-Khaṭṭāb. Some of the doctrines of their book, the Umm al-kitāb, were the basis of Nuṣayrī beliefs. In the introduction to his Haqāʾiq asrār al-dīn, al-Ḥasan ibn Shuʿba, when speaking about his personal library, makes an explicit statement concerning the Pentadists:

I read all my accumulated material, which was familiar to me from [my knowledge of] the mystical science of tawḥīd [monotheism, the Nuṣayrī

---

80 RB, p. 277; RA, p. 327.
81 AAN, p. 72.
doctrine]: some 150 books of the mystical *tawḥīd*, 250 books of the *takhlīs* [doctrine of the Mukhammisa], of the *taḥwīd* [doctrine of delegation] and of *taqṣīr* [deficient Shīʿa] and science of the *ẓāhir* [exoteric] but which proves the *bāṭin* [esoteric]...\(^83\)

Later in the introduction, he notes:

> I did not mention in it [in my book] the proofs and claims used to defend the sinners, apart from few [of them] belonging to the Mukhammisa, because of their adjacency to the *tawḥīd*.\(^84\)

Since the term *aytām* is not found in pre-Ṣayyarī documents, it is likely, as in the case of the third aspect of the divinity, that they were added to the divinity by the Ṣayyarīs for historical and theological-polemical reasons. It seems that the goal of the subordination of the *aytām* to the *bāb* was to undermine the main doctrine of the Mukhammisa without completely abolishing it. In order to subordinate the pentad to the triad, the *ahl al-kisāʾ* were given other important roles in the divine world and the members of the pentad were replaced by less important figures, the five most loyal followers of `Alī. Although Dussaud did not accept the idea that the *ahl al-kisāʾ* are the *aytām*, Lyde did find clear indications for this analogy, in his “Manual for Shaykhs”\(^85\). Lyde also gives a very interesting explanation for the translation of the *aytām* as “orphans”, i.e. “those disciples who have lost their master”.\(^86\) Indeed, several of the historical *bābs* were persecuted and died as martyrs, leaving their disciples “orphans”. Ibn Jundab became an “orphan” after his master Ibn Ṣayyar had died from his illness. The term *aytām* and its significance demands further study.

As al-Jillī explains in his *Bāṭin al-ṣalāt*, the pentad is the mystical meaning of the five prayers in Islam. They are also the mystical meaning of the five fingers on each hand, a symbol used in the Jewish mystical work *Sefer Yetzira*.\(^87\) Other elements are found in Ṣayyarī doctrine that are similar to those in the *Sefer Yetzira*. Jewish mysticism may have infiltrated the Ṣayyarī religion through earlier contacts between

---

\(^83\) *HAD*, p. 12.

\(^84\) Ibid., p. 14.


\(^86\) Lyde, ibid., p. 133.

the Ghulāt and Jewish mystics in Iraq. Indeed, a few Hebrew terms are present in the sect’s writing. It is surprising to find the explanation concerning the numerical significance of the angel Jibrāʾīl as a numerical symbol for the pentad, since in Arabic this name contains seven letters. It is the Hebrew Gavriʾel that contains five letters: g.v.r.’.l. The names of the most important personifications of the maʾnā, the head of the triad, and of the bāb, the creator of the pentad, have numerical significance as well. The name ʿAlī is formed from three letters and Salmān from five.89

2.4 The personification of the deity

The Nuṣayrī writings mention lists of the appearances of the triad and the pentad in human history. As explained earlier, their appearance is Docetic, without incarnation. The maʾnā, the ism and the bāb appeared to mankind in the form of kings, prophets and well-known figures from the Jewish Bible, the Christian world, Iranian and Greek cultures, and concluding with the Muslim world. These multi-cultural appearances signify simply that all such divine revelations have the same message, and all the appearances are of the one and only God. The fact that the divinity appeared in multiple aspects and forms does not contradict the principle of tawḥīd. The first poem of Dīwān al-Khaṣībī, the Bāb al-hidāya (gate of guidance) expresses this belief:

The gate of guidance is one eternal gate/
To the kingdom, a gathering [of entities] to one eternal ism
And the ism is the name of its maʾnā and his first [emanation]/
And the names of the ism are many as one would want [to imagine]
Even if they would number a hundred thousand/
their source is one which has no end
And God does not appear in the creatures and does not resemble them/
But in his own essence he appears as one and only90

Every appearance of the deity was intended to call upon a specific society to follow God’s message. Since the Nuṣayrīs consider themselves Shiʿī Muslims and their holy book is the Qurʾān, they explain that the most important appearance of the deity is that which occurred at the

88 KBS, p. 225.
89 Concerning the name Salmān, see ibid. Concerning the name ʿAlī, see JK, p. 19; FRR, p. 132; US, fol. 5b.
90 DKH, fol. 5a.
dawn of Islam, when the essence of the divinity was personified in ʿAli ibn Abī Ṭālib. Hence, his family and followers are all considered different aspects of the divinity:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>māʾnā</th>
<th>ism/hijāb</th>
<th>bāb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ʿAli ibn Abī Ṭālib</td>
<td>Muḥammad ibn ʿAbdallāh</td>
<td>Salmān al-Fārisī</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is very common in modern research to identify this triad as ʿayn-mīm-sīn, using the initials of the three personifications of the triad. Nevertheless, it should be noted that this formula is rarely found in medieval sources. In fact, it appears only in one source, al-Tabarānī’s Kitāb al-ḥāwī fī ʿilm al-fatāwā, written in the eleventh century, after the death of his master al-Jīlī. The next time we find this formula is in Nuṣayrī sources from the nineteenth-century the Nuṣayrī Catechism (Kiel 19), the Bākūra al-Sulaymāniyya and the Kitāb taʿlīm al-diyyāna al-Nuṣayriyya.

The three persons are well-known figures from the beginning of Muslim history. ʿAli, the younger cousin of the Prophet Muḥammad, is held by the Shiʿa to be the person most suitable to inherit his spiritual and political leadership after his unexpected death. This view was rejected by the majority of the Muslims led by other members of the Quraysh (the tribe of the Prophet). This majority was later called sunna (repetition, i.e. those who repeat the acts of Muḥammad). The tension between the Shiʿīs and the Sunnīs and the growing adoration of the cousin of the Prophet, even led some Shiʿī sects, among them the Nuṣayrīs, to consider ʿAli superior to Muḥammad. Salmān, the first Persian to convert to Islam and one of the most prominent șahāba (Companions of the Prophet), represents the Persian connection with Islam from its birth, which is an important aspect of the Nuṣayrī religion. Salmān and the persons who are personifications of the five aytām are the most eager supporters of ʿAli and the main

---

92 HIF, p. 54. The issue of this formula is dealt with in the discussion of the initiation.
93 KHC, fol. 10b; BS, p. 14; TDN, pp. 217–218 (question 74). In the Diwān al-Khaṣibī, the triple formula appears only four times in unreliable parts of the corpus, which are later additions; see DKH, fol. 74a, 81a, 106b, 119b.
advocates of his legitimacy as the leader of the *umma* (Muslim society). The five *aytām* created the two worlds, the world of lights and the material world:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. <em>al-yatīm al-akbar</em> (the greatest yatīm):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>al-Miqdād ibn Aswad al-Kindī</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Abū Dharr Jundab ibn Junāda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>al-Ghifārī</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. ʿAbdallāh ibn Rawāḥa al-Anṣārī</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. ʿUthmān ibn Maẓʿūn al-Najāshī</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Qanbar ibn Kādān al-Dawsī</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each of these *saḥāba* proved his loyalty to ʿAlī. For example, al-Miqdād refused to give his *bayʿa* (oath of allegiance) to Caliph ʿUmar, and Abū Dharr was mortally punished after criticizing Caliph ʿUthmān for his corruption. Among the Nuṣayrī saints are the Shiʿī *arkān al-arbaʿ* (four pillars): Salmān, Miqdād, Abū Dharr and ʿAmmār ibn Yāsir, who appears as one personification of the *aytām* in later cycles of time, together with other partisans of ʿAlī and other Shiʿī leaders.⁹⁴

Although the appearances of these eight persons, the triad and the pentad, are seen as the most prominent personifications of the deity, they are not the only ones. The Nuṣayrī tradition mentions additional appearances of all the eight beings in the form of other figures from Shiʿī culture. The triad appeared in the persons of the *satr al-imāma* (line of the Imams), the twelve Imāms of the Shiʿa and their *bābs*, as explained in al-Khaṣībī’s *Siyāqat al-zuhūrat*. They appeared each time with their five *aytām*, until the last cycle. Finally, the divinity was occulted with the disappearance of the twelfth Imām, the *mahdī*. The last personification of the deity was dealt with in the biography of Ibn Nuṣayr. This was seen as part of the divinity, the *bāb* and then the *ism*, and five of his most prominent followers were seen as the *aytām*. They were headed by the *yatīm al-akbar* (the greatest orphan), who was the successor of Ibn Nuṣayr, Muḥammad ibn Jundab.⁹⁵ The appearance of

---

⁹⁴ *TDN*, pp. 207–209.

⁹⁵ In Nuṣayrī literature lists are often found of the personifications of the deity in all the cycles, concluding with that of Ibn Nuṣayr and his followers. For lists of appearances of the triad, see, for example, *JK*, pp. 37–40; *KHA*, p. 229; *RR*, p. 59. For lists of the personifications of the *aytām*, see *RR*, pp. 70–71. For a combined list of personifications of the triad and pentad, see *TDN*, in Bar-Asher and Kofsky, *The Nuṣayrīs’ Alawi Religion*, pp. 201–209, translated into English pp. 171–180.
heavenly creatures in the material world leads to the explanation of the structure of the cosmos.

3. The Nuṣayrī cosmos

The cosmology of the Nuṣayris seems to have been already well-established two centuries before the sect’s appearance, in the writings of Mufaḍṭal. The main sources for this doctrine are Mufaḍṭal’s Haft wa-ʿl-azīlla as well as Muḥammad ibn Sinān’s Anwār wa-ʿl-ḥujub and al-Ḥujub wa-ʿl-anwār. The recently available sources from Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī mention an older book that was lost, Kitāb al-marātib wa-ʿl-daraj, attributed to ʿAbdallāh ibn Muʿāwiya, which contained detailed explanations of the ranks of the cosmos.96 This last author was a descendant of ʿAlī’s brother Jaʿfar ibn Abī Ṭālib. He is famous for his rebellion against the Umayyads in 127/744, eleven years before the uprising of Abū ʿl-Khaṭṭāb. From ʿAbdallāh ibn Muʿāwiya’s book several quotations are available in Nuṣayrī writings concerning the marātib. A list of the ranks, which is identical to the Nuṣayrī marātib, appears in al-Mufaḍṭal’s writings, probably copied from ʿAbdallāh ibn Muʿāwiya.97 A complete table of the marātib, their number and their symbols taken from the terminology of the Qurʾān, was copied from the latter’s book, the Marātib wa-ʿl-daraj, by two Nuṣayrī leaders from the Banū Shuʿba. These last sources became available to us recently in the Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī (see the tables in Appendix 4).98

According to the Nuṣayrī doctrine, the aḥl al-marātib (creatures of the rank) emanated from the five aytām. The term marātib (sing. martaba) seems to have originated from Neoplatonic thought and was used by the Ismāʿīlīs for the “ranks of propagandists” (marātib al-daʿwa, also called the ḥudūd).99 The equivalent term in Hebrew, maʿalot, was used by the fifteenth-century Rabbi Ḥōter Ben Shlōmō in his commentary on the thirteen principles of Maimonides, which was influenced by Ismāʿīli thought.100

96 AAN, pp. 135–183, 202; RHA, p. 308.
97 RMUF, p. 18.
98 HAD, pp. 88–89.
99 F. Daftary, The Ismāʿīlīs: Their History and Doctrines, p. 217.
The *ahl al-marātib* are divided into two parts. The first is that of the exalted ranks (*al-marātib al-*ʿ*alawiyya*); the five emanations of light are “the immense world of light” (*al-ʿālam al-kabīr al-nūrānī*), each created from another yatīm, in the following order:

1. al-Miqdād > Abū Dharr > `Abdallāh ibn Rawāhā > `Uthmān ibn Mazʿūn > Qanbar ibn Kādān
2. nuqābāʾ  
   leaders
3. nujābāʾ  
   nobles
4. mukhtāṣūn  
   authorities
5. mukhliṣūn  
   the faithful
6. muntuṭāhanūn  
   the tested

According to another tradition, al-Miqdād alone created all the *ahl al-marātib*. A list of the ranks (without the use of the term *marātib*) appeared in the *Umm al-kitāb* although in a different form, in which Salmān is the highest of the ranks, above Miqdād. Al-Khašībī explains that angels consist of a total of 5,000 creatures. The second part of the ranks is that of the seven inferior emanations (*al-marātib al-sufliyya*), which are in “the small material world” (*al-ʿālam al-saghtīr al-turābī*):

1. muqarrabūn  
   who are drawn near
2. karūbiyyūn  
   angels
3. rūḥāniyyūn  
   spiritual ones
4. muqaddasūn  
   saints
5. sāʾihūn  
   travelers
6. mustamiʿūn  
   listeners
7. laḥiqūn  
   followers

Al-Ṭabarānī explains that these seven ranks are alluded to in the seven letters of the names ‘Alī (3) and Muḥammad (4). It is interesting to note that the Nuṣayris developed a concept of holy emanations belong-

---

101 RB, p. 277; DKH, fol. 6b, 41a; KS, pp. 93a–94a; SUR, fol. 229b–131b; BS, p. 22. The *nuqābā* and *nujābā* also appear in the Sūfī ranks of angels; see, for example, R. J. A. McGregor, Sanctity and Mysticism in Medieval Egypt (Albany, N.Y: State University of New York Press, 2004), p. 22.

102 RR, p. 43.  

103 UK, fol. 99–100; Halm, al-Ghnūsyya fi ’l-ʿIslām, pp. 112–113. The enlightened ranks of *Umm al-kitāb* are seven: Salmān > Miqdād > Abū Dharr > naqībān (Persian, pl. of naqīb) > najībān > muwāḥḥidān (to be replaced later by the mukhtaṣūn; the name *muwāḥḥidūn* is used by the Nuṣayris to identify themselves > muntuṭāhanūn.

104 Ibid., pp. 16–17; RTN, p. 300.  

105 This list of the upper and lower ranks is repeated in the same order and with identical names in all the sources of the sect; see, for example, IM, pp. 246–247, 277; RR, pp. 16–17; BI, p. 426; RHA, p. 308; DKH, fol. 7a, 42b; KS, pp. 94a, b; DMS, p. 116; BS, p. 22.

106 JK, p. 19.
ing to the material world. The persons who belong to these inferior emanations of the deity are mystics and shaykhs of the sect. For example, al-Khaṣībī was considered by his followers as one of the marāṭīb al-suflīya. The sanctification of al-Khaṣībī was one of the main issues of Muḥammad ibn Shu’ba’s Risālat ikhtilāf al-ʿālamayn. According to this book, al-Khaṣībī was a charismatic leader and obtained illumination, but still had a human nature (for example the need to breathe, eat and drink). Hence he was considered to be more than a regular human being but less than a divine creature. Muḥammad ibn Shu’ba quotes al-Jillī who states that his master belonged to the rank of the karūbiyyūn, based on one of al-Khaṣībī’s poems.107

The role of the ahl al-marāṭīb in the Nuṣayrī doctrine is to serve as a spiritual ladder, in which the inferior level enables the mystic to reach the divine source of creation, a long and difficult process that is discussed separately. According to the Umm al-kitāb the ahl al-marāṭīb participated in the creation of the material world, together with Miqdād and Abū Dharr, headed by Salmān.108 In the Umm al-kitāb, the order to create the world was transmitted to Salmān directly from the “most exalted”, i.e. ‘Alī109 and in Nuṣayrī tradition it was transmitted to him with the mediation of the ism, Muḥammad.110 According to the Marāṭīb wa-ʾl-daraj, the number of ahl al-marāṭīb in the “lower ranks” is 119,000, which makes a total of 124,000 creatures together with the “higher ranks” emanated from the aytām.111 This number has significance in Muslim mysticism. According to Muslim tradition, a total of 124,000 prophets were sent by God, and according to a Şūfī tradition, God ordered Noah to prepare 124,000 boards to build the ark; on each board God wrote the name of one of his prophets, beginning with Adam and ending with Muḥammad.112

We can sum up the structure of emanations from the divinity in the following sketch:

---

107 RIA, p. 294. In the Kitāb al-majmūʿ, al-Khaṣībī is called al-ʿārif maʿrīfat Allāh (the mystic possessing the divine gnosis). See BS, p. 9.
109 Ibid., fol. 64–66.
110 RA, p. 326.
Emanations

\( ma'\text{n}\)ā
\( \checkmark \)

\( ism/\ h\text{i}j\text{ā}b \)
\( \checkmark \)

\( b\text{ā}b \)
\( \checkmark \)

5 aytām
\( \checkmark \)

\( ahl al-marātib: \)

\( al-'\text{ā}lam al-kabīr al-nūrānī: \)

\( nuqabā' \)
\( \checkmark \)

\( nujabā' \)
\( \checkmark \)

\( mukhṭaṣṣūn \)
\( \checkmark \)

\( mukhliṣūn \)
\( \checkmark \)

\( mumtaḥānūn \)
\( \checkmark \)

\( al-'\text{ā}lam al-saghir al-turābī: \)

\( muqarrābūn \)
\( \checkmark \)

\( karūbīyyūn \)
\( \checkmark \)

\( rūḥānīyyūn \)
\( \checkmark \)

\( muqaddasūn \)
\( \checkmark \)

\( sā'iḥūn \)
\( \checkmark \)

\( mustamī'ūn \)
\( \checkmark \)

\( lāhiqūn \)
\( \checkmark \)

The \( muwāh\text{ḥidūn} \), members of the Nuṣayrī sect, seeking for salvation through gnosis.

The subject of the \textit{marātib} leads to the doctrine of the creation of the world in the Nuṣayrī tradition. The “creatures of the rank”, apart from those belonging to the material world, took part in the creation but they themselves were also created as part of the process of emanation.
3.1 The creation of the world and the tradition of the letters

The process that led to the creation of the divine emanations and the dual cosmos of the spiritual and the material worlds should be explained. The doctrine of the creation of the world by God appears in several forms in pre-Nuṣayrī and Nuṣayrī texts. Nevertheless, these sources indicate that three main traditions associated with the creation are repeated more or less with the same variations. The three traditions do not contradict each other, but they can be merged together into a story of creation with three chapters: God produced letters to create the world; he tested his creatures knowing that they would fail; then this ideal world deteriorated as result of their sins and became a hierarchical cosmos of ranks divided between the ideal world of light and the evil material world, the *dunya*.

According to Nuṣayrī tradition, at the beginning of time God created the One (*al-wāhid*), which is the *ism*, and he created the 28 letters of the Arabic language, of which 22 belong to the Hebrew and Syriac languages. They were created by his will (*mashīʾa*) presented by the two letters k. and n. of the Arabic word *kun*! (be!). The first letter was the *yāʾ* and the last was the *alif*. After their creation they all bowed toward God except the *alif*. Since he was right not to bow without the order from God to do so, he became the first and the most respected of the letters. The *yāʾ* represents Salmān and the *alif* Miqdād. The first five letters of the alphabet are the *aytām*, the next twelve are the *nuqabāʾ* and the last eleven are the stars that Joseph saw in his dream (the well-known biblical story repeated in the Qurʾān, Yusuf [12]: 4). The letters were the divine tools for the creation of the world.

This tradition can be traced back to Mufadḍal’s writing, but does not seem to have originated from Muslim mysticism. Muslim mystics used to attribute enigmatic powers to the *fawātih*, the fourteen “mysterious letters” that appear at the beginning of 29 chapters of the Qurʾān, whose true meaning is unknown. It is rather in Jewish mysticism that a tradition is found about God using the alphabet (*aleph-beth*) to create the world. In the *Sefer yetzira* the Creator is called “the single” (*ha-eḥad*, compare with the Nuṣayrī *al-aḥad*) and he created the letters

---

113 *RMUF*, pp. 17–18; *MS*, p. 25; *IM*, p. 256; *RR*, pp. 43–45; *JK*, p. 21.
of the Hebrew alphabet. He crowned the aleph, then the mem and then the shin.\textsuperscript{115} Paul Kraus and later Paul Fenton both pointed out the interesting similarity between these three “crowned” letters aleph-mem-shin (which represent the triad of soil-water-fire) of Sefer yetzira and the Nuṣayrī initials ʿayn-mīm-sīn.\textsuperscript{116} Both triads are defined as “secret”: aleph-mem-shin sod gadol (great secret) in Sefer yetzira and sirr (secret of) ʿayn-mīm-sīn in Kitāb al-majmūʾ.\textsuperscript{117}

While the Nuṣayrī triad reflects God and two of his emanations, the triad of the Yetzira is subordinated to God and the aleph is created by him. Nevertheless, among the Nuṣayrīs there was also a deviant group in the eleventh century called the Ḫātimiyya, who subordinated the triad to God. They claimed that the triad was created by a more abstract God, the ghayb (absence).\textsuperscript{118} However, the language of the Yetzira is too vague to compare with the explicit definition of the Nuṣayrī triad. The use of the formula ʿayn-mīm-sīn is rarely found in medieval sources. Yet in the light of the number of similarities between the Sefer yetzira and Nuṣayrī theology, this subject demands further study.

3.2 The process of creation and the tradition of the fall

The tradition of the creating letters is followed, according to the logic of chronology, by another tradition of creation of light and shade. This tradition, which appears or is referred to in almost every source of the Nuṣayrī sect, seems to have been inspired by Persian Zoroastrianism and Gnostic Christianity, rather than by Jewish mysticism. It is based on the Neoplatonic concept of light of creation on one hand, and on the Persian dualism of light and darkness on the other. The sources for this second tradition of creation are Mufaḍḍal’s Haft wa-l-azilla and his Mufaḍḍaliyya as well as Muḥammad ibn Sinān’s Anwār wa-l-ḥujub and al-Ḥujub wa-l-anwār. Thanks to the recently available Ḥujjat al-ʿĀrif by Ḥamza ibn Shuʿba, we know that Mufaḍḍal’s

\textsuperscript{115} Heyman, Sefer Yeṣira, pp. 49–50, the earlier recoverable text, lines 9, 32–34.

\textsuperscript{116} This comparison was made by Professor Paul Fenton during my doctoral thesis defence, Sorbonne Paris IV, 27 February 2006. See also P. Kraus, Jābir ibn Hayyān: Contribution à l’histoire des idées scientifiques dans l’Islam (Cairo 1942), vol. 2, p. 267.

\textsuperscript{117} Heyman, Sefer Yeṣira, p. 50, line 24. Compare with Kitāb al-majmūʾ, sūrat al-nisba (4) line 3; sūrat al-ʿayn al-ʿAlawīyya (9), lines 1–3; see in BS, pp. 14, 25.

source was Yûnus ibn Žabyân’s lost book, the Kitâb al-ibtidâ’ (book of creation/beginning).\textsuperscript{119}

The \textit{Umm al-kitâb} is also relevant to this subject, since it represents an older, less developed version of this tradition, which contributes to a better understanding of its contents. According to the \textit{Umm al-kitâb}, the creation of the cosmos was the result of a series of sins committed by the creatures. The more severe were the sins, the more distant the creatures became from the pure divinity. Creatures who expressed their regret ceased their deterioration. Thus, the different levels of sins and regrets created the ranks, the \textit{marātib}.\textsuperscript{120} This process was the result of the challenge of God to his creatures in order to test their loyalty to him.

According to the \textit{Umm al-kitâb}, in the beginning of time there was a pure world of light. God was praised by his enlightened creations. Then, in order to test them, he changed his form of appearance and created confusion among them. As a result, two major sins were committed which caused their gradual deterioration (or fall). The first sin was doubt (\textit{shakk}), a lack of belief in God’s presence, caused by his strange appearance. The second was the sin of pride, caused by the fact that the first emanated creatures of light compared their inferior nature to that of the divinity. After every sin God took light from the sinning creatures, and the more they sinned the darker and more inferior they became. From the contents of this tradition, we may assume that its goal was to prevent the belief in dualism. When the first emanation of God, called ‘Azâzîl in the \textit{Umm al-kitâb}, claimed that he was God because he possessed the power of creation, God answered him that “it is impossible that there will be two Gods”.\textsuperscript{121} This anti-dualistic tendency appears in this source together with explicit Zoroastrian elements, such as the presence of Ahrimân,\textsuperscript{122} another name for ‘Azâzîl, a kind of demiurge who incites the creatures against God.\textsuperscript{123} This

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{119} HAIH, p. 269.
\item \textsuperscript{120} UK, fol. 98–107; Halm, \textit{al-Ghunûsiyya fi ’l-Islâm}, pp. 110–112; RHA, p. 308.
\item \textsuperscript{121} UK, fol. 63; Halm, \textit{al-Ghunûsiyya fi ’l-Islâm}, pp. 114–120.
\item \textsuperscript{122} According to Zoroastrian dualism, two gods exist: Ormazd and Ahrimân, who represent good and evil. According to the Avesta, their permanent struggle will end with the defeat of Ahriman. See F. M. Muller, \textit{The Zend Avest}, 2nd ed., London: Routledge, 2001), p. xliii.
\item \textsuperscript{123} UK, fol. 115; see the explanation concerning the evil angel ‘Azâzîl in Halm, \textit{al-Ghunûsiyya fi ’l-Islâm}, pp. 136–137; for his appearance in al-Hallâj’s poetry, see M. S. Sells, \textit{Early Islamic Mysticism} (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), pp. 278–280.
\end{itemize}
struggle between 'Ali and Ahrimān reflects the polemic of Islam against
Zoroastrianism, of monotheism against dualism. Also, in the Haft
wa-'l-azilla, Mufaḍḍal challenges dualism, claiming that light existed
before darkness and good before evil.\footnote{HA, p. 29.}

The process of the creation in the Haft wa-'l-azilla contains similar
elements to the Umn al-kitāb. God created by his will (mashi‘a) the
seven shades (azilla, sing. zīll) and taught them how to worship him by
imitating him: he praised himself and they followed him by praising
God.\footnote{Ibid., p. 30. According to al-Khašībī, the mashi‘a and the azilla were God’s first
creations; see HK, p. 437.} The creation of shades in a world of light enabled these
creatures to wear a certain form of existence. Since they possessed a great
amount of the light of creation, their praise of God created the seven
heavens.\footnote{HA, p.} Their praise also created more inferior creatures, which
are the “ghosts” (ashbāḥ, sing. shabāḥ). From these creatures there
emanated even more inferior creatures: the “spirits” (arwāḥ, sing.
rūḥ) and then the bodies (abdān, sing. badan), which are the mate-
rial creatures.\footnote{HA, pp. 29–30.} From the praise of himself, God created the ūjūb,
which veils him from his inferior creatures. The ashbāḥ serve as veils
(ūjūb) for the “creatures of light” when they appear to humanity.\footnote{HA, p. 31.}
Then God created seven Adams (sab‘a [in Persian haft] Ādamiyyūn),
one for each of the seven heavens, and he made a pact (mithāq) for
them and their descendants, according to which they acknowledged
his superiority and declared a shahāda, that he is the one and only
God.\footnote{HA, p.; AUH, p. 66.} According to the Anwār wa-‘l-ūjūb, God asked his creatures:
“Am I not your Lord?” (a-lastu bi-rabbikum? Qur’ān, al-Aʿrāf [7]: 172),
and they answered: “Yes you are”.\footnote{AUH, p. 73.} Since all the heavenly creatures
wore a form of light, God veiled himself with light when he appeared
to them, since “one cannot grasp a thing which is not from his form
or from his nature”.\footnote{Ibid.}

After creating the first seven Adams and educating them, God cre-
ated time. At first, he created seven days, each day corresponding to

---

\footnote{HA, p. 29.}
\footnote{Ibid., p. 30. According to al-Khašībī, the mashi‘a and the azilla were God’s first
creations; see HK, p. 437.}
\footnote{HA, p.}
\footnote{HA, pp. 29–30.}
\footnote{HA, p. 31.}
\footnote{HA, p. 31; AUH, p. 66.}
\footnote{AUH, p. 73.}
\footnote{Ibid.}
one of the heavens.\(^{132}\) Then He created the twelve cycles of time, the *adwār* (sing. *dawr*), each one of 50,000 years. In the first five cycles the creatures of light appear in this world wearing a material form. These cycles were followed by another six cycles in which only material forms existed as a result of the growing power of evil in the world. Finally, He created the “cycle of the end of the world” (*dawr muntahā 'l-dunyā*).\(^{133}\) God enabled his creatures of light to reach the material world in order to test its dwellers. From the sins of the creatures of light he created their enemies. Their first sin was a combination of arrogance and disobedience to God. Trying to escape from their trial, the creatures of light said they preferred not to descend to the material world as God had demanded, but rather wanted to worship God only in the world of light. As a result God ceased to appear to them in his own essence, and created from their sin the *ḥijāb* in which he veiled himself every time he contacted them. The creatures of light were cursed by losing forever the closeness they possessed to their creator. As an expression of their sorrow, they surrounded the *ḥijāb* for 7,000 years.\(^{134}\) According to a tradition based on Muḥammad ibn Sinān’s *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, the total period in which there was only a world of light lasted 7,077 years and seven hours.\(^{135}\) No source was found for this strange period of time, which emphasizes the enigmatic significance of the number seven. The only possible connection can be drawn from a Muslim tradition about Job, according to which, when he was 70 years old he was stricken by the devil (*Iblīş* and the duration of his calamities was seven years, seven months and seven hours. This tradition, mentioned by the commentary of Bayḍāwī (d. 681/1282) on the Qur’ān, is based on a similar tradition that appears in the much older Jewish *Berēshīt Rabba*.\(^{136}\) Since the purpose of God in both cases, that of the *ahl al-marātib* and that of Job, was to test the loyalty of his creatures, the connection between the two traditions may not be a coincidence.

The sin of the creatures was followed by more sins, which created the devil, *Iblīş* (from the Greek Diabolos) and his army of demons (*shayātīn* sing. *shayṭān*, as the Hebrew *satan*). Since Iblīş was created

\(^{132}\) *HA*, p. 33.

\(^{133}\) *HA*, pp. 34–35.

\(^{134}\) *HA*, pp. 35–36; *AUH*, p. 77.

\(^{135}\) *HAD*, p. 22; Dussaud, *Histoire et religion des Nosayris*, pp. 70–71.

at a later stage of the creation, he did not know the source of creation and did not receive the divine education that had been granted to the creatures of light. As a result, he did not acknowledge the supremacy of God and was totally evil. The Imām Ja’far al-Ṣādiq explained that from the time Iblīs was created, evil was always connected with ignorance (jahl).\(^{137}\)

The enmity of Iblīs towards the believers stemmed from his scorn of them. He thought that they were only material bodies and that he was more powerful than them. The Prophet Muḥammad was sent to remind the believers that they were once lights. Since this knowledge gives the believers much power, they are ordered to keep it secret. Since then, the muwahhidūn are obliged to maintain caution (taqiyya) and concealment (kitmān), important terms that are discussed later.\(^{138}\)

According to the Qurʾān Iblīs said:

I am better than him [the human Adam], you [God] have created me from fire and him from soil.

(Qurʾān, al-Aʿrāf [7]: 12).

Whilst fire is considered stronger than soil, the only material that can resist fire is water. Thus, the Nuṣayris attribute mystical powers to water, which is for them a divine symbol of God’s representatives in the material world, beginning with Adam who is stronger than Iblīs. Since God gave the devils human appearance, there is no perceptible difference between them and the believers.\(^{139}\) The element of water in Nuṣayrī theology is discussed later.

Although the fall of the creatures from the ideal “world of light” is gradual in the Haft wa-ʾl-Azīlla, the Umm al-kitāb divides this fall into a gradual fall of the creatures of light, which creates the world of lights, and an abrupt fall from the world of light to the material world. This last fall was caused by the objection of a group of creatures of light, the muʿtaridān (Persian, objectors), to the decision of God to create human beings, because their inevitable wickedness would lead them to commit sins. This objection to God’s decision, which is an unforgiven sin, caused the precipitate fall of this group into the material world.

\(^{137}\) HA, pp. 37–38; AUH, p. 72.

\(^{138}\) HA, pp. 38–39. The Nuṣayris believe that they are composed from one light; see US, fol. 30b–32a.

\(^{139}\) HA, pp. 41–42.
world. The *muʿtariḍān* were called from then on the *muwahhidān* (monotheists), and later the Nuṣayrīs came to view themselves as these penalized creatures of light.

### 3.3 God’s education in his triple appearance

A third tradition, which should be placed chronologically after the creation of the seven heavens and before the creation of Adam, appears in the *Kitāb al-usūs*, attributed to Mufāḍdāl, and is repeated almost identically in several Nuṣayrī sources. God educated the creatures of light by appearing to them in three forms: he appeared first in the form of an old man with white hair and beard, to show his dignity and mercy to his creatures and to teach them to respect him. His second appearance was as a young man with a curled mustache riding a lion, which expressed his anger, in order to warn them against disobedience. The third and final appearance was as little child in order to explain to them their situation as weak creatures who must be raised and educated. In his *Masāʾil al-khāṣṣa*, al-Ṭabarānī notes that al-Jīlī taught him that the three positions of the moon (crescent, full moon and the absence of moon) represent the triple appearance of God.

The tradition of the fall from the ideal world into an inferior material world is central in Nuṣayrī medieval theology. Al-Khaṣṣībī refers to it throughout his *Dīwān*. This tradition is defined as “the fall” (*habṭa*) but in medieval sources it is called rather “the day of the shades” (*yawm al-azīlla*). The account given by Sulaymān al-Adhanī of the *habṭa* in his *Bākūra al-Sulaymāniyya* is a combination of the three traditions mentioned. They are all based on the

---


141 KU, fol. 8b; see translation suggested for the text in Bar-Asher and Kofsky, *The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī Religion*, p. 53. See this tradition in Nuṣayrī sources: KHA, p. 159 (an almost verbatim copy of the Usūs version); RN, p. 318; RA, p. 328; HAD, p. 34. According to these sources the boy who appears is 14 years old.

142 MKH, pp. 197–198. See a more developed version of this tradition in the poem of Muḥammad ibn Kalāzū, in BS, p. 60 and the explanation in Bar-Asher and Kofsky, *The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī Religion*, p. 53, n. 59. In this poem we find the formula h-b-q for hilāl-badr-qamar (crescent-full moon-moon), which does not exist in other sources of the sect.

143 See, for example, DKH, fol. 7b, 20a, 39a, 51b, 101a.

144 See, for example, BD, p. 138. The use of the term *habṭa* is rare in medieval sources, and usually refers to Adam, who was “taken down to earth” (*ahbiṭa fi ʾl-ard*); see HAD, p. 82.

145 See this tradition abbreviated in the words of Sulaymān al-Adhanī, in BS,
Haft wa-‘l-azīla, the Kitāb al-usūs of Mufaḍdal and the Umm al-kitāb of Jābir ibn ʿAbdallāh.

The fall that followed the sin caused the muwahhīdūn to be imprisoned as the rest of humanity in the material world. Nevertheless, only the muwahhīdūn still have a chance for salvation.

4. Transmigration and prohibited foods

Transmigration (in Nuṣayrī terminology tanāsukh, naskh, naql, radd, karr) is one of the fundamental doctrines of Nuṣayrism. The person wears a different “shirt” (qamīs) in each life, a term used also in Druze doctrines.\textsuperscript{146} It is possible to find traces of belief in transmigration in the Qurʾān:

Those whom God cursed and was angered with he turned into monkeys and pigs.

(Qurʾān, al-Māʾīda [5]: 60)

However, this belief is totally rejected in orthodox Islam, since it is regarded as contradictory to the doctrine of resurrection at the end of time. Nevertheless, some well-known Ṣūfī leaders were accused of teaching a doctrine of transmigration, for example Ḥallāj (d. 310/922), Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191) and Rūmī (d. 672/1273). Some Muslim philosophers also held certain notions of transmigration, as for example al-Rāzī (d. 325/925), al-Farābī (d. 339/950) and the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, the Ismāʿīlī mysterious Brothers of Purity, a secret society in tenth-century Iraq.\textsuperscript{147} It is worth noting that several of the scholars who held this belief were contemporaries of al-Khaṣībī and lived in Iraq.

An attempt should be made to present a reasonable suggestion as to the origin of this doctrine. Transmigration was part of the doctrines of Ghulāt sects, long before the appearance of the Nuṣayriyya. There is a strong connection between belief in the eternal nature of the Imām and that of the concept of the eternal soul. Farhad Daftary notes that belief in the reincarnation of the Imām, or his return (rajʿa) after

\textsuperscript{146} KS, fol. 99b.

absence (ghayba), is close to and may even derive from the belief in the transmigration of the human soul.\textsuperscript{148} The divinity passes from one Imām to his successor as the soul passes from one body to another. Therefore, it is quite natural that the doctrine of tanāsukh exists among the earliest Ghulāt.

Paul E. Walker’s study of transmigration in Islam is relevant here. Walker tends to see the origins of this belief in Greek philosophy, mainly in the writings of Pythagoras, his disciple Plato, and finally in the writings of Plotinus.\textsuperscript{149} According to this logic, transmigration was introduced to Islam through the rational Muʿtazilīs who were influenced by the Greek philosophers. They held that God’s justice necessitates another life before or after the actual life, in order to explain the suffering of the innocent and the pleasure of evildoers.\textsuperscript{150} However, another possible route is from the east rather than the west: the doctrine of transmigration is a central doctrine in the Hindu religion and infiltrated into Persian culture. In that case, the belief could have arrived in Iraq through Persian Manicheanism.\textsuperscript{151} The existence of a doctrine of transmigration among the admirers of Abū Muslim in Khurasān may indicate such an influence from the east. As in Hindu religion, transmigration is considered a negative phenomenon because all matter is evil, and when the soul is once again imprisoned in a body it cannot ascend to the spiritual world.

In his article concerning the doctrine of transmigration among Jews in the tenth century, Haggai Ben Shamai begins with a short but thorough description of the development of this belief in Islam. His research reaffirms the hypothesis concerning the two major sources of this belief: Indian and Greek. The Greek influence derived from Muʿtazili circles in the ninth and tenth centuries and involved a quest for God’s justice in this world. The suffering of children and believers was explained by sins they had committed in their previous lives.

\textsuperscript{148} Daftary, The Ismāʿīlīs: Their History and Doctrines, p. 66.
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., p. 226.
Hindu influence on Islam was received indirectly through Iranian religions, for example the Manicheans and the Khurramiyya, and the Buddhist Samaniyya, who believed in compensation and punishment through transmigration, and rejected the idea of the Judgment Day. The idea of eternal transmigration was embraced by most of the Ghulāt sects, beginning with the Kaysāniyya, the Ḥarbiyya of ʿAbdallāh ibn Muʿāwiya, and followed by the Khaṭṭābiyya. However, this last point of Ben Shamai should be questioned, since all the information concerning these sects that no longer exist derives from hostile Muslim heresiographers. In particular, the assumption that “extremists Shiʿīs” rejected the idea of the Judgment Day should be viewed sceptically, since the Nuṣayris, who were mostly influenced by these Ghulāt, did not find any contradiction between transmigration and judgment at the end of time.

Ben Shamai cites the Persian theologian and historian al-Bīrūnī (d. 440/1048) as the most important Muslim source concerning the belief in transmigration in the Indian religions. Al-Bīrūnī noted that Mani’s main activity was in India, hence Manichean belief in transmigration was a result of Indian influence. Following other researchers, Ben Shamai agrees that belief in transmigration was rejected by the majority of the Jews in the tenth century, and the term gilgul (reincarnation) was absorbed at a later period in the theology of the Kabbala. As such, Jewish belief in transmigration does not seem to be a source of inspiration for the Nuṣayris.

Bar-Asher and Kofsky discuss the subject of transmigration in Nuṣayrī religion and make a brief comparison between this doctrine and the Druze belief in transmigration. Their study is based on the Kitāb al-usūs, which contains interesting details concerning the connection between divine justice and transmigration. Transmigration offers a solution for the existential paradox of suffering by the righteous, but does not answer the question of the source of evil in this world. The source of all evil and suffering is “original sin”, which caused the fall. Ever since the fall, the soul has transmigrated through seven

155 Concerning the subject of transmigration, see the bibliography in Bar-Asher and Kofsky, The Nuṣayrī-Alawī Religion, p. 62, n. 117.
156 Ibid., pp. 62–63.
bodies in seven cycles of time. But the more severe are a person’s sins, the more inferior are the creatures into which his soul will transmigrate. According to the *Usūs*, the souls of Jews, for example, transmigrate into animals, but those of heretics transmigrate into sacrificial animals. Bar-Asher and Kofsky conclude their discussion with the connection between transmigration and the religious prohibition of certain foods. They cite a relevant passage from the *Usūs*:

> It is forbidden to eat any transmigratory food [*mamsūkh*], for example an egg which has no two distinguished sides, fish with no scales, hare, pig, monkey and others.

They note the interesting fact that all these foods are also proscribed by Jewish dietary laws. Their important study is based on a pre-Nuṣayrī source and, as such, does not contain the complete doctrine of *tanāsukh* as developed by the founders of the sect. Heinz Halm’s study of this doctrine is based on the *Haft wa-ʿl-ażilla*, which also predates the Nuṣayrīs. New available sources included in the *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī* offer a more complete picture of this doctrine. Nuṣayrī sources divide the foods into two groups: the first group is of those animals that had transmigrated from sinners, and which are proscribed. The second group is of creatures that were created as a result of the sins of the believers, and which it is permissible to consume.

### 4.1 Levels of transmigration

In his *Risāla al-rāstbāshiyya*, al-Khasībī presents a crystallized doctrine of transmigration. He explains that the term *tanāsukh* is the opposite of *maʿrifā* (gnosis/esoteric knowledge), since the gnosis is the only chance of escaping from transmigration and being exalted to the world of light. The sinner’s transmigration occurs on five possible levels:

---

157 Ibid., pp. 63–65. See also in BS, p. 81.
159 Ibid., pp. 65–66.
160 See H. Halm, *Die islamische Gnosis: Die extreme Schia und die ʿAlawiten* (Zürich: Artemis Verlag, 1982).
161 *KHA*, p. 216; *HAD*, pp. 152, 158; *AAN*, p. 186.
162 Transmigration is also one of the major issues in the *Diwān* of Khasībī; see *DKH*, fol. 7b, 10a, 20a, 22b, 48a, 51b, 70b, 101a.
(1) \textit{naskh} (replacement): passage of the soul from one human body to another.

(2) \textit{maskh} (transformation): passage from a human body to that of an animal (some are prohibited as food and are considered impure).

Al-Khaṣābi cites in this context the verse from the Qur’ān concerning monkeys and pigs. Other “pure” animals are permitted as food and their milk and skin may also be used. The Nuṣayrīs believe that the souls of such animals leave their bodies before they are slaughtered.

(3) \textit{waskh} (from \textit{wasikh}, dirty): passage of the soul into the smallest creatures and grass dwellers, such as bats, rats, mice, lizards, beetles, worms and flies. It should be noted that bees are not mentioned here for their mystical symbolism; this is discussed later.

(4) \textit{faskh} (from the verb \textit{tafassakha}, to separate): the soul is separated from the body of a sinner in his lifetime and passes into the body of a sick man. The sick man’s soul is transferred into the body of another sinner. As a result, the person changes his nature until his family and friends do not know him anymore.

(5) \textit{raskh} (from the verb \textit{tarassakha}, to stay in the same position): the soul is transferred into inanimate matter, such as gold, silver, iron, stone or dry wood. The soul suffers when these materials are burned and finally remains with its residue forever in the ground.\footnote{\textit{RR}, pp. 64–65.}

This terminology of the degrees of transmigration also appears in the writings of Bīrūnī\footnote{Ben Shamai, “Transmigration in tenth-century eastern Jewish thought”, p. 124.} as well as some of the later Sūfī circles, such as the schools of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273)\footnote{S. Can, \textit{Fundamentals of Rumi’s Thought: A Mavlevi Sufi Perspective} (Somerset, N.J.: The Light Inc., 2004), p. 237.} and Qūṭb al-Dīn from Shiraz (d. 711/1311).\footnote{J. Walbridge, \textit{The Wisdom of the East: Suhrawardi and Platonic Orientalism} (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2001), p. 77.}

The second \textit{sūra} of the \textit{Kitāb al-majmū‘} speaks of seven degrees of transmigration, the five mentioned above with the addition of two others: \textit{qashh} (straw) and \textit{qushshāsh} (waste),\footnote{BS, pp. 10–11.} which refer to the most inferior levels of transmigration. These two terms derive from the economic world, meaning “worthless”. In the Geniza documents, for
example, these terms are used for the second-hand clothes in a bazaar of Cairo. The theological explanation for the *qashh* and *qashshāsh* are given a medieval source, the *Kitāb al-badʾ wa-l-iʿāda* by the disciple of al-Khaššibī, al-Ḥusayn ibn Ḥarūn al-Baghdādī. According to him, they refer to the most inferior and weak creatures on earth such as bugs, flies, ants, lice and fleas, which are cursed with never being able to sleep, to copulate or to reproduce.

4.2 The process of transmigration and the “fountain of life”

While the gnosis, the *maʿrifā*, leads to heaven, the transmigration into inferior creatures (*musūkhīyyāt*) is considered hell. It should be noted that the Nuṣayrī mystics are also doomed to transmigration, since they were creatures of light who had disobeyed God, but only eighty times before they are saved. Al-Khaššibī gives details concerning the process of transmigration. The soul of a dead man passes through the sperm into a woman’s womb. While he dwells there he remembers the *yawm al-azīllah* and his previous lives. This memory also lasts for the first twenty-four months of breastfeeding. Then he forgets everything. This process is painful for both a believer and a sinner. But the latter suffers much more and cries more at his birth, because he remembers his sins and is aware of his ill fate.

Other Nuṣayrī leaders, such as al-Jillī, al-Ṭabarānī and Ḥasan ibn Shuʿba, speak of an interim stage between death and the entrance into the woman’s womb. According to their explanation, after death the soul is taken by angels to the “fountain of life” (*ʿayn al-hayāt*) where it is purified and waits until a pregnancy begins in the material world. When this happens, the angels call to the soul: Go! (*sīrī*) and it reaches its destination. Ḥasan ibn Shuʿba adds some more details: the angels transmit the names of every soul that passes through the “fountain of life”.

---

169 *Bi*, p. 452.
170 *RR*, p. 66; *HUA*, p. 25.
171 *DKH*, fol. 7a, 67a.
172 *RR*, pp. 62–64.
life” to the Imâms. The souls wear a form of light in the fountain. He mentions also a “fountain of humiliation” (ʿayn al-ridhāl) where the sinners dwell.174

This “fountain of life” seems to be based on the Qurʾānic Salsabil (Qurʾān, al-Insān [76]: 18), a fountain situated in heaven and surrounded by childlike angels. However, the term is not typical of Muslim theology. It is similar to the Jewish The Fountain of Life (Fons Vitae; Hebrew Mekōr ḥayīm) of the Jewish Spanish poet Ibn Gabirol (d. 450/1058). Ibn Gabirol was much influenced by Neoplatonism, mainly through al-Farābī (d. 339/950).175 In his book, Ibn Gabirol speaks about the soul’s imprisonment in nature and the need to exalt the intellect in order to purify it.176 However, it is the Jewish scholar Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra (d. 563/1167) who clearly refers to the Mekōr ḥayīm as the place where souls are purified, based on Psalm 36:10: “With You is the fountain of life, by Your light do we see light”.177 It seems that both medieval Jewish scholars and Nuṣayrīs were influenced by the same Neoplatonic source. Plotinus, inspired by Pythagoras and Plato, speaks of the “fountain of life” as the source of souls.178 In Nuṣayrī theology, the fountain is personalized in the figure of Salmān al-Fārisī. Salmān’s mystical pseudonym Salsal, an abbreviated form of Salsabil, which appears in the Umm al-kitāb, is very common in Nuṣayrī writings. Al-Khasibī explains that this name is the result of ʿAlī’s address to him: sal sabīlak ilayya! (seek your path to me!), or sal al-ism (seek the ism [through me]), and the meaning of Salmān’s name is sal al-mānn! (seek [through him] the one who grants grace!).179 Salmān’s identification with the fountain of life seems to be based on the explanation of al-Khasibī, which is repeated by his followers, that Salmān is the personification (shakhā) of water.180 In addition to the purifying meaning of water, its power is reflected by the ability to extinguish fire, which

174 HAD, ibid.
178 See, for example, E. Underhill, Mysticism (Whitefish, Mont.: Kessinger Publishing, 2003), p. 281. This is a reprinted version of her 1911 book.
179 RR, p. 59.
180 FRR, p. 119.
symbolizes the devil. Al-Khasibī dedicates a poem in his Diwān to this subject, beginning with the following lines:

Water is an honorable person (shakhs) / from which life is extended
And the inner meaning of water is a person / he is the sent guide
And everything comes from him / his life never ends

4.3 Transmigration in Nuṣayrī and Druze doctrines

Some notes should be added to the brief discussion by Bar-Asher and Kofsky of the belief in transmigration held by the Druzes and the Nuṣayrīs. Ḥamza, the Druze propagandist, attacks the Nuṣayrī belief in transmigration, which seems to him illogical:

As to his claim [that of the Nuṣayrī] that the souls of the objectors and the opponents [addād, of the Imāms] are transformed into dogs, monkeys and pigs to the level of white-hot iron beaten by a hammer, others to birds and owls, and others are transmigrated into a woman who lost her son: he [the Nuṣayrī] lied upon our Lord [the Druze divine incarnation, al-Ḥākim] may His memory be exalted, and he spread a grave deceit, because this matter is illogical and it contradicts the justice of our Lord, the praised one, that a person would sin against him [al-Ḥākim] and He would punish an intelligent person by transforming him [after transmigration] into the form of a dog or pig, [knowing] that he cannot understand what he did when he had a human form and does not know [anymore] what his sin was. If he turns into a white-hot iron beaten with a hammer what is the benefit [Arabic hikma, literally wisdom] of it and that of the torment in these [transmigrations]. The benefit [or wisdom] from the torment is that a person would understand and the torment, would educate him and cause him to repent. As to the torment it is the transmigration of a person from a high level of belief to an inferior level.

The contradiction between the Druze and Nuṣayrī concepts of transmigration reflects a much older conflict between two points of view held by the great Neoplatonic philosophers of the third century. For example, while Plotinus believed in several levels of transmigration, the Syrian Porphyry rejected the possibility that a soul could pass from one frame to another. Muslim philosophers also dealt with this issue;

181 DKH, fol. 64b–65a.
Suhrawardī accepted the idea of transmigration of the human soul to an animal body, but rejected transmigration into plants, which lack intelligence.\(^{184}\)

Although most researchers in the field of sects in Islam consider transmigration an example of the similarity of Druze and Nuṣayrī doctrines, there is a huge doctrinal gap between the two points of view, the Druze concept being positive, and the Nuṣayrī negative. While the former gives the soul another chance to correct his sins and purify his soul, the latter is merely a means of retribution. The reason for this fundamental difference seems to be that the Druzes focus on the ‘ａｄｌ, divine justice, while the Nuṣayrīs emphasise the concepts of qadāʾ and qadar (divine decree and predestination), terms repeated in their sources.\(^{185}\) While the Nuṣayrīs believe that human fate was predetermined in the yawm al-azīla, the Druzes believe that divine justice necessitates the existence of a choice between right and wrong.\(^{186}\)

It is important to note that transmigrations in Nuṣayrī theology, as in the Druze religion,\(^{187}\) are limited and end with Judgment Day, and as such, this doctrine does not contradict the Muslim apocalyptic concept of messianic salvation. Al-Khasībī explains that the sinners, called “the people of denial and sin” (ahl al-inkār wa-l-juhūd) pass through 100,000 transmigrations and the believers, “the people of acceptance” (ahl al-iqrār) only 80, until the coming of Judgment Day, or “the day of revelation and appearance” (yawm al-kashf wa-l-zuhūr).\(^{188}\)

The belief in transmigration is linked with the Nuṣayrī concept of time. Since life is described as a cyclic process of death and rebirth, time is also cyclic.

5. *Cyclic history*

The Nuṣayrī concept of history is cyclic. History repeats itself in historical cycles of time in different variations. In each cycle seven mes-
sengers or prophets of God, called the Āwādim (pl. of Ādam), appear each time to another society. History is formed of large cycles that contain small cycles of time. They are called akwār (sing. kawr, eon) and adwār (sing. dawr, era). The calculation of this time and the definition of these terms differ from one Nuṣayrī source to another. The term dawr appears in the doctrine of ʿAbdallāh ibn Muʿāwiya. According to al-Nawbakhtī, this last ghālī, who also believed in transmigration and in the doctrines of the shades (azilla), transmitted these doctrines to Jābir ibn ʿAbdallāh and to Jābir ibn Yazīd al-Juʿfī. The term kawr is also used in the similar Ismāʿīlī doctrine of the cycles of time.

In Ibn Nuṣayr’s writings traditions are found concerning the cycles of time in the world of light followed by other cycles in human history in the material world. In his Kitāb al-akwār wa-ʾl-adwār, based on the tradition of Jābir ibn ʿAbdallāh, there is another period of time which preceded human history and contained ten cycles called akwār, each of 100,000 years, marking a separation between each event in the world of light. After these millions of years, human history began. In his Mithāl wa-ʾl-ṣūra, Ibn Nuṣayr cites a tradition transmitted by the mystic ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad al-ʿAqīqī, in which the Imām Jaʿfar says that history contains seven akwār, each consisting of 7,000 years or, according to another tradition, every kawr contains 400 adwār, and every dawr consists of 50,000 years.

Later Nuṣayrī writers give different proposals as to the length of the cycles. Hasan ibn Shuʿba mentions two different traditions, the first based on Mufaḍḍal’s transmission from the Imām Jaʿfar, using other terms for time. According to his tradition, the time that preceded human history includes 12,000 qībāb each of 12,000 abwāb (sing. bāb, gate). Each bāb consists of 12,000 years. According to another tradition, transmitted from ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad al-ʿAqīqī, human history contains 400,000 akwār, each of 400,000 years. In each kawr, the seven Āwādim appeared: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus,

---

189 Dussaud’s assumption that Nuṣayrī history is based on seven cycles is derived mainly from the Kitāb al-majmūʿ, as is his hypothesis of Ismāʿīlī influence; Dussaud, Histoire et religion des Nosairîs, pp. 42–43; repeated in Moosa, Extremist Shiites, p. 312.
190 Al-Nawbakhtī, Firaq al-Shiʿa, pp. 34–35.
191 Daftary, The Ismāʿīlīs: Their History and Doctrine, p. 295.
192 AAN, p. 41.
193 Ibid., pp. 48–51.
194 MS, p. 227.
195 HAD, p. 79.
Muḥammad and his family (ʿAlī, Fāṭima and the Imāms). Another tradition, transmitted by al-Khaṣībī and also attributed to the Imām Jaʿfar, maintains that history contains 50,000 adwār, each dawr contains 50,000 akwār, each consisting of 400,000 years.197

5.1 *The qibāb and the historical concept of time*

In addition to the terms kawr and dawr, which seem to have been inherited from the Ghulāt and are found in the writing of Muḥāḍal,198 the Nuṣayrīs developed a parallel terminology of time, using the term qubba (pl. qibāb). This term, which means “dome”, “mausoleum” or “crown”, reflects a cyclic process within the close and limited space created by God.

Since the Nuṣayrīs possess an apocalyptic doctrine, their concept of time cannot be completely cyclic. It has some linear aspects with a beginning and an end, and it repeats itself only in its esoteric (bāṭīn) sense, not in its exoteric (zāhir) aspect. We can therefore conclude that Nuṣayrī time is a combination of cyclic and linear history, or in other words a spiral concept of time. E. H. Carr noted that the cyclic concept of history was an innovation of the monotheistic religions as opposed to the haphazard historical view of pagan cultures.199 Monotheistic history is teleological and has a beginning and an end. However, his suggestion that the mystical view of history is detached from the concepts of time and place does not fit the Nuṣayrī example. The Nuṣayrīs possessed a solid sense of territory and chronological time. The Majmūʿ al-ʿayād reflects not only a clear idea of religious chronological history, but also a concept of a quasi-world history which contains a vast territory. Al-Ṭabarānī mentions the following: Greece, Armenia, Bulgaria, Syria, Iraq, Iran, the Arabian Peninsula, India, Ethiopia, Egypt, China, and the Turkish tribes.200

The term qubba seems to have been first used by the Kufan mystic Muḥammad ibn Sinān (ʿal-Ḥakīm”, the wise, d. 220/835). His *Anwār*

---

196 Ibid.
197 Ibid., 90.
198 See, for example, the use of the term adwār in *HA*, pp. 116–117.
201 See the interesting explanation concerning this term in Bar-Asher and Kofsky, *The Nuṣayrī-Alawī Religion*, 29 n. 110.
wa-’l-hujub is the oldest known source in which this term is used. He explains that the term qubba actually refers to the period of the Imāms beginning with ʿAlī. However, it is the Nuṣayarī sect that adopted this term and used it intensively to define historical cycles of time. The first to use this term was al-Khašibī, in his Siyāqa, then al-Jillī in his Bāṭīn al-ṣalāt. However, the doctrine of the qibāb becomes crystallized mainly in al-Tabarānī’s writings. In his Dalāʾil fi-’l-maṣāʾil, al-Tabarānī explains that in hādhihi ‘l-qubba (this qubba) or the qubbāt al-Muhammadiyya, the divinity appeared to everybody, to mystics as well as to normal believers (li-’l-khāṣṣ wa-’l-ʿāmm), because this was the last qubba before Judgment Day.

In the qibāb, as in the case of the akwār and adwār, there are prehistorical cycles, which belong to the period that preceded the fall. Bar-Asher and Kofsky note, based on the Bākūra and the Catechism of Paris Ms. 6182, the existence of seven cycles of time (al-qibāb al-sabʿ). However, what they call the “enigmatic names” of these periods should be explained in order to understand this doctrine. The names of these primordial cycles express a negative process leading towards the fall. This is the reason why the first letters of the first four cycles (ḥinn, binn, timm, rimm) create the name Ḥabtar (fox), a nickname for Abū Bakr, who is considered the personification of the devil in Nuṣayarī belief. The next two primordial cycles are named for the two kinds of demons who serve the devil: Jānn and Jinn (sing. Jinnī). The following qibāb divide human history into parts. In every qubba the eight aspects of the divinity, or the triad and the subordinated pentad, were personified by those whom the Nuṣayarīs consider the most pious society of the time. In other words, every revelation is given the name of the most important persons or culture of its time:

al-qubba al-Ādamiyya, after Adam;
al-qubba al-Nūḥiyya, period of Noah and the deluge;

---

202 AUH, p. 82.
203 See, for example, RS (included in RR), p. 54.
204 KBS, pp. 224–225.
205 DM, p. 132.
207 TDN, answer to question 43, compare with BS, pp. 61–62. The addition of a seventh cycle appears only in al-Adhanī’s book.
208 MA, p. 213; BS, pp. 204–205.
209 MA, p. 381.
al-qubba al-Ibrāhīmiyya, period of the Hebrew patriarchs;

al-qubba al-Mūsawiyya, period of Moses;

al-qubba al-Kanahwariyya, a weird antique Persian period, which appears only in al-Ṭabarānī’s Majmūʿ al-aʿyād;

al-qubba al-Fārisiyya, period of the Persian kings before the Islamic period;

al-qubba al-Hāshimiyya, after the great-grandfather of the Prophet Muhammad, Arab pre-Islamic period;

al-qubba al-Muhāmmadiyya, after the Prophet Muḥammad, the period of Islam, also called hādhihi ʾl-qubba (this cycle, or the actual cycle).

To these cycles al-Ṭabarānī adds a cycle called al-qubba al-ṭālibīyya from the verb ṭalaba (to seek after the name Abū Ṭālib, father of ʿAlī). It is also called al-maqāmāt al-ṭālibīyya, which is another dimension of time and exists only for mystics who ascend to the divine world.

The maqāmāt (sing. maqām) is a well-known Ṣūfī term for the seven stations in the mystic’s path.

The lists or tables of the qibāb and the emanated persons (shakhs, pl. ashkhāṣ) who appear with the deity in each cycle are not organized in Nūṣayrī medieval sources. The similarity of these lists, in the sect’s available sources, may indicate that the Nūṣayrīs possessed tables containing all the personifications of every cycle, as they had in the case of the ahl al-marātib. Apart from the names found in al-Khaṣībi’s Siyāqa, a list of ashkhāṣ in each cycle is also found also in the Nūṣayrī
The Nusayri religion 218 Although history contains cycles of time and the divinity appears in different forms, the batin, which is the esoteric contents of the divine message, remains the same, and only the zahir, the external content, changes, as al-Tabarani explains:

The religious laws [sharia, sing, sharīa] in their internal meaning are all the same although in their external form they are different, all the qibāb are one and the natiq (the divine speech) is one because it is the mim [Muhammad] in all the appearances. 219

Although history has an end and the Nusayris do have an apocalyptic doctrine, there is a means of escape from the material world before Judgment Day. In other words, the sect combines a regular Muslim religious concept of history with a timeless concept of the mystical path. Time in the material world is combined with the timeless path of the mystic returning to the divine world of light: a mystic’s soul transmigrates in the cycles of history, but at the same time he can ascend in each lifetime to a higher degree of spirituality. When he eventually achieves the world of light he is disconnected from human history, he ceases undergoing transmigration, and he becomes part of the ahl al-marātib.

6. The Gnostic mystical elevation: ma’rifa and sirāṭ

The Nusayri belief in the habta (fall) and the creation of a double cosmos, spiritual and material, reflects a predetermined concept of permanent punishment. However, according to the Nusayri doctrine there is a possibility for a small minority of pious mystics to return to the divine world by a long and gradual process. The attachment to the ahl al-marātib is possible since their most inferior emanations exist in the material world. By studying the secret knowledge, which was lost in the fall, and following the guidance of a shaykh who has gained an exalted degree of gnosis (ma’rifa or ‘ilm), one can achieve a higher spiritual degree. The members of the sect believe that their knowledge, which is learnt by heart or through the study of their religious books,
is the key to being released from the evil material world.²²⁰ This process of the mystic (the owner of the inner knowledge, the ʿārif) begins with the initiation into the mystical circle of the sect. Since the initiation concerns primarily the issue of the Nuṣayrī identity, it is discussed separately in Chapter 3. The mystical path is called the širāt, the spiritual path towards the bāb.

The term širāt is known in orthodox Islam as the bridge over hell leading to paradise on the Day of Resurrection, but its original meaning in the Qurʾān is simply “the path of God”.²²¹ In the terminology of the sect, the mystics are “walking” (sālikūn, sing. sālik)²²² in the širāt and crossing over seven “obstacles” (ʿiqāb or ʿaqabāt, sing. ʿaqaba), also called “the obstacles of the material world” (al-ʿaqabāt al-suf-liyya). The more the Nuṣayrī mystic progresses in the study of the ʿilm al-tawhīd and is strengthened by the acceptance (iqrār) of its truth, the more he will be able to confront his own doubts (shukūk, sing. shakk) which are the main reason for the delay of his progress. The ahl al-iqrār (people of acceptance), or the mystics, ascend the širāt, as opposed to the ahl al-inkār wa-ʿl-juhūd (people of denial and repudiation) who stay imprisoned in the material world. These sinners are doomed to descend in the levels of transmigration. Once the mystic reaches the highest degree, he is freed from the material world and the punishment of transmigration from one body to another. Then he can continue his path until he attains the bāb and the secrets of the divinity become unveiled to him. According to some sources, the mystic who attains the world of light becomes visible to the material world as a star in the sky.²²³

The Nuṣayrī sources use other mystical terminology for the process of ascending the širāt: The ascent (irtiqāʾ) of the mystic is his passage from the human degree (nāsūtiyya) into the spiritual luminous degree (nūrāniyya), until he attains purification (šafāʾ).²²⁴ The term šafāʾ is well known from Ṣūfī terminology and is even used as one of the explana-

²²⁰ DKh, fol. 9a, 38b, 83b.
²²¹ In the Qurʾān the term širāt appears 32 times as the path of God; see Muḥammad Fuʿād ʿAbd al-Bāqī, al-Muʿjam al-mufāras li-alfāz al-Qurʾān al-karīm (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1988), p. 407. In most of the cases it is called širāt al-mustaqīm (the righteous path). One exception is the širāt al-jahim which is the “path to hell” for the sinner; see Qurʾān, al-Ṣafāt (37), 23.
²²² See, for example, the use of the term in DMS, p. 59.
²²³ RB, pp. 279–281; RR, pp. 60–62.
²²⁴ RR, p. 62; RB, p. 281; RM, p. 299.
In the Nusayrī religion the term šāfāʾ seems to derive from the doctrine of Mufaḍḍal. In Muḥammad ibn Sinān’s Kitāb al-ḥujub wa-l-anwār, the author is taught by Mufaḍḍal that the study of esoteric knowledge leads to purification and the passage from this world, which is “the house of trial” (dār al-mīḥna) into the luminous “house of eternity” (dār al-khuld). In Muḥammad ibn Sinān’s text, the spiritual path is also defined in terms of time, as “the cycle of trial” (qubbat al-mīḥna), since it involves a process in which the mystic gradually ascends to a higher spiritual level after several transmigrations. The term širāt is not an exclusive to the Nusayrīs; it is also used in Ismāʿīlī literature to describe the path of the believer’s soul to purity, as in the writings of the Persian poet and philosopher Nāṣir Khusraw (d. 481/1088).

Although the possibility of returning to the world of light exists, it is meant only for a small group of pious mystics. According to Nusayrī sources, there are strict rules as to who is permitted to begin his journey to the širāt. Besides a person’s religious righteousness, he must not have any bodily defect, perhaps because this is a proof of sins in a previous life.

The main source of study of the širāt for the Nusayrī initiates is Mufaḍḍal’s Kitāb al-širāt, which was added to the Nusayrī canon in the time of al-Khaṣībī, as can be concluded from its chain of transmitters. This source was studied by Bar-Asher and Kofsky in comparison with other Nusayrī sources, mainly Mufaḍḍal’s Kitāb al-usūs and Muḥammad ibn Shu‘ba’s Kitāb al-uṣayfir. According to these sources, the obstacles to the mystic’s ascent reflect the devil’s efforts to hurt the believers. The hierarchical structure of the spiritual degrees is the result of the emanations from the time of the creation of the cosmos. Thus, the mystic needs the help of a person in a higher rank in order to progress. When he reaches the divinity, he is not bound by earthly laws and is not obliged to observe the laws of religion. Bar-Asher and Kofsky consider this doctrine an explanation for the sect’s

---

226 *HUA*, pp. 46, 58.
228 *JK*, p. 25.
However, as is shown below, the Nuṣayrī leaders did not allow the mystics to neglect their religious duties. According to Bar-Asher and Kofsky, the doctrine of the širāṭ defines the terms “paradise” and “hell” in an approach that is different from the one known in orthodox monotheistic religions. Since the material world is evil, transmigration that prevents release from it is hell. The gnosis is the path to paradise, which is the return to the original pre-fall state in the world of light. This process is described in the Usūs in terms of ascending a ladder (sullam) towards paradise. Once a person arrives at the highest level where he meets the bāb, he achieves perfect knowledge and all the secrets of the universe are unveiled to him. Here again, the Nuṣayrīs use the same terminology as the Ismāʿīlīs as well as the Ṣūfīs. The term was used in the Sullam al-najāt (ladder of salvation) by the Persian Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī, an important Neoplatonist Ismāʿīlī propagandist from the tenth century. We also find the use of the symbol of the sullam in the poetry of the well-known Ṣūfī scholar Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240). Ibn al-ʿArabī used another term that was common in the Nuṣayrī religion, the isrā’, the Night Journey, in the sense of a spiritual ascension.

6.1 The isrā’: an elevation in the divine world

The use of the term isrā’ is similar in Nuṣayrī and Ṣūfī doctrines. The Night Journey of the Prophet Muḥammad from the “holy mosque”

---


(al-bayt al-ḥarām) to the “most distant mosque” (al-masjid al-aqsā), mentioned in the Qur’ān (al-Isrā’ [17]:1) is not explained in geographical terms. It is interpreted as a mystical ascension to a higher spiritual degree. Nevertheless, while the Ṣūfīs use the term isrā’ to describe a human experience, the Nuṣayrīs attribute the isrā’ only to heavenly creatures from the ahl al-ḫarām. This difference derives from the fact that, unlike in the Ṣūfī tradition, Muhammad is regarded not as a human being but as a personification of the ism. Hence, for the Nuṣayrīs the isrā’ is a phenomenon of the world of light, not a model of the Prophet for his believers.

Bar-Asher and Kofsky offer an explanation for this doctrine based on the text of the Baghdadian member of the sect, Hārūn al-Ṣāʾigh, which preserves the teaching of his master al-Khāṣībī. According to this document, the isrā’ is the ascent of an emanated creature of light towards the ma’nā. The example given by Hārūn is that of the ascent of first yatīm al-Miqdād to the degree of the bāb Salmān. In the mystical interpretation, the journey of the Prophet Muḥammad with the angel Jibrīl to the masjid al-aqsā, is replaced by the ascent of al-Miqdād with the bāb Salmān. For the Nuṣayrīs, the “holy mosque” is the ism/hijāb and the “most distant mosque” is the ma’nā.²³⁴

Although the doctrine of the isrā’ appears in Nuṣayrī literature, it seems to be only a marginal part of the sect’s theology. Even though it became a subject of discussion in the majlis of al-Jisrī in Baghdad, it is rarely discussed in other sources. An explanation of al-Khāṣībī, in Fiqh al-risāla al-rāstbāshiyya, of a tradition that was transmitted by Ibn Nuṣayr from the Imām Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, was probably the source of al-Jisrī’s later discussion in his majlis. According to al-Khāṣībī’s explanation of this tradition, the bāb Salmān is the door to the ism and the latter is identified with the “holy mosque”. The “most distant mosque” is interpreted as the ma’nā.²³⁵ This explanation is rarely repeated in the sect’s later sources. There are only two brief mentions of it, in al-Jillī’s Bāṭīn al-ṣalāt²³⁶ and in al-Ṭabarānī’s Risāla al-murshida.²³⁷ In the sect’s

²³⁵ See in FRR, p. 126.
²³⁶ KBS, p. 244.
²³⁷ RMU, p. 172.
sources from the nineteenth century, such as the Catechism and the Bākūra, this doctrine does not appear at all. The reason for the marginalization of this doctrine seems to be its contradiction of a more important doctrine, that of the siyāqa. The major principle of the siyāqa, the order of appearances of the divine aspects, is that none of the divine triad and pentad can appear in the form of a superior being. An ascent of a part of the divinity to a higher level would completely contradict the siyāqa, because it would enable, for example, the highest part of the pentad, al-Miqdād, to reach the highest rank of the superior triad, the ma’nā. Since there is no text that resolves the contradiction between the two doctrines, a likely explanation is that it caused confusion among the Nuṣayrīs, and the doctrine of the siyāqa superseded that of the isrāʾ. The only possible way to avoid the contradiction between the two doctrines is to assume that each deals with a different issue. The siyāqa is an explanation of the order of the appearance of the deity in human history, while the isrāʾ focuses on transitions that occurs only in the divine world.

7. Demonology and the personification of Iblīs

The presence of evil creatures in the world is mentioned and explained in most of the Nuṣayrī writings. The existence of a developed doctrine of demonology in Nuṣayrī religion does not seem extraordinary, considering the fact that the devil is present as an active figure already in the Qur’ān.²³⁸ Hence, all the fundamental Nuṣayrī demonic terminology derives from Muslim theology. Iblīs (king and father of the demons)²³⁹ and his shayātīn (sing. shaytān, Satan or devil) exist as shadows of the creatures of light: they follow them everywhere and are created as a result of their bad actions.

²³⁸ Apart from the frequent mention of Iblīs, king and father of the devils, chapter 72 of the Qur’ān is called Sūrat al-jinn, and provides the interesting affirmation of tawḥīd even among the jinn.
²³⁹ Muḥammad al explains that the meaning of Iblīs derives from the verb ablasa (equivalent to the verb āyasa, meaning “to despair”) because his ignorance led him to despair of God’s mercy. See HA, p. 49. This explanation is known in orthodox Islam. See, for example, S. R. al-Mubarakpuri, Taḥṣīr Ibn Kathīr (Riyadh/London/New York: Darussalam, 2002), vol. 4, p. 29. But another explanation, which seems equally logical, is that the name Iblīs derives from the Greek diabolos; see A. Campisi, Lessico Della Teologia Islamica (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2002), p. 20.
7.1 A hierarchy of evil

According to Nuṣayrī theology, based on ʿAbdallāh ibn Muʿāwiya’s Kitāb al-mārātib wa-ʾl-daraj, God created a dual world of light and darkness, reflected in the natural order of day and night. Unlike the creatures of light, the creatures of darkness were not created as a result of an emanational process, but as a result of evil acts and the denial of God’s existence. In other words, the sins of the creatures of light created evil creatures that have an order of existence parallel to that of the ahl al-mārātib. There are seven ranks called mārātib al-kufr (literally “ranks of disbelief”, better defined as “ranks of evil”).

Contrary to the ahl al-mārātib, the ranks of evil are not specified, but are given only general descriptions. In the writings of Ḥasan ibn Shuʿba there is a description of the jinna (sing. jinn, demon) and the arwāḥ (sing. rūḥ, ghost), which are invisible creatures or souls without bodies that can intervene or harm human beings. Al-Ṭabarānī, based on a tradition transmitted from Jābir ibn ʿAbdallāh, gives a detailed description of Iblīs, an ugly and terrifying creature possessing most of the human defects. Muḥammad’s Haft wa-ʾl-azīlla provides a detailed account of the creation of Iblīs from fire, his rebellion against God, and his enmity towards humanity from the time of Adam. According to the Haft, Iblīs gave birth to the shayāṭīn who are the addād (sing. didd, opposite), or enemies of all ahl al-mārātib and the believers.

Even the divine triad is shadowed by negative forms. The most important appearances of the evil triad are those considered to be the greatest villains of ancient history: Pharaoh, Haman and Korah (Arabic Firʾawn, Hāmān and Qārūn). These three appear with some differences in both the Hebrew Bible and the Qurʾān as rebels against God and his prophets. They stood against the divine appearances in the persons of Joshua, Moses and Aaron. In the period of the Prophet Muhammad, the qubba al-Muḥammadīya, the evil triad of ʿUmar-Abū Bakr-ʿUthmān appears in opposition to the divine ʿAlī-Muḥammad-Salmān.

---

240 See the citation from Kitāb al-mārātib wa-ʾl-Daraj, in HAD, p. 83.
241 HAD, p. 100.
242 JK, p. 27; KSS, included in MA, p. 47.
243 HA, pp. 37–40; see also: JK, p. 27; BS, p. 17.
Against ‘Alī, who is the maʿnā, stands ‘Umar, who is Iblīs al-Abālisa.\textsuperscript{245} In some sources of the sect, a fourth person is added to the first three caliphs, that of Muʿāwiya ibn Abī Sufyān, the founder of the Umayyad dynasty. Together, they are called in Nuṣayrī literature “the four abominables” (\textit{al-arbaʿa al-ardhalūn}).\textsuperscript{246}

The fact that after the death of the Prophet Muḥammad the Muslim world was ruled by the \textit{marātib al-kufr} throughout its history intensifies the negative view of the material world. The domination by the devil of every aspect of human history increases the need to escape from this world by the path of the \textit{ṣirāt}. As long as the \textit{muwahḥidūn} stay in the material world, the Nuṣayrīyya will remain under the rule of the \textit{addād}. In addition to the Muslim usurpers, Jābir ibn Yazīd’s \textit{Kitāb sharḥ al-sabʿin} contains a list of people from sixteen different cultures who represent the devil in this world.\textsuperscript{247} This pessimism seems to be one of the reasons for the passive attitude of the Nuṣayris towards their surroundings and their detachment from regional politics during most of the medieval period.

A Nuṣayrī tradition on the authority of al-Khaṣībī deals with the question of the justice and the suffering of the believers in the material world:

\begin{quote}
Al-Jillī said: I asked my master al-Khaṣībī concerning [Jaʿfar] al-Ṣādiq’s words: “This world is the paradise of the sinner and the prison of the believer” and he replied: “But also [from another aspect] this world is the paradise of the believer and the hell of the sinner… because gnosis [\textit{maʿrifā}] is heaven… and the sinner [his soul] undergoes transmigration without escape.\textsuperscript{248}
\end{quote}

To conclude, in Nuṣayrī theology, only mysticism can provide a logical answer to injustice in the world and the domination of evil.


\textsuperscript{246} In some sources \textit{al-arzalūn}; a phonetic exchange of dh and z is typical of several Arabic dialects; see, for example, \textit{KHA}, p. 213.

\textsuperscript{247} \textit{KSS} in \textit{MA}, pp. 40–41.

\textsuperscript{248} \textit{ARM}, p. 12.
7.2 Demonic nicknames

The first three rāšidūn (righteous caliphs), who were considered usurpers in the Shi‘a, and demons in Nuṣayrīsm, were given pejorative nicknames that replaced their original names. These nicknames were used by all Shi‘īs in the medieval period and appear in Imāmī as well as Ghulāt literature. They expressed contempt and were also used as a means of caution (taqiyya).

In the writings of Muhammad ibn Sinān, the three caliphs are scornfully called “the first”, “the second” and “the third” (al-awwal, al-thānī and al-thālith). Together they represent the negative of the divine triad of ʿAlī-Muhammad-Salmān. The Umayyad dynasty is called by the general nickname shaysabān after a famous Arabic jinn.249

In the Nuṣayrī writings, Ḥabtar (fox, i.e. crafty) is the nickname of the first caliph, Abū Bakr. Dulām, which is probably an old Iraqi dialectical deformation of dalām or ṣallām (dark, oppressor) is the nickname of ʿUmar. He is called in Jābir ibn Yazīd’s Kitāb sharḥ al-sabʿīn by the strange name Sakd or Sakad, which is not to be found in any Arabic dictionary or other sources of the sect. The third caliph, ʿUthmān is named Naʿthal (old fool). Despite their demoniac nature, the Nuṣayrī writings attribute to them human sins and promise them human punishment. The three are given the title “worshipper of idols” and are doomed to burn in hell.250

The use of nicknames is a passive means of struggle against the authorities, through cursing and scorning. The passive attitude of the Nuṣayrīs characterizes their religion. Nevertheless, in the period of Ghulāt activity in Kufa in the eighth century until the time of al-Khaṣībī, an important doctrine of mystic activism still subsisted. Nuṣayrī literature preserved it and used it as an ideology of revenge postponed for the Day of Judgment.

---

249 HUA, pp. 60, 61, repeated by al-Khaṣībī in: RR, p. 42.
250 See for example, Ḥabtar in AAN, p. 116; IM, p. 275; RR, p. 52; Dulām in AAN, p. 114; IM, p. 275; Sakad in KSS included in MA, p.47, ciphered by al-Ṭabarānī with the gematric numbers 4 20 60 (= s.k.d.); Naʿthal in KBS, p. 262. See also their appearance in DKH, fol. 17a, 36a, 47b, 51a, 63b, 78b, 111a; DMA, fol. 136 a, b, 167a. Compare with the similar pejorative names of the three first caliphs in Imāmī literature, in M. M. Bar-Asher, Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imami Shiism (Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp. 115–118. See more details concerning derogatory appellations of the three first caliphs in Imāmī Shi‘ism in E. Kohlberg, “Some Imāmī views on the Şaḥāba”, JSAI 5 (1984), pp. 162–165.
8. The “Prince of the Bees”: ʿAlī and his army of martyrs

One of the greatest mysteries of the Nuṣayrī religion is the strange title of ʿAlī, amīr al-nahl (prince or commander of the swarm of bees). Orientalists of the nineteenth century explained that this title is used only by Shiʿīs, particularly the Nuṣayrīs. Lammens pointed out that the source of this title is in the Qurʾān, in the “verse of the bees” interpreted by the Shiʿīs as a symbol of their community.251 The following verse from the Qurʾān speaks about bees:

And your Lord inspired the bees, saying: Take for yourself, of the mountains, houses and of the trees and of what they are building. Then eat all the fruits and walk in the path of your Lord made smooth for you and from them [the fruits] will come out a drink [honey] with several colors in which there is healing for men. Surely in that is a sign for the thinking people.

(Qurʾān, al-Nahl [16]: 67–68)

Goldziher explained that the amīr al-nahl is a synonym for the term yaʿasūb, and the nahl is a symbol for the family of the Prophet Muhammad, the ahl al-bayt, and their words are like honey. Their enemies are the followers of yaʿāshūb al-māl (queen bee of material things).

In his article concerning Dussaud’s study of the Kitāb al-majmūʿ, Goldziher notes that in Nuṣayrī theology the bees are exalted to the level of stars and become angels and their amīr, ʿAlī, is raised to the level of divinity.252

Lyde explains that: “the true believers are like bees, which seek the best flowers”.253 Bar-Asher holds that the Imāmī explanation for “prince of the bees” is that the bees are the Imāms.254 The explanation of Lyde, that the bees are the believers, is more appropriate for the Nuṣayrī religion.

The analogy of the two titles of ʿAlī, amīr al-muʾminīn and amīr al-nahl provides for the same explanation, that the believers (muʾminīn)

---

253 Lyde, The Asian Mystery, p. 275. See the same example of the flowers in TDN, p. 211–212.
are the bees (*nahl*). Indeed, al-Khaṣībī, in his *Hidāya al-kubrā*, explaining the title *amīr al-nahl*, explicitly identifies the bees with the believers.²⁵⁵ This was also the opinion of al-Majlīsī, who explains that the *nahl* is a synonym for the Shiʿa. In his chapter concerning *taqiyya* he compares the Shiʿīs and the Sunnīs with the bees and the birds. According to this analogy, the bees keep their honey secret from the birds, which are apparently stronger than them. According to this tradition, the birds are not totally aware of the power of the honey, but even their limited knowledge concerning the secret of the bees is enough to make the birds envy them and to persecute them. In his explanation of the importance of *taqiyya*, al-Majlīsī compares the physical merits of honey with the spiritual advantage of knowledge. The honey is the sweetest food and brings health to the body, as does the knowledge that the Imām shares with his community.²⁵⁶ In the late Nuṣayrī catechism, honey is also identified with knowledge: “The believers were likened to bees because they gather from the flowers their best”.²⁵⁷ Nevertheless, the available explanations do not answer the question why the bees were chosen from all living creatures to represent the believers. Hence, an additional explanation should be proposed.

In a recent work, Ross Shephard Kraemer devotes a chapter to the significance of bees in Eastern cultures. The bees had an important value in Egyptian and Greek religions of antiquity, which is reflected in their mystical role in the anonymous apocryphal work *Joseph and Aseneth*. Kraemer finds Neoplatonic symbols associated with bees based on the writings of the philosopher Porphyry (d. 309), a disciple of Plotinus. It may therefore be assumed that the mystical role of bees became known to Shiʿī mystics through Neoplatonic influence. The bees in *Joseph and Aseneth* surrounded Aseneth, daughter of Potiphar, who converted to monotheism in order to marry Joseph. According to Kraemer, Porphyry considered the bees righteous souls that die and are reborn, live justly, do God’s will, and finally return to heaven.²⁵⁸

In addition to the logical association of the loyalty of the bees to their queen with the loyalty of believers to God, the second most prominent

---

²⁵⁵ *HK*, p. 93.
²⁵⁷ *TDN*, pp. 211–212; the translation is from Bar-Asher and Kofsky, *The Nuṣayrīs-'Alawi Religion*, p. 186.
characteristic of the bees is their will to sacrifice their life in order to defend the swarm and their queen. In this context, al-Khaṣṣībī, in his *Dīwān*, describes the bees as *junūd*, armies of God. In Nuṣayrīsīm, the bees are the leading believers, mystics who sacrifice their lives to spread the message of the Imām before returning to heaven. Also according to an Imāmī tradition, on the eve of the Karbalā’ massacre, Ḥūsayn and his followers, who are the main symbols of purity and of self-sacrifice, were reciting a prayer that had “a sound as the sound of bees” (*dawī ka-dawī al-nahْl*).

8.1 *The docetic martyrdom: nidā, taṣrīḥ and khūṭba*

The martyrdom of the bees leads to the important doctrine of *nidāʾ* (call, pl. *andiya*), also called *taṣrīḥ* (declaration). The first term describes the act, which is a synonym for the *adhān*, the call from the minaret. The second term describes the content of this call, a declaration of the divinity of the Imām, which replaces the orthodox call for prayer. By performing the *nidāʾ* and *taṣrīḥ*, the mystic sacrifices his life, because his belief is considered heretical by the authorities and the masses, and he must accept the consequences and be prepared to be punished. His goal is to serve the Imām by spreading his esoteric message. He knows that the Imām will excommunicate him or even demand his execution, but only outwardly, as an act of *taqiyya* (caution). According to this doctrine, the mystic is not really harmed at all. This interesting process of docetic sacrifice, which has not yet been studied, appears in several sources, including the newly available sources of the *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī*. Ivanow alluded to it in his study of the *Umm al-kitāb*, where he noticed that one characteristic of the *muwahḥidūn*, the mystic disciples of the Imāms, from the time of ʿAlī to that of al-Bāqīr, is their willingness to sacrifice themselves. Their

---

259 DKH, fol. 17a, line 8 in the poem *bukhtu bi-sirrī*. The pious daughter of Potiphar is not mentioned in Nuṣayrī sources, but we do find that his wife is denounced in BS, p. 17.


261 Several scholars, such as Modarressi and Moezzi, share the opinion that the disassociation of the Ghulāt does not necessarily reflect a rejection of their doctrine, but seems more like an act of defending the Shīʿī community from the general accusation of heresy by the Sunni authorities. See Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, p. 21; M. A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Guide divin dans le Shīʿisme originel* (Paris: Verdier, 1992), pp. 313–315.
religion is defined as madhhab fidāʾī (doctrine of sacrifice). The term fidāʾī appears also in the late Urjūza of Shaykh al-Ṣuwayrī (fourteenth century). In Nuṣayrī theology, the doctrine of nidāʾ and taṣrīḥ was developed into a docetic concept. This doctrine is linked to the principle of siyāqa. In appearance, the bāb declares the divinity of the Imām and sacrifices his life. In reality it is the ism that appears in his bāb, declares the divinity of the maʾnā, and then disappears. The nidāʾ is a repetition of the act of Muḥammad when he declared the divinity of ʿAlī on a wooden podium in Ghadīr Khumm, as described in al-Khaṣībī’s Qasida al-ghadiriyya:

The day of Ghadīr is a day of joy/
God clarified in it the grace of Ghadīr
And granted Khumm the glories and merit /
   And the treasures in the happiness
And the most excellent and great numbers of pleasures /
   [Granted] as a honor comprising [or exceeding] all praises
The day when Muḥammad called [nādā] to all the creatures /
   When he said in a clear speech
Declaring to all above a wooden stage /
   Disposed according to His decreed command:
   “Indeed, this is your creator therefore know him! /
   This is the former of the forms
Indeed, this is your God therefore grasp him! /
   he is the subject of your worship for ever
Indeed, this is your Lord therefore worship him only! /
   He is [too] exalted to have any comparison or parallel.

The content of the nidāʾ is explained in al-Khaṣībī’s poem by a combination of citations from the Qurʾān in which Muḥammad calls upon the believers to know God and make a declaration of God’s virtues. Most of the texts that deal with this subject in Nuṣayrī sources cite al-Khaṣībī. Hence it may be assumed that he was the first leader of the

---

263 SUR, fol. 218b.
264 The difference in the two versions of the Dīwān al-Khaṣībī: in Ms. Manchester yahūzu (comprising), in Ms. Damascus yajūzu (exceeding). See S. Ḥabib, Dīwān al-Khaṣībī ma a sharh liʾl-rumūz al-bātiniyya al-wārida fihi: dirāsa wa-tahqiq wa-sharh (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Aḥlamī liʾl-Matbūʿāt, 2001), p. 31. Ḥabib’s version seems to be the correct one in this case, based on the citation of this line in MA, p. 56; however, this version suffers from imprecisions and the omission of lines from the poem.
265 DKH, fol. 9a. Compare with the almost identical version in MA, p. 56.
sect to teach the doctrine of nidāʾ to his disciples. The declaration of God’s divinity is in fact a list of his virtues, which can be found in what can be defined as the khutba literature of the Ghulāt. This literature is an anonymous collection of sermons written in the first person in which ‘Alī declares his divinity. Because of their esoteric nature these sermons were not included in the canonic Nahj al-balāgha. According to al-Jillī’s Risālat al-andidya, which is the most important document concerning the issue of nidāʾ, the declaration of the Imāms’ divinity is in fact a citation of a khutba. In other words, when the mystic was performing the nidāʾ he used to quote these sermons.266

In Risālat al-andidya, al-Jillī mentions the following sermons: Khūṭbat al-aqālim (sermon of the regions), Khūṭbat al-bayān (sermon of the clarification), Khūṭbat al-kashf (sermon of the revelation), Khūṭbat al-ṭaḥanijjīyya/tuṭuṇjīyya (sermon of the Gulf).267 To this list al-Ţabarānī adds two additional speeches: Khūṭbat al-durra (sermon of the pearl) and Khūṭbat al-fāḥis (sermon of the examining one).268 Fragments of some of these speeches are found in Ms. Kiel 19 and some were preserved in Imāmī and Bahāʾī sources.269 The anonymous compiler in Ms. Kiel 19 defined these speeches as iʿlān (call, a synonym of nidāʾ) and tasrīḥ, which confirms the link between the doctrine of nidāʾ and the khutba literature.270

The Qasīda al-ghadīriyya indicates that al-Khāṣibī was well acquainted with the Khūṭba literature. Thus, the possibility should not be excluded that al-Khāṣibī’s declaration of his mystic beliefs in Baghdad, which caused his imprisonment, was in fact an act of nidāʾ. Al-Khāṣibī could still claim to be speaking in the name of the Imām, who was still in a state of ghayba sūghrā (lesser occultation) between

266 RR, p. 73; FRR, p. 110; KHA, p. 168; KBS, p. 233; RA, pp. 328–332, RZB, p. 17.
268 RZB, p. 17.
270 KHC, fol. 2a.
260/874 and 329/941. However, since al-Khaşibi was neither excommunicated nor liquidated, his followers did not view him as a martyr. Moreover, although he was sanctified as one of the *ahl al-marātib al-suflīyya*, his disciples did not consider him as a personification of the *bāb*. Hence, al-Khaşibi could not be seen as one of the “bees of God”. Indeed, the doctrine of *nidā* became a theoretical idea rather than a practical obligation after the time of al-Khaşibi, who promoted the obligation of *taqiyya* as a means of survival.

In the *Risālat al-andiya* al-Jilli presents a crystallized doctrine of *nidā*, *taṣrīḥ* and *khutba*. According to this doctrine, all the major mystics (or Ghulāt) who are considered *bābs* in Nuṣayrī religion performed the *nidā*. The persons mentioned in the Nuṣayrī sources are as follows: the first was Muḥammad, the *ism* who appeared in his *bāb* Salmān and declared the divinity of ʿAlī, a declaration called *nidā* *yawm al-ghadīr*. This was then repeated by ʿAbdallāh ibn Saba ʿ271 who declared the divinity of ʿAli. The latter’s reaction was to order Ibn Saba’s execution. Other mystics were only cursed or excommunicated by the Imām. Such was the case of Jābir al-Ju ḍī and Jābir ibn ʿAbdallāh, who declared the divinity of the Imām al-Bāqir, and later ʿUmar ibn al-Furāt and Muḥammad ibn Nuṣayr, who declared the divinity of ʿAlī al-Riḍā and his son Ḥasan al-ʿAskari. ʿ272 The most important, and probably the most famous, of these examples is Abū ʿl-Khatṭāb, who became a martyr as a result of his *nidā*. His activity was not regarded by Sunnis as important at all. Historians such as Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) did not even bother to mention him. It is only within Shiʿī society that he had any significant influence.

According to Nuṣayrī sources, Abū ʿl-Khaṭṭāb Muḥammad ibn Abī Zaynab mounted the minaret of the mosque of Kuфа, and performed the *nidā*. His declaration of the Imām Jaʿfar’s divinity, which was performed as an *adhān* (call for prayer) from the top of the minaret, is defined in Nuṣayrī theology as “a testimony of the unification of God” (*shahāda bi-tawhīd Allāh*). ʿ273 The Nuṣayrī account is backed by Imāmī sources. Abū ʿl-Khaṭṭāb’s revolt together with his seventy

---

271 According to the *Umm al-kitāb*, Ibn Saba’ declared the divinity of al-Bāqir, the fifth Imām, after the latter had revealed to him the secret meaning of the letters and then appeared to him in the forms of Muḥammad, ʿAlī, Fāṭima, Ḥasan and Huṣayn, explaining to him in each form that it was a divine appearance; see Hālm, *al-Ghunūsīyya fi ʿl-Islām*, pp. 92–96.

272 KBS, pp. 232–233; DMA, fol. 211a–212a.

273 KBS, p. 232; AAN, pp. 125–126; RR, p. 73, RA, p. 323.
partisans caused a riot in Kufa and ended with his brutal execution by the ʿAbbāsid authorities. According to al-Nawbakhtī, the disciples of Abū ʿl-Khaṭṭāb developed a docetic belief concerning their master’s death. The gap between the historical events and this belief is striking. The ʿAbbāsid governor executed Abū ʿl-Khaṭṭāb on the banks of the Euphrates and crucified him with some of his partisans in Kufa. Their heads were cut off and sent to Caliph al-Mansūr in Baghdad, who ordered that they be hung for three days at the entrance of the city. Then their heads and bodies were burned. These terrible events did not prevent his adherents from developing a docetic belief that Abū ʿl-Khaṭṭāb and his followers were not harmed at all. According to this belief of the Khaṭṭābiyya, the Imām encouraged the ʿAbbāsid warriors to attack the mosque of Kufa during the night, and made some of them wear the form of Abū ʿl-Khaṭṭāb and his partisans. In the morning, when the fight was over, the warriors discovered that they had been killing each other, while the rebels disappeared. Abū ʿl-Khaṭṭāb and his disciples turned into angels. 274

The connection between the doctrine of nidāʾ and taṣrīḥ and the khutba literature as presented in the sources of the sect not only reveals an important aspect of the Nuṣayrī religion; it also sheds new light on the role of these mystical sermons and enables us to understand the role they played in the activity of the Ghulāt.

So far, the theoretical aspects of the Nuṣayrī religion, which are the main issues in the study of the sect’s mystics, have been dealt with. The rest of this chapter covers the doctrines that have a practical aspect and are connected with the liturgy and cults, beginning with an explanation of the Nuṣayrī interpretation of the obligations of Islam.

9. Allegorical interpretation of the sharīʿa

The study of the Nuṣayrī version of Islamic law, the sharīʿa, is of importance for understanding the sect’s identity as well as the practical dimension of their religion. Although the law is based on a taʾwil, an allegorical interpretation, which gives every obligation an esoteric meaning (bāṭin), 275 several Nuṣayrī sources repeat the warning of the

274 Al-Nawbakhtī, Firaq al-Shīʿa, pp. 70–71.
Imām Jaʿfar that neglecting the practical observance of the regular, outward (zāhir) obligations may lead to the sin of ibāha (antinomianism).276 The Nuṣayrī religion demands both ʿilm (knowledge) and ʿamal (work, meaning practical performance of the obligations). According to a Nuṣayrī saying, “ʿilm without ʿamal is like a traveler who sails in a boat without a sailor” (ka-ʾl-fulk allatī yarkabuhā ʾl-rākib bilā mallāh).277 However, the mystical aspect of the religion is regarded as much more valuable than the overt aspect. According to Nuṣayrī sources, the Imām al-Bāqir said that esoteric knowledge (ʿilm/maʿrif) is much more important than the cult (ʿibāda),278 and that the knowledge of one mystic (ʿārif, pl. ʿārifūn) is worth more than the cult of 70,000 worshippers (ʿibād, sing. ʿābid).279 It seems that al-Khasībī was the main figure in the creation of Nuṣayrī law, since he is called in one source of the sect šāḥib al-sharīʿa (owner of the law).280 In the following discussion, the Nuṣayrī interpretation of the sharīʿa is studied in comparison with the two orthodox versions of Islamic law in Sunnism and in Shiʿism, which in practice are very similar to each other.

9.1 The pillars of Islam: shahāda, ṣalāt, ṣawm, zakāt and ʿา hij

The arkān al-Islām, the five pillars of Islam, are the fundamental obligations of all Muslims.

9.1.1 Shahāda (declaration of faith)

The shahāda is the Muslim declaration of belief in one God and the acknowledgment of Muḥammad as his Prophet, to which the Shiʿīs add loyalty (walāya) to ʿAlī. In Nuṣayrīsm, the shahāda is given a mystical interpretation, since its first part (lā ilāha illā ʾllāh) contains twelve letters corresponding to the number of Imāms.281 Every

---

276 See, for example, DKH, fol. 22a; IM, p. 257; HAD, pp. 110, 146, 170; TU, p. 316; ARM, p. 10; HUA, p. 51 (Mufaddal asks in his testament that the zāhir not be neglected). Maksūn al-Sinjārī explained the importance of following the obligations of Islam along with the study of mysticism. See RTN, pp. 279–282, 293.

277 AAM, p. 263.

278 KHA, p. 199.

279 HAD, p. 123.

280 RIA, 294.

281 MN, fol. 129a. See also ARM, pp. 16–17, where it is explained that the second part of the shahāda also contains 12 letters in Arabic: Muḥammad rasūl Allāh (messenger of God). Other names of Shiʿī saints contain 12 letters in Arabic, for example: Fāṭima bint Muḥammad and Ṭālib.
Shi'i believer must declare: “There is no other God but Allāh, his Prophet is Muhammad and 'Ali is his beloved one” (lā ilāha illā 'llāh wa-Muḥammad rasūl Allāh wa-'Ali walī Allāh). But since 'Ali and Muhammad are personifications of the deity, the Nūṣayrīs replace this declaration by their own shahāda: “There is no God but 'Ali” (lā ilāha illā 'Alī), or “the prince of the bees, there is no other God but him” (amīr al-naḥl lā ilāha illā huwa). According to a Nūṣayrī tradition, when 'Ali was a baby he said: “There is no God but me” (lā ilāha illā anā). However, it should be stressed here again, in order to prevent a widespread error, that the Nūṣayrī ‘Alī is not the person known to us from Muslim history, nor is he a human being in whom the divinity was incarnated, as described in other Ghulāt texts or in hostile heresiography. The misunderstanding of this doctrine has led throughout the sect’s history to accusations of heresy that have had severe consequences. For the Nūṣayrīs, ‘Alī was not a human being but a human form through which God contacted humanity in a docetic appearance. Hence, the accusations that the Nūṣayrīs worship the human person of ‘Alī derive from a superficial understanding of the sect’s belief. Al-Khaṣibī explained, based on the teaching of Ibn Nūṣayr, that “the form of God is not God himself” (mithāl Allāh ghayr Allāh). Al-Jillī also dealt with the expression “God is ‘Alī” with much caution, even concerning the worship of the form of God. In his Ḥāwī l-āsrār, he cites Muhammad ibn Sinān’s Kitāb al-tawḥīd, explaining that ‘Alī is a form through which the believers can grasp God, but he is not God himself: “The one who declares that the human appearance of ‘Ali is God, is a heretic”. When God said in his Khutba: “I am the exoteric and the esoteric” (anā l-ẓāhir wa-anā l-bāṭin), says Ibn Sinān, “He meant that his exoteric appearance is a test [of belief] to

---


284 RB, p. 274.


286 RR, p. 58.
them [to humanity] and is not his appearance in reality [but only in a
docetic way]".287

A more complete formula of the Nuṣayrī declaration of faith is
found in later sources. According to an anonymous istifāʾ (request for
a fatwā) sent in the fourteenth century from Syria to the well-known
Sunnī authority Ibn Taymiyya, the Nuṣayris are said to use a triple
formula of the shahāda:

I testify that there is no other God but ‘Ali the transcendent the esoteric,
and there is no veil but Muhammad the righteous the faithful, and there
is no path to him but Salmān the powerful.288

Such a detailed triple formula is not found in any of the medieval
Nuṣayrī sources, but there is a similar version in the nineteenth-cen-
tury Bākūra al-Sulaymāniyya.289 The fact that this formula does not
appear in the sect’s literature but only in external (not Nuṣayri) or
late sources may indicate that it was used orally and not read from
religious books, as were the other formulas of the shahāda found in
their writings. Indeed, according to Sunnī sources, the triple formula
was declared by the members of the sect during their uprising in Jabala
in 717/1317, headed by a Nuṣayrī mahdī and not by their religious
shaykhs.

Bar-Asher and Kofsky allude to an additional shahāda, which is
declared only by the mystic who reaches such an exalted degree of
ascent of the soul that he feels unification with the deity itself: “I testify
that You are my goal and You are my maʿnā . . . and You are I and I am
You”.290 Such a declaration of unification, which is rare in Nuṣayrī reli-
gion and even considered heretical by Makzūn al-Sinjārī, and appears
only in the twelfth-century Munāzarat al-Nashshābī, is more typical
of Şūfī mysticism. The most famous example is the declaration of the
mystic Hallāj who claimed to achieve the divine degree of spirituality
and declared “I am truth”. The mystic’s shahāda of unification is an
example of the similarity between Şūfism and Nuṣayrīsm, undoubt-
dedly an important subject for further study.

288 See Y. Friedman, “Ibn Taymiyya’s fatāwā against the Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī sect” Der
Islam, 82/2 (2005), pp. 357–358 and note 34. Ibn Taymiyya’s juridic decision is dis-
cussed in detail in Chapter 3.
289 Ibid., p. 358, note 34; BS, pp. 14, 26.
Another use of the term *shahāda* is found in Muhammad ibn Shu’ba’s *Kitāb al-uṣayfir*. According to this source, the *shahāda* (meaning in Arabic “declaration of belief” but also “to be present in a place”) is the peak of the mystic’s path. It is a spiritual presence in the world of light in which the mystic sees the *bāb* with his own eyes (*muʿāyin*). This situation is seen as complete freedom from the material prison and the ultimate happiness.291

9.1.2 Şalât (prayer)
Islamic law demands five prayers a day. The Nuṣayrīs claim that the day always begins at noon, thus the noon prayer is the first one, and not that of the dawn. Every prayer includes a number of *rakaʿāt* (sing. *rak’a*), which are units of recitation from the Qur’ān, accompanied by bowing and prostration. Altogether they form 17 *rakaʿāt* per day, another example of the mystical significance of this number. According to Nuṣayrī belief, every prayer represents a saint (*shakhs*, pl. *ashkhās*), who is a personification of one of God’s aspects.292 This is the order of the prayers and their *ashkhās* according to old Ghulat tradition and later Nuṣayrī tradition:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>obligatory prayers</th>
<th><em>rakaʿāt</em>293</th>
<th><em>ashkhās</em> in the older tradition294</th>
<th><em>ashkhās</em> in the later tradition295</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>al-`zuhr (noon)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td><em>maʿnā</em></td>
<td>Muhammad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>al-`asr (afternoon)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td><em>ism/hijāb</em></td>
<td>Fātir (the masculine appellation of Fāṭima)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>al-maghrib/al-wusṭā (sunset/middle prayer)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>İmām Jaʿfar (=al-jīm)</td>
<td>Hasan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>al-<code>ishā'/al-</code>atama (dusk/evening)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Hasan (=al-ḥā al-awwal)</td>
<td>Ḫusayn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>al-fajr (dawn)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ḫusayn</td>
<td>Muḥsin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

291 US, fol. 8a–9a.
293 TU, p. 252.
294 According to HUA, pp. 34–35.
295 According to HAD, p. 108.
The logic of the order of the prayer is based on the role of each of the ashkhās. For example, the reason the Nuṣayris consider the maghrib to be the middle prayer, is based on the fact that the shakhṣ of this prayer is Jaʿfar, who was the sixth leader of the Shiʿa, i.e. the middle of the twelve Imāms.296 In a later tradition, based on the same logic, it is the middle prayer because it symbolizes Ḥasan who is the third of the five persons of the ism.297 According to some sources, the prayer itself, the ṣalāt, is identified with Muhammad and represents the recognition of ‘Ali’s true nature.298

The main source for understanding the mystical meaning of the prayers is al-Jillī’s Bāṭin al-ṣalāt (the inner meaning of prayer). Al-Jillī explains that the five prayers represent five appearances of the maʿnā and his ism in three cycles of times which followed the yawm al-azilla: the cycle of Abraham (al-qubba al-Ibrāhimiyya), the cycle of Moses (al-qubba al-Mūsāwiyya) and what he calls “the actual cycle of Muhammad” (ḥādhihi ‘l-qubba al-Muhammadīyya). Every prayer represents the five appearances of the ism following those of the maʿnā: the ashkhās al-ṣalāt (saints of the prayers).299 As shown in the table, ‘Alī is represented in the zuhr prayer in the old tradition, which is taken from Ibn Sinān’s Kitāb al-ḥujub wa-ʾl-anwār. In the later tradition, which is that of al-Jillī, all the prayers represent the personifications of the ism. ‘Alī is not represented in a prayer; rather he is the prayer itself.

In Bāṭin al-ṣalāt, al-Jillī gives interesting explanations for the names of the prayers. The first is called zuhr, from the root ẓ.h.r. (to appear) because it represents Muḥammad, the first appearance of the ism. The second prayer, the ʿaṣr, represents Fāṭir. This masculine appellation of Fāṭima derives from the Nuṣayrī resentment of the feminine element. Her name is Fāṭir because she was created (infaṭarat) from the ism. According to exoteric Imāmī Shiʿism, Fāṭima was the best of Muḥammad’s children, and according to esoteric Nuṣayrism, Fāṭir is the jawharat al-mīm (the pearl or the best of the essence of the ism). There is no call for prayer (adhān) for the ʿaṣr prayer to express the idea that there is no separation between the ism and Fāṭir. Al-Jillī explains that the feminine nature of Fāṭir is only in appearance, in

296 HUA, p. 34.
297 KBS, pp. 230–231.
299 KBS, pp. 223–224.
order to provide the illusion of giving birth to the three holy ۵۴۳ (three times the letter ۵), ۲۸۲ and ۵۵۳. The third prayer, the ۵۴۷, is from the root ۵.۸ (to disappear) because it represents the vanished Imām ۵۲۴. The fourth prayer is called ۵۴۸ (evening) and ۵۴۹ (darkness), to symbolize the Docetism of ۵۵۰, when the infidels were in the dark and were not able to see the truth. In addition, ۵۴۹ is one of the names of the devil, such as Dulām, which is also the nickname of ۵۵۰ who is in a state of darkness. The last and fifth of the obligatory (۵۵۶) prayers is ۵۵۸ (dawn). It is the last because it symbolizes the fact that ۵۵۸ was the last of the ۵۴۳.

Al-Jillī gives a symbolic meaning for every prayer and for every movement during its performance. For example, the prayer of Friday, the ۵۵۱, is of special importance because it symbolizes the Judgment Day. This explanation is based on the meaning of ۵۵۱ (assembly), because not only will all humanity be assembled at the judgment, but the ۵۵۲ will also be united with his ۵۵۳ and thus the esoteric and exoteric will be one. This also explains why Friday is called “the day of the appearance [of the divinity] and of the revealing” (۵۵۴).

The obligation to wash before prayer, the ۵۵۵, is explained as symbolizing the knowledge flowing from the ۵۵۶ to the ۵۵۷, and purification is achieved by the study of the ۵۵۸ and the cleansing that it provides from the impurity of the enemies of the ۵۵۹. The purification of the hands with sand when water is not available, the ۵۶۰, symbolizes the situation of the ۵۶۱ after the death of Ibn ۵۶۲, in which the ۵۶۳ studied with mystic leaders in the absence of the ۵۶۴. The ۵۶۵, the forenoon prayer, which is an optional (۵۶۶, pl. ۵۶۷) prayer in orthodox Islam, is forbidden

300 Ibid., pp. 223–230. Another explanation for the name ۵۷۰ is the translation of the name “creator”, a result of her important role of creation in the chain of emanation; see MA, p. 170; Bar-Asher and Kofsky, The ۵۷۱– ۵۷۲, p. 145. However, the reason for this appellation may also be the need for a gemetric value equal to Fāṭima’s previous personification: Maryam (Mary, mother of Jesus): F=80+A=1+T=9+R=200 and M=40+R=200+Y=10+M=40; both equal 290. See L. Massignon, The Passion of al-Hallāj: Mystic and Martyr in Islam (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982), vol. 1 p. 203.
301 Ibid., pp. 251–252.
302 Ibid., pp. 259–262. According to a Nusayrī source, the members of the Ishāqiyya performed the ۵۶۶ after prayer; see HIF, pp. 73–74.
303 Ibid., p. 266.
in Nuṣayrism because it is considered an invention of the notorious Caliph ʿUmar.304

While al-Jillī deals with the meaning of the prayers, his disciple al-Ṭabarānī adds important explanations as to the movements of the body during prayer. In his Ḥāwī fi ʿilm al-fatāwā he discusses the prayer of the mystic in the context of the initiation. General instructions for prayer appear in his Majmūʿ al-aʿyād. The liturgical units include a khutba (sermon) or a duʿāʾ (prayer), and are sometimes followed by a ziyāra (literally, pilgrimage to a holy tomb). Al-Ṭabarānī gives instructions concerning the units of prayers (though he never uses the term rakʿa), which include prostration and the raising of the hands and face towards the sky.305 In some cases he permits adding personal requests at the end of a prayer.

An allegorical interpretation of the term qibla (direction of prayer) is known from some important Ṣūfī orders. While in orthodox Islam the qibla is the direction of prayer towards the Black Stone of the Kaʿba in Mecca, in Ṣūfism it is replaced by a human qibla. The Ṣūfī qibla is a spiritual leader from whom the believers ask for guidance.306 In Nuṣayrī theology the sacred object of the prayer has an allegorical meaning. The Kaʿba is a symbol of Muḥammad who is the ism. Mecca, which is called Umm al-Qurā (the mother of the villages), represents Fāṭir (Fātima). From her essence were created the qurā, which is personified by the three hāʾāt.307 Thus, the term qibla turns from a

---

304 Ibid., p. 270. The duḥā prayer was a subject of controversy among Muslim medi eval scholars. Most of them agreed that the Prophet Muḥammad did not perform this prayer regularly and some claimed that he never performed it at all. The Shiʿī resentment against this prayer may be explained by the fact that it was recommended mainly by ʿĀʾishah, the beloved wife of the Prophet, who was in conflict with ʿAlī. Concerning this controversy, see U. Rubin, “Morning and evening prayers in early ʿIṣlaḥ”, in G. R. Hawting (ed.), The Development of Islamic Ritual, pp. 110–114. It is interesting to compare this Nuṣayrī prohibition of the duḥā prayer with the similar prohibition during the caliphate of the Fāṭimid al-Hākim (disappeared in 412/1021); see D. L. O’Leary, A Short History of the Fatimid Khalifate (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co./New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1923), p. 141; N. Dana, The Druzes in the Middle East (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2003), pp. 42, 191 note 18.

305 See, for example, the beginning of each prayer, in MA, pp. 122–124.


practical obligation into a spiritual concept. The believer does not turn in his prayer towards the object of sanctity, but addresses his prayer towards what it represents. Since the Imāms are personifications of the ism, they become the qibla. Such identification of the Imām with the qibla can be found among other mystic Shīʿīs as well. For example, Amir-Moezzi notes that the eighth Imām, ʿAlī al-Riḍā, was called “the seventh qibla” a nickname used by the Persian theologian Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274) and later on in the writings of the nineteenth-century Dhahabīyya Shīʿī-Ṣūfī order.308 The Nuṣayrī interpretation of the qibla is related to the general concept of the mystical Ka’ba. Since the mystical Ka’ba is not a perceptible object, the pilgrimage also becomes a spiritual path. These issues are explained in the examination of the ḥajj.

9.1.3 Șawm (fast of Ramadān)
The șawm, the fasting during the holy month of Ramadān, appears in the Qur’ān (al-Baqara [2]: 183) and is obligatory for all Muslims. They are prohibited from eating and drinking in the daytime during this month as an act of purity of the soul and devotion to God, since the first parts of the Qur’ān are believed to have been revealed during this month. Nuṣayrī sources do not abolish the duty of fasting, but add to it the prohibition of talking, which is the mystical meaning of the fast. Al-Ḥasan ibn Shu’ba explains in his Ḥaqa’iq asrār al-dīn, that the fast of Ramadān represents the silence of ʿAbdallāh, father of the Prophet Muḥammad, during that month.309 We find the same explanation in al-Ṭabarānī’s Majmūʿ al-a’yād, with the addition of the silence of Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist and of Mary, mother of Jesus (Qur’ān, Maryam [19]: 26).310 Al-Hasan ibn Shu’ba explains the reason for this silence. These persons were aware of the sanctity of their children and kept silence instead of announcing it (tark al-īdhā’a, refraining from announcement) in order to protect them. This fast of speech is an example of the taqiyya, the obligation to keep the religion secret. Thus, the breaking of the fast represents the abolition of the taqiyya (isqāṭ al-taqiyya) and also the open discourse of the bāb to the

---

309 HAD, p. 177.
believers. In Ismāʿīlī writings, the silence in Ramaḍān also symbolizes the obligation to keep silence concerning the bātin.

9.1.4 Zakāt (alms giving)

Islamic law obliges every Muslim to pay zakāt, also called ṣadaqa, a small part (or tithe) of their wealth, in order to help poor people or to support financially weak sections of society. This payment is valued in accordance with a person’s wealth. Shiʿi law divides the charity into two kinds of payments, the zakāt for the community and the khums (fifth) for the Imām or his representatives after the ghayba. Since the Nuṣayrī community was a poor one for most of its history, it can be assumed that the collection of such a tax was difficult. It is also unlikely that the leaders of the sect would impose heavy alms if they intended to spread Nuṣayrīsm among the peasants in the rural territories of Syria. Indeed, the obligation of the zakāt is interpreted in Nuṣayrī doctrine as a spiritual gift, rather than a material one. In his Haqā’iq asrār al-dīn, al-Ḥasan ibn Shu’ba explains that the zakāt and the khums are the transmissions of esoteric knowledge from the mystic, who is rich in knowledge, to his disciples who are poor in knowledge. Thus, the transmission of the mystic knowledge, the ʿilm al-tawḥīd, is one of the major obligations of the Nuṣayrī mystic. Nevertheless, the sect’s sources do not exempt the believers from giving charity. The Imām Ja’far al-Ṣādiq, followed by Ishāq al-ʿAhmar, both state that it is obligatory to offer the zāhir as well as the bāṭin of the zakāt. In Risālat al-bayān, al-Jīlī explains that although the zāhir, the material aspect of the ṣadaqa, is also obligatory, a leader who collects it by force becomes controlled by the devil as a result of his material greed. In this connection, al-Jīlī discusses the problematic appointment of Salmān al-Fārisī as governor of Madāʾin (Ctesifon) by Sakad (or Sakd, nickname of Caliph ʿUmar). Al-Jīlī explains that ʿAlī

---

311 HAD, p. 177.
315 HAD, pp. 170–173. Citations from Ishāq al-ʿAhmar in Nuṣayrī literature are dealt with in Chapter 1.
316 RB, p. 282.
approved this appointment because it is recommended to take money from the sinner and to offer it to the believers. According to al-Jilli, Salmān did not transmit any money to the caliph and spent all his revenues on the poor and the believers. This is considered a maʿrūf (good act), which is equal to charity, according to the Islamic concept that “every good act is a charity” (kull maʿrūf ṣadaqa). It is quite possible that al-Jilli stresses this subject as result of the historical circumstances of the sect. According to his principles, the financing of the sect by the Banū ʿl-Furāt and later by the Ḥamdānids could have been considered by the leaders of the sect an act of maʿrūf and ṣadaqa.

9.1.5 Ḥajj (pilgrimage)
The obligation of the ḥajj, the duty of Muslims to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once during their lifetime during the four holy months, is given an allegorical interpretation as are the rest of the arkān al-Islām. Al-Khasibī explained that the ḥajj is a personal process, when a person progresses in knowledge and passes through three stages: he moves (sālik) from the taqṣir, a state in which he has no esoteric knowledge at all, to that of tafwīd, when he believes that God has delegated (fawwāda) his powers to the Imāms and their bābs, and finally he reaches the state of tawhīd, when he understands the esoteric knowledge.

Most of the mystical interpretations of the ḥajj in Nuṣayrī theology identify the objects of worship as ashkhās (saints). In Ḥaqāʾiq asrār al-dīn, al-Ḥasan ibn Shuʿba cites the Imām Jaʿfar saying:

The house to which God ordered the pilgrimage to be performed is Muhammad and the bāb Salmān, which is the axis [of the Kaʾba], as well as the two yatīms Miqdād and Abū Dharr.

Al-Ḥasan ibn Shuʿba continues to explain that the obligation of the jamra, the ritual of throwing of the stones at the devil in the pilgrimage,

---

317 This concept can be found in al-Bukhārī’s Sahih; see, for example, Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī, Sahih al-Bukhārī (Cairo: Dār al-Ṭibāʿa al-Munirīyya, 1928), vol. 8, p. 20 (transmitted by Jābir ibn ʿAbdallāh) and vol. 31, pp. 25, 29. See also a discussion concerning the modest style of Salmān as governor of Madāʾin, as opposed to other governors, in S. H. Alatas, “The problem of corruption”, in K. S. Sandhu, P. Wheatley, H. Alatas (eds.), Management of Success: The Moulding of Modern Singapore (Malaya, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1989), pp. 998–999.

318 FRR, p. 114.

319 HAD, p. 173.
should be replaced by a symbolic cursing of Dulām repeated every year.\textsuperscript{320} In his book, he considers the \textit{hājj} in its \textit{ẓāhir} (outward) meaning as a serious sin, as idol worship. The Imām ʿAlī al-Riḍā is cited as saying during his visit to the Kaʿba:

There is no idol left for the devil on earth to worship instead of God, except this house.\textsuperscript{321}

The \textit{hājj} is also condemned in al-Adhanī’s \textit{Kitāb al-majmūʿ}, in the fourth chapter, called \textit{al-Bayt al-maʿmūr} (the house which is the object of pilgrimage). Al-Adhanī adds an explanation to this chapter that the Imām Jaʿfar saw the \textit{hājj} as the worship of a stone and that Ibn Nuṣayr denounced it.\textsuperscript{322} Al-Ḥasan ibn Shuʿba cites the following tradition, which illustrates the meaning of the \textit{hājj} in Nuṣayrī doctrine:

A man came to the house of the commander of the believers [\textit{amīr al-muʿminin}, i.e. ʿAlī] and said he wanted to perform the \textit{hājj} and he [ʿAlī] replied: I am the \textit{hājj}; everyone who performs the pilgrimage to me is saved and rescued.\textsuperscript{323}

This identification of the Imām with the \textit{hājj} was mentioned before, in connection with the \textit{qibla}. The physical Kaʿba is replaced by a mystical Kaʿba. Another tradition explains that the mystic who reaches the inner knowledge of the seven \textit{maqāmāt} (sing. \textit{maqām}, station in the mystical path), which are personified by the seven main prophets in Islam (Adam, Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad) and the \textit{mahdī}, has thereby performed the \textit{tawāf}, the ritual of seven circumambulations of the Kaʿba.\textsuperscript{324} The term \textit{maqāmāt}, as well as the identification of the spiritual stations with the seven prophets can be found in Sūfī doctrine.\textsuperscript{325}

In Nuṣayrī writings every part of the holy “house of God”, the Kaʿba, represents an aspect of the divinity and its personification. Nevertheless, the traditions concerning the role of each person are not

\textsuperscript{320} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{321} \textit{HAD}, pp. 174–175.
\textsuperscript{322} BS, pp. 30–32. Al-Adhanī uses a wrong example to demonstrate the condemnation of the \textit{hājj}. He cites Ibn Nuṣayr’s attack against the \textit{ziyāra} in Medina to the tomb of the Prophet Muḥammad instead of the pilgrimage to Mecca. He condemns the consideration of Muḥammad, the personification of the \textit{ism}, as dead. See BS, p. 31; MA, p. 159.
\textsuperscript{323} \textit{HAD}, p. 175.
\textsuperscript{324} \textit{HAD}, p. 174.
uniform. The Shi'i term *al-arkān al-arba* (the four pillars) for the people most loyal to 'Ali gains a mystical dimension. The four pillars of the Ka'ba and the Black Stone are represented by Salmān, Abū Dharr, Miqdād and 'Ammār ibn Yāsir (Miqdād is a pillar as well as the Black Stone). According to another tradition, cited from Ishāq al-Alhmār's *Bāṭīn al-takālīf* and an anonymous *Kitāb al-ashkhāṣ*, the four pillars are Muḥammad, Fāṭima, Hasan and Husayn. Other parts of the Ka'ba are members of their family, for example the Black Stone is 'Ali's nephew, Tālib ibn 'Aqīl, the floor of the Ka'ba is Fāṭima bint Asad, the mother of 'Ali (not to be confused with Fāṭima/Fāṭir daughter of Muḥammad and the wife of 'Ali), and the roof is Abū Tālib, the father of 'Ali. 326

The doctrine of the "mystical Ka'ba" seems to precede the period of the Nuṣayrīs, since it is found in Ibn Sinān’s *Kitāb al-ḥujub wa-’l-anwār*. In this source the ghālī Abū ’l-Khattāb explains to Mufadīl ibn ’Umar the mystical meaning of the Ka'ba. According to this source "the holy house of God" (*bayt Allāh al-ḥarām*) is God (the *ma'ān*) who is the house from which the hijāb Muḥammad talks. The door of the Ka'ba is the bāb Salmān, the lock (*qufl*) is Husayn and the key (*miftāḥ*) is the qāʾim (raiser, i.e. the Messiah). The carpet is Muḥammad, the *ism*. The *kiswa*, the cover of the Ka'ba is red and white: the red represents the spilling of the blood of the *addād* and the white represents the esoteric appearance of God in the form of Bahmān (a Persian element in Nuṣayrī religion). Abū ’l-Khattāb also indentifies the Black Stone with the *yatīm* Miqdād.327

The replacement of the concrete Ka'ba by the mystical Ka'ba characterizes the symbolic and spiritual nature of the Nuṣayrī religion. There is neither a perceptible object of prayer nor a place of prayer. There is no Nuṣayrī mosque because the *masjid* (pl. *masājid*, mosque) is the Imām and the understanding of his mystical nature (*ma’rifat al-Imām*).328 Hence the accusation against the Nuṣayrīs that they do not pray because they do not have mosques in their villages is baseless. The Nuṣayrīs, like the Druzes, pray in private houses. Their cult is not public but discreet, because of the obligation of *taqiyya*.

---

326 HAD, pp. 174–175. A similar but not identical description of the *ashkhāṣ* who form the Ka'ba is found in BS, pp. 30–31.
327 HUA, pp. 36–37.
328 Ibid., pp. 110, 118; AAM, p. 286.
9.2 Taqiyya, jihād and other commandments

9.2.1 Taqiyya/kitmān
The sawm represents the duty to conceal the mystical religion. Etan Kohlberg explained the term taqiyya literally as “fear”, “caution” and technically as self-protection by dissimulation and the safeguarding of secrets. It is a method of suppressio veri and suggestio falsi. The word taqiyya is a synonym for kitmān (concealment) as opposed to idhāʿa (public declaration). This doctrine was practiced not only to protect Shiʿī society against the Sunnī oppressor, but also to conceal the esoteric knowledge, to keep it secret (sirran) and not public (ʿalaniyyan), hidden from those who are not worthy to have it. Kohlberg divides the taqiyya into two types: a “prudential taqiyya” against external enemies and a “non-prudential taqiyya” against the uninitiated. Kohlberg sees the taqiyya as one of the most important tenets of Shiʿism. The Imām Jaʿfar is cited in Shiʿī sources saying: “taqiyya is our religion”. Equally, the idhāʿa is considered a severe sin, which can result in excommunication. Nevertheless, Jaʿfar said that the taqiyya should be practiced according to need. Thus, the more a Shiʿī group was persecuted, the more it used taqiyya.329

For the Nuṣayrīs, the two types of taqiyya cannot be divided. The knowledge of the muwahḥidūn is not to be revealed both because it is a gnosis possessed by a minority of initiated mystics and because the declaration of such tenets would cause excommunication, death or other persecutions. The world that surrounds the muwahḥidūn is an evil one, and it would make wrong use of the esoteric knowledge. At the same time, in order to prevent danger and to keep the Nuṣayrī society safe, there is a need to present it outwardly as a “normal” Imāmī group. For the members of the sect, the figure of al-Khaṣibī and his double life was and still is an example of a successful use of taqiyya. Among the sect’s literature are several zāhir books, which characterizes their use of taqiyya in order to be considered part of the exoteric Shiʿa. The most important works of this kind are al-Khasibī’s Hidāya al-kubrā and Ḥasan ibn Shuʿba’s Tuhfat al-ʿuqūl (or Tuḥfat al-ʿuqūl in the Imāmī version), both cited in Imāmī/orthodox Shiʿī literature (see Appendix 1).329

While Imāmī scholars of the tenth century argued as to whether taqiyya/kitmān is a permanent obligation or is only used in time of need,330 in the Nuṣayrī religion it is an everlasting obligation (fard),331 and the learning of the ‘ilm al-tawhīd without taqiyya is like “reading the Qurʾān in the ḥammām [public bath]”.332 Al-Adhanī explains that the Nuṣayrīs consider themselves to be the body and other religions the clothes. Hence, they permit themselves to “wear” different clothes, while they keep their real identity secret. According to al-Adhanī, the Nuṣayrīs compare a person who neglects taqiyya with a madman walking naked in the market.333

9.2.2 Nuṣayrī division into ṭāmma and khāṣṣa

Taqiyya was a means of survival for the Nuṣayrīs from the days of al-Khaṣṣībī. The more the dimensions of danger grew, the more taqiyya was strictly maintained. The actual internal division of the sect into two groups, of the ignorant mass (ṭāmma, sing. ṭāmm) and a minority of the initiated elite (khāṣṣa, sing. khāṣṣ) is the final outcome of the process of growing strictness in taqiyya. This division is also found within the Druze sect, though with a different terminology, of juhhāl (the ignorant ones) and ‘uqqāl (the wise ones). However, the divisions between these two groups did not exist from the time of their emergence, and it is not certain whether they existed prior to the eleventh century. The earliest appearance of the antithetical terms “masses” and “initiates” occurs in the twelfth century Munāzarat al-Nashshābī, which concludes with the following sentence:

The scholars [‘ulamā’] became few and [most of] the religious men [fuqahā’] died, as the proverb says, and we who were left are so few, so we presented proofs in our book... its contents would be useful for the prayer leader [imām], and he in turn will teach it to the khāṣṣ and the ṭāmm.334

330 The main controversy was between Ibn Bābawayh (d. 381/991) and Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022). While the first considered taqiyya to be an obligation (fard) as important as prayer, the latter claimed that it is needed only in times of danger. See L. Clark, “Taqiyya in Twelver Shi‘ism”, in T. Lawson (ed.) Reason and Inspiration in Islam: Theology, Philosophy and Mysticism in Muslim Thought (London/New York: I. B. Tauris, 2005), pp. 55–56.
332 AAM, p. 279. The use of the hammām for this example is not surprising. Muslims had been using public baths, for relaxation and washing, since the seventh century. See, for example, M. G. Morony, Iraq after the Muslim Conquest (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias Press, 2005), pp. 269–270.
333 BS, p. 82.
334 MN, fol. 152b.
Although this terminology exists in this text, the demand that the Imām teach both groups shows that the division between them was not total, as it is today, and the ‘āmma were more involved in religious matters.

In the case of the Druzes, it is also difficult to decide when exactly this division into two groups took place. Kais Firro notes that these terms exist in early writings of the sect, but the date of the division itself is unclear. Like the Nuṣayrīs, the Druzes passed from a period of propaganda (daʿwa in Druze terminology) when the religion was preached openly, into a state of concealment and taqiyya when the sect was persecuted. In both cases, the dissemination period was short but sufficient to increase the membership of the sect and to create a community. A long period of persecution followed during which these two communities did not grow but only survived. We can therefore assume that the division of the Nuṣayrī sect into elite and masses took place during the second period that began in the eleventh century, when the sect was left without any powerful supporters. Although medieval sources do not mention such a division, it seems that it was created by the internal, social, and religious differences between members of the sect from the eleventh century. From that period onwards, the sect consisted of two groups, the intellectual urban leaders and the rural people who embraced Nuṣayrism. The two groups that eventually emerged—the initiated shaykhs and the converted believers—were defined in time as khāṣṣa and ‘āmma, based on the traditional Imāmī division of the Muslims into the exalted Shīʿī community and the mass of Sunnis. This definition was also based on an economic terminology for the upper and lower layers of society. This hypothesis is backed by M. A. J. Beg’s assumption that the elite of the khāṣṣa had an economic and cultural advantage over the ‘āmma, which gave the former the ability to control and even to manipulate the latter. Beg’s most relevant claim in this context is his citation of the Baghdadian

335 Firro, History of the Druzes, pp. 25, 27.
338 See, for example, L. Marlow, Hierarchy and Egalitarianism in Islamic Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 9.
Muʿtazili theologian Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (d. 414/1023), that “it was the ṣāmma which made up the hordes of the extremist sects.” Al-Tawḥīdī’s claim is important not only because he was a contemporary of the most important propagator of Nuṣayrīsm in Syria, al-Ṭabarānī, but also because of the link that he made between the spiritual and the economic advantages of the khāṣṣa. In one of his fatwās Ibn Taymiyya mentions a division inside the Nuṣayrī community of his time (fourteenth century), but he used other terminology: juhhāl (sing. jāhil, ignorant) and ḥudhdhāq (sing ḥādhiq, intelligent). But since Ibn Taymiyya confuses the Ismāʿīlīs and the Nuṣayrīs, it is possible that he is describing the Druzes. A comparative study of the formation of this dual society in Nuṣayrī and Druze societies is yet to be made; such a study should consider the similar circumstances of the two sects.

Another important means of taqiyya, which is similar to that of the Druzes, is the concealment of the place of prayer. While the Druzes use a marginal house in the village, called khalwa (place of seclusion), the Nuṣayrīs simply call the place manzil or the synonym bayt (house) to describe its simplicity and insignificance, as opposed to the masjid (mosque). Medieval as well as modern texts of the sect use this simple term for the place of prayer. Each shaykh in turn invites the khāṣṣa to hold a meeting in his house for various purposes such as prayer, study, initiation or the celebration of a holiday. This custom has been practiced continually from the time of the founders of the sect until the present period. Ibn Nuṣayr’s meeting with his mystical circle took place at his home in Basra. Al-Khaṣibī’s meetings with other Shiʿī scholars and with his disciples took place in private homes. In Nashshābī’s account, the polemical meetings also took place in private homes. To sum up, the place for the Nuṣayrī religious experience, as the Nuṣayrī religion itself, is secret and intimate. The regular change of meeting place from the home of one shaykh to another is a means of taqiyya that in time became a tradition. Dussaud’s citation from an anonymous manuscript that “the Nuṣayriyya has no prayer place like the Muslims and the Christians, but they meet every period

341 See, for example, MA, p. 133; MN, fol. 111a.
342 BS, p. 36.
of time in a place that they decide upon”, is relevant to the medieval period as well as to his time. While the mosque represents the źāhir, the house meeting represents the bātin. The former signifies public, open and mass practice of Islam, the latter represents another aspect of Islam, which is private, secret and restricted to a small group of mystic initiates.

9.2.3 The spiritual jihād
In Nuṣayrī theology the classic Islamic meaning of jihād as a holy war does not exist in the present. It was waged by ‘Alī and later by some bābs, such as ‘Abdallāh ibn Muʿawiya and Abū ’l-Khaṭṭāb, and it will be renewed at the end of time. In connection with the issue of nidāʾ and khutba, it was explained earlier that the act of self-sacrifice ended with the Docetic martyrdom of Ibn Nuṣayr and may have been attempted once again by al-Khaṣibī in Baghdad. Active rebellion against the authorities was not undertaken by any of the significant Ghulāt after that of Abū ’l-Khaṭṭāb. In addition, the sect did not have enough power to play a military role in the events of their region prior to the emergence of Makzūn al-Sinjārī in the thirteenth century. There is an account of resistance to the Crusader conquest, but there are no records of these events in the sect’s writings. Although Ibn Taymiyya’s fatwā demanded that Nuṣayrīs should not be allowed to participate in jihād, the sect’s sources are silent as to the obligation of an active holy war against external enemies of Islam. Makzūn al-Sinjārī’s obligation of the jihād al-zāhir was not applied by his successors. Thus jihād in Nuṣayrī theology is not a sacrifice of life or a rebellion, nor is it a holy war against the infidels. It is reasonable to assume that the idea of an active war was developed only as a result of al-Sinjārī’s military activity and the influence of the warriors who came with him, settled in Jabala, and embraced Nuṣayrism.

Ḥasan ibn Shu’ba, in Ḥaqāʾiq asrār al-dīn, deals with the issue of bāṭīn al-jihād (the mystical struggle/effort). He explains that there are two kinds of jihād. In the first jihād, the believer fights the enemies of the Imāms, the nawāṣib (sing. nāṣibī), in loyalty to the Imāms and in repudiation of their enemies (walāya and barāʾa). The second and more powerful jihād is the jihād al-nafs (the effort of the spirit), which is “a struggle against the soul that is tempting [people] to do bad acts”

---

(mujāhadat al-nafs allatī hiya 'l-ammāra bi-'l-sū). In Imāmī doctrine the jihād al-nafs is also considered more powerful and thus it is called “the greater jihād”, while the holy war is the “lesser jihād” (al-jihād al-akbar and al-jihād al-asghar).

The few Nuşayrī writings that deal with the subject seem to indicate that the sect embraced the general Shi‘ī quietist policy (qu‘ūd) that characterizes the mainstream of the Ja‘farī Shi‘a (followers of the Imām Ja‘far al-Sādiq). Since after the brief caliphate of ‘Alī (36/656–41/661) the enemies of the Shi‘īs took power and oppressed the community of the Imāms, taqiyya took the place of jihād, as a means of self-defence. Shaykh al-Mufid said that: “The concealment of our secret is a holy struggle for God” (kitmān sirrinā jihād fī sabīl Allāh).

As in Imāmī theology, in Nuşayrism the holy war is postponed to the Judgment Day when ‘Alī will return holding his sword, the dhū ‘l-faqār, to avenge all the enemies of the Shi‘a. Until then, taqiyya is equal to jihād. Al-Sādiq is cited in Imāmī sources saying, “every believer is a shahīd (pl. shuhadāʾ, martyr), even if he dies in his bed”. Hasan ibn Shu‘ba cites Abān ibn Taghlib (d. 141/758), a disciple of al-Sādiq, who says about his master, “When people were reminding him of those who are dying on the frontiers, he used to say: Alas for them! What is the point of their act? They hasten their death in this world and in the next world. There are no other shuhadā’ except our Shi‘a, even if they die in their bed”.

The term shahīd is also given an allegorical explanation in Nuşayrī theology. In his Risāla 'l-Masīhiyya, al-Ṭabarānī explains that those shuhadā’ who died with Jesus received their name according to the

---

344 HAD, p. 176. See also in AAM, p. 264; BS, pp. 24–25; DMS, p. 94.
347 Although the sword of ‘Alī represents the shakhs of the yatīm al-Miqdād in one tradition (see MKH, p. 196), it appears in all the rest of the sect’s sources, such as in the Imāmī tradition, as the sword of the apocalyptic revenge. Its name derives from the Arabic plural of faqāra (vertebra), referring to the special form of its blade. See other explanations concerning this sword, in B. M. Wheeler, Mecca and Eden: Ritual, Relics and Territory in Islam (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), pp. 35–36.
348 Ibid., p. 78.
349 HAD, p. 176.
original meaning of the verb *shahida* (to witness). The reason they were called *shuhadā* is not because they died, since according to the doctrine of Docetism they did not die. The real meaning of *shuhadā* is not “martyrs” but “witnesses”, because the saints who died only in appearance were witnessing Jesus in heaven. “The killing did not [even] touch them”, explains al-Ṭabarānī, “but it happened to the *addād*...as it appears in His saying: Those who were killed for the sake of Allāh are not considered dead, but on the contrary, they are alive and nurtured by their Lord” [Qur’ān, Āl ‘Imrān [3]: 169].350

Another explanation of *jihād* in Nuṣayrī theology is linked to the process of initiation; it is the disciple’s effort to appease his master (*jihād al-tilmīdh riḍā ’l-ālim*), as “the effort of the woman to please her husband”.351 This doctrine creates an interesting link between the obligation of the *jihād* and the obligation of *birr al-ikhwān* (reverence of brethren), the respect between the members of the sect, who are all considered to be one family. Although the obligation of *birr al-ikhwān* exists also in Imāmī Shīʿism,352 it gains another dimension in Nuṣayrī theology as a result of the mystic fraternity between the members of the sect. The duty of *barāʾa* (repudiation) is the only active way to attack the enemies of the sect. In his *Dīwān*, al-Khasībī cursed the *addād*, the *muqassīra*, the followers of Ishāq al-Aḥmar and the groups that were considered heretics: the Ismāʿīlis, the Qarmatians, the followers of Ḥallāj (Ṣūfis) and other lesser known sects.353

9.3 *The universal bāṭin of commandments and prohibitions*

There is a great amount of detail concerning the Islamic *sharīʿa* that is absent in the Nuṣayrī writings. While the *sharīʿa* laws concern the *usūl* (roots), the basic principles of the law, Nuṣayrī writings lack the discussion of the *furūʿ* (branches, subsidiary details). Since the Nuṣayriyya considered itself a Shīʿī sect, and even the “true Shīʿa”, in matters which are not discussed it must be supposed that the members of the sect followed a legal code close to the Imāmī *sharīʿa*. There are

---

350 *RM*, p. 302.
351 *AAM*, p. 263. The two obligations also appear together in *HAD*, p. 176.
353 *DKH*, fol. 19a, 20b, 24a, 28a, 36a, 44b–45a, 47b, 53b, 54a, 61b, 62b–63a, 71b, 75b, 89a, 96b, 98a, 99a.
some references to the furūʿ scattered among the sect’s writings, but these serve only as explanations for the obligations of the mystics. For example, the polytheism (shirk) of a mystic is compared with committing a crime (jīnāya) and the repudiation of the sinner is compared to the amputation of a thief’s hand (qaṭʿ al-yad). The divulgence of the sect’s secrets by one of its members is likened to adultery (zīnāʾ), and a person who commits it is compared to a prostitute (zāniya); thus it is called “the dishonor of the secret” (hatk al-sirr). The mystic’s prayer not to die without completing his study is compared to the prayer for rain (istisqāʾ) in a period of drought. The study of the mystic with a shaykh in the absence of the bāb is compared to the purification of the hands with sand (tayammum) when there is a lack of water. In the process of initiation, a disciple who is disloyal to his master can be expelled, an act that is compared with divorce (ṭalāq).

As to the proscribed foods, the interdiction of impure foods such as carrion meat, blood and swine (Qurān, al-Māʾīda [3]: 3) is explained by the fact that they represent the three addād (the three first caliphs). The same Qurʾānic verse mentions the prohibition of eating meat that has not been slaughtered in the name of Allāh (his name must be pronounced to make the meat halāl, permitted for eating). This obligation is explained as representing the prohibition to teach the ʿilm al-tawhīd to people with a lineage (nasab) to the Umayyad or ‘Abbāsid families.

These examples show an allegorical interpretation of the furūʿ rather than their application in Nuṣayrī religion. In general, the observance of the zāhir, the regular practical obligations of Islam, during the Middle Ages is unclear. Although the shaykhs of the sect were ordered not to neglect them, it seems that the study of their mystical meaning was more important than their zāhir application. ‘Alī ibn Shu’ba explains in the sixth chapter of his Hujjat al-ʿārif, that the bāṭin is a universal message, an inner truth for all mankind. The zāhir is merely the means to teach people the complicated bāṭin. God has sent to each civiliza-

354 HAD, p. 116.
355 Ibid., p. 135.
356 HUA, p. 33; KS, fol. 102a.
357 KBS, p. 269; HAD, p. 113.
358 KBS, p. 266.
359 HAD, p. 136.
360 HIF, p. 67.
tion different prophets and messengers with different laws, but the goal was to teach them the same mystical message. ‘Ali ibn Shu’ba rejected the principle of *badā‘* (change in God’s decision), and explains that Jews, Persians, Christians, Muslims and others were given different codes of the *shari‘a*, but this does not means that God changed his laws, because their *bātin* was the same one:

Then [after Jesus] Muhammad brought a different and contradictory *shari‘a* [to that of the Jews and the Christians] and ordered them [the Muslims] to turn to the Ka‘ba, to perform *jihād*, to observe the *ṣawm* in Ramadān and respect this month. He prohibited the swine’s meat and other foods and abolished previous laws [*nasakha*]. God is too mighty and honorable to order a thing and ask for its application and then to abolish it and change it, then to send a prophet . . . then another prophet to order the opposite. God is exalted from this [changing nature] because the Most Intelligent does not change or transform from one situation to another. He is too exalted to be influenced by physical needs . . . his justice is the same for all, he ordered them all [all civilizations] to have inner knowledge [*ma‘rifa*], which will result in reward [*thawāb*], and prohibited ignorance, which will result in punishment [*‘iqāb*]. All the given laws [*sharā‘i*] of permission and prohibition [*taḥlīl wa-tahrīm*], orders and interdictions are all [symbols of the] *ashkhās* [sing. *shakhs*, person] and signify the same; they are [symbols of] *ashkhās* whom God ordered to know and to obey and *ashkhās* whom God prohibited [from following] and demanded they repudiate them [*amara bi-‘l-barā‘a min-hum*]. All of these [laws] call for the same thing, which is the significance of the *bātin* and which we [the Nuṣayrīs] possess, and which are transmitted to us from the the credibles [*Imāms*].

‘Ali ibn Shu’ba’s explanation is highly valuable for the understanding of what is viewed in research as Nuṣayrī syncretism. It is the result of a concept of universal mysticism. Nuṣayrism was originally meant to turn into a universal message spread throughout the Muslim world by propagators, and not into the secret code of a persecuted sect. As such it should have been suitable for all the communities in the Muslim world, and for the Muslims and Christians of Iraq and Syria in particular.

An important commandment which appears in ‘Ali ibn Shu’ba’s explanation is the duty of *barā‘a*, the repudiation of the enemies of

---


the Imāms, which is the negative of the walāya, loyalty to the Imāms.\footnote{Concerning this doctrine in Imāmī Shi‘ism, see E. Kohlberg, “Barā’a in Shi‘i doctrine”, JSAI 7 (1986), pp. 139–175. See a nineteenth-century version of a Nuṣayrī barā’a, in BS, pp. 44–45, 53.} This Shi‘ī doctrine of dissociation from enemies is linked with the demand to curse the Companions of the Prophet (sabb al-ṣaḥāba) who were the enemies of ‘Alī.\footnote{E. Kohlberg, “Some Imāmī views on the Ṣaḥāba”, JSAI 5 (1984), pp. 143–175.}

The allegorical interpretation of the shari‘a led to the creation of a particular Shi‘ī identity that was different from the Imāmī; this identity was characterized by the creation of an exclusive calendar based on the bātin.

10. The Nuṣayrī holidays and the creation of a new calendar

The process of turning the ‘ilm al-tawhīd from ideas into practice seems to have begun in the time of al-Khaṣībī and was developed by his successor al-Jillī. The complex issues of study in the majlis that characterized the Numayriyya/Namīrīyya could be grasped and developed only by the intellectual leaders of the Nuṣayriyya. The enlargement of the community demanded the creation of organized rituals for the mass of believers. In order to be attractive to diverse communities of potential converts (Christians, Sunnī and Shi‘ī Muslims, Zoroastrians and others), the sect needed to expand its message into the quasi-universal mystical message explained above. Thus, while al-Khaṣībī emphasized the mystical meaning of Shi‘ī and Zoroastrian holidays, al-Jillī and al-Ṭabarānī included Christian elements by adding Christian holidays to the Nuṣayrī calendar, although all the non-Muslim holidays were completely altered from their original significance to be replaced by Nuṣayrī mysticism. The combination of three religious components derived from Shi‘ism, Zoroastrianism and Christianity correspond to the three human components in medieval Nuṣayrī society: Shi‘īs (Arabs and mawālī) as well as Zoroastrian Persians and Christians converted to Nuṣayrīsm. The process of turning Nuṣayrī ideas into practical holidays reached maturity in al-Ṭabarānī’s Majmūʿ al-‘ayād.

Rudolf Strothmann’s important critical edition of this book (see Appendix 1) was used by all subsequent scholars in the field, including Massignon, Corbin, Halm, and more recently Bar-Asher and Kofsky,
who dedicated a chapter in *The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī Religion* to the book,\(^{365}\) which deals merely with what they call the “Muslim Festivals”. An older description of the Nuṣayrī holidays is presented in the studies of Lyde and Dussaud, but they are based mainly on documents from the nineteenth century, the *Bākūra* of Sulaymān al-Adhanī and the Nuṣayrī Catechism.\(^{366}\)

Although al-Ṭabarānī’s *Majmūʿ al-aʾyād* remains the main source, new available sources included in the *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī* allow a more complete description of the Nuṣayrī holidays and the reconstruction of the original Nuṣayrī calendar from the time of the founders of the sect. In the following description of the holidays, an attempt is made to complete the work begun by Bar-Asher and Kofsky, and to present a complete picture of the Nuṣayrī calendar, including all the festivals and sacred days.

To reconstruct the order of the Nuṣayrī calendar is a complicated task. Not only was the original meaning of a holiday altered, or given an allegorical interpretation, but even its date was sometimes changed. Moreover, the complexity of the Nuṣayrī calendar stems from the fact that it is based on two different but coexisting calendar systems. The first is the Muslim calendar, which is based on a lunar system in which the dates of the holidays do not change. The original Muslim calendar, which al-Ṭabarānī calls the “Arabic year” (*al-sana al-ʿArabiyya*) begins with Muḥarram and ends with Dhū ’l-Ḥijja. But al-Ṭabarānī presents a different order of months in what he calls “the year of the monotheists, the honorable sect of al-Khaṣībī and of al-Jilli” (*sanat al-muwahḥidīn al-tāʾifa al-Khaṣibīyya al-jalīla al-Jilliyya*), which begins with Ramaḍān (originally the ninth month) and ends in Shaʿbān (originally the eighth month).\(^{367}\) The second calendar system, in which al-Ṭabarānī inserted holidays of Christian and Iranian origin, is based on a solar system consisting of Babylonian months in Arabic. This calendar includes holidays that were originally based on the Persian calendar (*al-sana al-Fārisiyya*) and the Julian calendar (*al-sana al-Rūmiyya*); their dates were changed in the Nuṣayrī calendar.

---

\(^{365}\) Chapter 6, pp. 111–152.


\(^{367}\) *MA*, p. 19.
Although the Nuṣayrī calendar contains elements from three religious sources, al-Ṭabarānī divides the holidays into ethnic origins: Roman/Hellenistic, Arab and Persian. In other words, according to his concept, the Nuṣayrī religion contains components of three ethnic sources, while the religious identity of the holidays is the same: that of Nuṣayrism. Again, there is another indication of the ethnic structure of the muwahhidūn as well as that of their potential converts in the eleventh century. Bar-Asher and Kofsky quite reasonably note that the Nuṣayrī calendar symbolizes the creation of a new and unique identity, and conclude that it reflects the syncretist nature of the sect. However, their definition of the Nuṣayrī holidays from Islamic sources as “the Muslim holidays” (instead of the original “Arab holidays”) is problematic. Since Shi‘ī mysticism and allegorical interpretations of the Qur‘ān provide most of the explanation for all the sect’s holidays, including holidays of Persian and Christian origin, a separation of the holidays into Muslim and non-Muslim holidays would be unjust. It is interesting to note al-Ṭabarānī’s focus on ethnicity to the level of including most of the holidays of Shi‘ī origin in what he defines as “Persian holidays”: Maqṭal Dūlām, al-Mubāhala and al-Firāsh. Surprisingly, Christmas is also included in the Persian holidays.

In Nuṣayrī tradition, the mystical meanings of the “Arab and Persian holidays” were transmitted by Muḥammad ibn Sinān from the Imām ʿAlī al-Ridā. According to this tradition, which appears at the beginning of the Majmūʿ al-ʿayād, the Imām transmitted his message to his mystical circle (the ʿarifūn) whose members had obtained the esoteric and exoteric knowledge of the tawḥīd, and explained to them and to Muḥammad ibn Sinān the two aspects of the holidays, the ẓāhir and the bātin. Although this tradition serves as the introduction to the book, al-Khaṣībī and al-Ṭabarānī himself are the main sources for the content of the book. The following list presents the Nuṣayrī holidays and their meanings, according to their order in the appearance in the Majmūʿ al-ʿayād, and concludes with a synoptic table.

---

369 MA, p. 10. See the same division of these holidays into Arab and Persian holidays, in DMA, fol. 151b–154a.
370 Ibid., pp. 4–5.
10.1 The fast (ṣawm) of Ramaḍān and ‘Īd al-Fīṭr

The month of mercy and of the revelation of the Qurʾān is marked by a fast in which food is not eaten during the daytime, as is the custom for the rest of the Muslims, but also includes abstention from speech. According to Nuṣayrī tradition, the holiday represents the shakhṣ of the Prophet Muḥammad’s father ʿAbdallāh, who kept silent during this month. The month of Ramaḍān has a special mystical meaning, since every day in it represents one of the Nuṣayrī ashkhās. The night of destiny (laylat al-qadr), which is the most significant night of the sacred month in which the Qurʾān was revealed, represents the most exalted of the ashkhās, the Prophet Muḥammad. Al-fīṭr, the breaking of the fast, is also the abolition of the duty of silence. The holiday represents the shakhṣ of Fāṭir, the masculine form of Fāṭima, whose name is formed from the same root as the name of the holiday: f.t.r. (to create). In mystical Shiʿism, the silence (sukūt) in Ramaḍān represents the order to observe kitmān, the duty to keep the religion secret. Thus, both the shakhṣ and the ʿid, Fāṭir and the fīṭr, represent the abolition of the taqiyya at the end of time.

10.2 The Ḥajj and ‘Īd al-Adhā

The ḥajj in the Nuṣayrī religion is a long mystical process that can last for several lifetimes of a mystic, and thus it is not marked by a specific holiday. Indeed, it does not appear in the Majmūʿ al-ʿayād at all. However, the Muslim holiday following the pilgrimage, the ‘Īd al-Adhā, is celebrated by the Nuṣayris. The sacrifice of al-adhā represents the slaughter of the addād, the enemies of the Imāms, by the mahdi at the end of time. In al-Ṭabarānī’s explanations of the ʿĪd al-Adhā in the Majmūʿ al-ʿayād, we find a complete citation of Kitāb sharh al-sabʿīn. This last source is attributed to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq and transmitted by Jābir ibn Yazīd al-Juʿfī; according to it, the infidels and the

371 HAD, p. 177; KBS, pp. 253–254; HAD, p. 177.
372 KBS, p. 265; RR, pp. 77–81; DMA, fol. 137a–142b.
375 HAD, p. 177.
enemies of the Imāms are punished by transmigration into animals that are slaughtered on this holiday.\footnote{MA, pp. 28–49.}

10.3 ‘Īd al-Ghadīr: celebration of the declaration of the ma’nā’s divinity

The Ghadīr holiday, celebrated on 18 Dhū ‘l-Hijja, is the first of a series of particular Shi‘i holidays that commemorate significant events in the lives of the first Imāms, notably ‘Alī and Ḥusayn. Ghadir Khumm is the name of the place where, according to Shi‘i tradition, the Prophet Muhammad is said to have declared ‘Alī his spiritual successor. Nuṣayrī tradition gives an allegorical interpretation to this, explaining it as Muhammad’s declaration of ‘Alī as God. In other words, ‘Īd al-Ghadīr is the holiday of the ism’s declaration of the divinity of the ma’nā before humanity.\footnote{MA, pp. 54–68; KBS, p. 270; RA, p. 323; Bar-Asher and Kofsky, The Nuṣayrī-‘Alawī Religion, pp. 36, 120–128.} It is interesting to compare the Prophet Muhammad’s declaration according to the two versions, the ẓāhir and the bāṭin:

Imāmī version:  

\textit{man kuntu mawlāhu fa-‘Alī mawlāhu} (everyone whose patron I am ‘Alī is his patron)

Nuṣayrī version:  

\textit{man kuntu mawlāhu fa-‘Alī ma’nāhu} (everyone whose patron I am ‘Alī is his ma’nā).\footnote{For the declaration of the ma’nā’s divinity in verse in al-Khāṣībī’s al-Qaṣīda al-Ghadīriyya, see DKH, fol. 9a–12a (Yawm ghadir yawm surūr). For the Muslim debate over the meaning of this phrase of Mūhammad, see Halm, Shi‘ism, pp. 7–8; M. J. Kister, “Ādam: A study of some legends in Tafsīr and Ḥadīth literature”, Israel Oriental Studies 13 (1993), p. 127; P. Crone, God’s Rule: Government and Islam (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 73.}

10.4 ‘Īd al-Mubāhala: celebration of the debate with the Christians of Najrān

The Mubāhala, celebrated on 21 Dhū ‘l-Hijja, is the religious debate over the nature of Jesus, which is believed by the Shi‘is to have taken place between the Christians of Najrān (northwest Yemen) and the Prophet
Muḥammad, followed by ʿAḥma, Fāṭima, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. The former claimed that Jesus was God’s son, while the latter explained that he was only human. The leader of the Najrānīs, who met the Prophet, was deeply impressed by his family members. Eventually, the Christians signed a treaty of protection under Islamic law. The Nuṣayrīs explain this by the conviction of the Najrānīs, who understood the divine nature of ʿAḥma and Muḥammad.380 During the holiday a special chapter of the Majmūʿ al-aʿyād concerning the six revelations (tajalliyāt) is read by the mystics of the sect. This chapter concerns the mystical meaning of the six days of creation. It is interesting that al-Ṭabarānī bases the words of the Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir concerning these six days on the work of certain Greek thinkers who applied the mystical meaning of the number six to philosophy and grammar. He mentions Aristūṭālis (Aristotle, d. 322), Hīrmis al-Harāmisa (Hermes Trismegistus, the ancient Egyptian god of wisdom also worshipped by the Greeks)381 and a certain Bārūn of Alexandria who wrote a commentary on Dināṭās (the Roman grammarian Donatus from the fourth century or the Greek Grammarian Dionysius Thrax from the second century BCE).382

10.5 ʿĪd al-Firāsh: the holiday of the bed

On 29 Dhū 'l-Hijja, a significant event is celebrated. When the Prophet Muḥammad left Mecca and his enemies planned to kill him in his bed (firāsh), his cousin ʿAḥma took his place, thus showing his willingness to sacrifice himself to save the Prophet’s life. For the Nuṣayrīs, the infidel murderers were personifications of the addād, thus the celebration is also that of a general triumph of good over evil.383 On this day the members of the sect read a qaṣīda recounting the tradition of the bed written by Hārūn al-Šāʾigh, a disciple of al-Khaṣibī.384 Since the events

---

380 MA, pp. 88–89.


382 MA, pp. 88–89. Al-Ṭabarānī refers to this grammarian when explaining the mystical meaning of the the six vowels (a, e, i, o, u, sukūn). On Dionysus and another of his explanations concerning the vowels, see P. Kraus, Jābir ibn Hayyān: Contribution à l’histoire des idées scientifiques dans l’Islam, vol. 2, p. 209, note 3.


of this holiday took place at night, this is the only celebration that is authorized at night, while all the other holidays must be celebrated during daylight.\footnote{HIF, pp. 63–64.}

10.6 \textit{‘Id ʿAshūr: the holiday of 10 Muḥarram}

Al-Ṭabarānī explains that this holiday takes place on the tenth day of the first month of the “Arabic year” (al-sana al-ʿArabiyya). This is the only holiday that has an allegorical interpretation and also an inner explanation that totally contradicts its outward meaning. For the Imāmī Shīʿīs, the ʿāshūr (or ʿāshūrā) is a day of a cosmic tragedy, the martyrdom of al-Ḥusayn in Karbalāʾ (61/680), the grandson of the Prophet Muḥammad, who should have arrived at Kufa to begin the struggle against the Umayyad tyrants and return the Muslims to their legitimate leadership. Although the Nuṣayris believe in the demonic nature of the Umayyads, they still claim that Ḥusayn’s martyrdom was only in appearance, a docetic concept that is attributed to Jesus as well. Thus, the holiday changes its fundamental atmosphere, from mourning to happiness. The explanations of al-Ṭabarānī contain a criticism of the belief of the “outward Shīʿīs” (ẓāhirīyyat al-Shīʿa), that the Umayyads killed al-Ḥusayn and that his head was taken to the caliph. According to Nuṣayrī doctrine, since he is a personification of the maʿnā, al-Ḥusayn is immortal.\footnote{MA, p. 107; Bar-Asher and Kofsky, The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī Religion, pp. 128–129.} According to Imāmī tradition, the death of al-Ḥusayn is seen as a ransom for Ishmael’s sacrifice. The Nuṣayrīs claim that it was Caliph ʿUmar who was killed in his place. Al-Ṭabarānī adds to the tradition of the ransom by saying that al-Ḥusayn miraculously gave one of his followers, Ḥanẓala al-Shibāmī, his own form to be killed in his place. Thus, Ḥanẓala was also ransommed by the death of ʿUmar.\footnote{MA, pp. 108–109; Bar-Asher and Kofsky, The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī Religion, pp. 129–130.} The idea of al-Ḥusayn’s replacement by Ḥanẓala seems to have prevailed in several Ghulāt groups, since al-Majlisī attacks this belief in his Biḥār al-anwār as a heresy prevalent in Kufa without mentioning the Nuṣayris. Al-Majlisī also condemns those who express joy and happiness on this day and explains that this was the order of Caliph Yazīd to celebrate al-Ḥusayn’s execution.\footnote{Majlisī, Biḥār, vol. 44, pp. 270–271.} However, the Nuṣayris are asked on this day to read three poems of
al-Khašibî in which he expresses joy and scorns those who “mourn their Lord.” On this holiday the Nusayrîs are obliged, as are the rest of the Shi‘îs, to perform the duty of barā‘a, the public cursing of the enemies of the Imâms and the Umayyads above all. The Nusayrîs are also asked to curse two Arab tribes which are sub-clans of Quraysh: Taym, the clan of Abû Bakr and ‘Adi, the clan of ‘Umar. Instead of the traditional Shi‘î pilgrimage to the tomb of al-Husayn, Nusayrîs read a special prayer called ziyâra (literally, a pilgrimage to a tomb of a saint), in which they declare the following:

I testify that you did not die nor were you murdered or defeated but you have made your disappearance appear [to the people] with your power and you veiled yourself from the eyes of the gazing people…since you are too powerful to be defeated, captured and killed and you can give life and death to whomever you wish.

The term ziyâra thus changes its original significance into a prayer in honor of an occulted personification of the deity instead of a prayer for a dead saint. The same significance of ziyâra is used in the context of praise for Ibn Nusayr, who is also considered immortal.

10.7 Maqtal Dulâm: celebration of the killing of ‘Umar

Caliph ‘Umar’s murder (24/644) is celebrated on 9 Rabî‘ al-Awwal. It was celebrated on this day by most of the Shi‘îs in the medieval period, and it later became an obligation under the Safavids in Iran, even causing hostility between Shi‘îs and Sunnîs in the modern history of the Middle East. Since ‘Umar is identified with Iblîs, the day of his death is an occasion for great joy and symbolizes, as other holidays, the triumph of good over evil. The source for the celebration of this day in the Majmû‘ al-a‘yâd is a certain Amîr Abû ‘Abdallâh

---

391 MA, p. 124; HUA, p. 60.
392 MA, pp. 124–125.
393 Lyde’s chapter concerning the pilgrimage to tombs of saints reflects merely the Nusayrî cults of his period (nineteenth century); see Lyde, The Asian Mystery, pp. 166–176.
395 See, for example, M. J. Fisher, Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), p. 177.
Muḥammad ibn Abī ʿAbbās,396 probably a disciple of al-Jillī, whose location or occupation is unknown. According to al-Jillī, on the day of Maqtal Dulām all the enemies of God were killed, such as the biblical sons of Lot, Pharaoh, and the Qur’ānic ʾašhāb al-ḥāl (Yemeni fighters riding elephants who aimed to destroy the Kaʿba). On that day, called the “day of the celebration of ʾahl al-bayt”, “the second Ghadīr” and other names reflecting happiness, well known miracles have occurred such as the resurrection of the dead by Jesus. The Ṣuṣayrīs are asked to wear clean clothes and to celebrate with a feast the destruction of all ʾaddād from all periods of time.397

10.8 The night of mid-Shaʿbān

This holiday is observed by all Muslims as a night of forgiveness (laylat al-barāʾāt, 14/15 Shaʿbān), and by the Shīʿīs specifically as an occasion for pilgrimage to Karbalāʾ. This holiday is the last one of the “Year of al-Khaṣībi” (al-sānī al-Khaṣībiyya), which begins with Ramadān and ends with Shaʿbān. On this night the Ṣuṣayrīs drink the ʾabd al-nūr, which is a wine permitted for drinking only on specific occasions.398 Al-Ṭabarānī compares this night with the laylat al-qadr, which is also a night of great importance, when a person can ask forgiveness.399 Three ziyyārat (sing. ziyyāra) are read on this day in honor of Muḥammad ibn Nuṣayr, the ʾahl al-marātib and the māʾnā. The third ziyyāra contains a barāʾa against those who deny ʿAlī’s divinity.400 As in Maqtal Dulam,

396 MA, pp. 126, 131, 164, 192.
399 MA, p. 155.
400 Ibid., pp. 156–163; Bar-Asher and Kofsky, The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī Religion, pp. 143–144. Bar-Asher and Kofsky’s claim that a pilgrimage to Ibn Nuṣayr’s tomb is performed on that day is unacceptable, since Ibn Nuṣayr’s death is not accepted by the Nuṣayrīs, because he is the bāb. Al-Ṭabarānī gives an explicit explanation, saying that for the mystics the place of prayer has no importance and that the ziyyāra is an act of prayer reading not a pilgrimage. See MA, p. 157.
this holiday also contains a symbol of the victory of good over evil. A tradition which is read on the night tells the story of Salmān and Qanbar and their symbolic ride on two camels Ḍalāl and Wabāl ("going astray" and "disaster"), which represent the first two caliphs, Abū Bakr and ʿUmar.401

10.9 Laylat al-Mīlād: Christmas

Christmas appears in the Majmūʿ al-ʿayād as the last holiday in the Gregorian calendar (al-sanat al-Rūmiyya, 24/25 of December). The celebration of Christmas in the Nuṣayrī tradition was seen by scholars as one of the most important proofs for Christian influence on Nuṣayrism. However, this assumption should be reviewed carefully. The chapter of Laylat al-mīlād contains a basic Christian framework, but it cannot be considered Christian chapter in any way since there is not a single citation from the Gospels. Al-Ṭabarānī uses only citations from the Qurʾān to explain the holy nature of Jesus and his miraculous birth by the Virgin Mary (for example, he cites Qurʾān, al-Tahrīm [66]: 12). According to Nuṣayrī doctrine there is no difference between Jesus and Muḥammad or between Mary mother of Jesus and Āmina bint Wahb mother of Muḥammad. The former appeared in the qubba al-Masihiyya and the latter in the qubba al-Muḥammadiyya. The content of this holiday is not Christian but Nuṣayrī. The day marks the fact that Jesus "made his birth appear" (azḥara ʿl-wilāda), a typical Nuṣayrī docetic concept. The Nuṣayrī Jesus has no human aspect at all, since there is no incarnation in al-Khaṣibī’s Nuṣayrism. The source of the information in this chapter is al-Ṭabarānī’s, master al-Jillī.402 In addition, two of al-Khaṣibī’s poems are read on this holiday, one concerning the Docetism of Jesus and the other his admiration for Jesus and for the Christian holy places in Syria.403

It is difficult to understand the nature of al-Ṭabarānī’s Christian inspiration. On the one hand he cites from the most important Qurʾānic chapter against the belief in the Trinity, Sūrat al-Ikhlās (Qurʾān 112:3) denying the divine birth of Jesus from the Father.404 On the other, he

---

401 MA, pp. 164–168.
402 Ibid., p. 175.
403 Ibid., pp. 176–177; DKH, fol. 16b–18b, 47a–50b (Bukhtu bi-sirrī and Saʾintu ʿl-muqām, see Appendix 6).
404 MA, p. 177, the citation appears at the beginning of the prayer for Christmas. See also DKH, fol. 6a.
shows great respect for Christian figures. It is only in this chapter that he calls Jesus not only by his Muslim name ʿĪsā, but also by his original Christian name Yasūʿ (from the Hebrew Yeshūʿa). The same applies to St. Peter who is called Simʿān (from the Hebrew Shimʿōn). In the same chapter, al-Ṭabarānī mentions the celebration of the salāq, Jesus’ elevation to heaven, of fish, the celebration of Easter, commemorating the rebirth of Jesus, as well as the ishrāq, the Eastern Church celebration of Epiphany, commemorating the baptism of Jesus. He also mentions shaʿānīn, the Sunday before Easter (Palm Sunday), commemorating Jesus’ entry to Jerusalem before his Passion. These Christian holidays appear in an earlier source, al-Jīlī’s Risāla al-Masīḥiyya, with brief explanations. Yet al-Jīlī and al-Ṭabarānī do not demand that members of the sect observe these holidays, but only that they understand their mystical meaning and above all the docetic nature of Jesus’ birth and crucifixion.

In the final prayer for the Nuṣayrī Christmas, al-Ṭabarānī refers to a triad, which is totally different from the Christian Trinity. Instead of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, he explains that the triad was manifested a few times in the qubba al-Masīḥiyya as follows:

\[ \text{maʿnā} = \text{ʿAlī: Yuḥannā, Shamʿūn Buṭrus (John and Peter)} \]
\[ \text{ḥijāb} = \text{Muḥammad: ʿĪsā, Mār Jirjis (Jesus and St. George)} \]
\[ \text{bāb} = \text{Salmān: Lūqā, Mattī, Marqus (Luke, Matthew and Mark).} \]

Jesus is subordinated to John to fit the subordination of Muḥammad to ʿAlī. In this holiday the Nuṣayrīs are ordered to recite a testimony (shahāda) in which they declare their belief in these three manifestations of the deity. It can therefore be concluded that the Nuṣayrī Christmas includes explanations of Qurʾānic verses focusing on Jesus and the Virgin Mary within a narrow Christian framework consisting of the title of this holiday and its date. The reason for the creation of this Islamized Christmas may well be the missionary nature of the Nuṣayrīsm in the time of al-Jīlī and al-Ṭabarānī. This is probably the

405 MA, pp. 319–320.
406 RM, pp. 289–291. If al-Adhani is reliable in his account of the Nuṣayrī holidays in the nineteenth century, several Christian holidays, including the holidays mentioned here, were celebrated by the members of the sect, as well as holidays that are not mentioned in medieval sources. According to his account, the ʿid al-mīlād was moved to 15 December. See BS, pp. 34–36.
407 MA, p. 179; BS, pp. 26–27 (Kitāb al-majmūʿ, sūra 11: al-Shahāda).
reason for al-Ṭabarānī’s praise of “what is said in the church, the precious words of the monks in Mār Sim‘ān…and in the Mār Jirjis”\(^{408}\).

10.10 **Holiday of 17 Ādhār (March)**

This holiday is in honor of the bāb Muḥammad ibn Nuṣayr. The significance of the number 17 was discussed earlier. The source of this holiday is Ibn Nuṣayr’s *Kitāb al-akwār wa-ʾl-adwār al-Nūrāniyya*, telling the story of a miracle performed by the Imām Ḥasan al-ʾAskarī through his bāb Ibn Nuṣayr on the day of Nawrūz. The symbol of this holiday is a crown of myrtles or anemones (*akālīl adhrayūn/akālīl ās*) that commemorates these miraculous events. The Imām sent his bāb to resurrect one of his disciples in China. After leaving the Imām, Ibn Nuṣayr met a mysterious Indian mystic who gave him a crown of myrtles. When he put it on his head, he was able to transport himself immediately to any place he wished. This crown enabled Ibn Nuṣayr to go to China, resurrect the dead disciple, and return on the same day. On this holiday, believers may put myrtle crowns on their heads and ask for the fulfillment of their wishes.\(^{409}\) The element of the crown of myrtle is a religious symbol for the cult of Mithra in Zoroastrianism and other Iranian sects.\(^{410}\)

The mystical nature of the holiday of 17 Ādhār, which seems to be the only original Nuṣayrī festival, is characterized by the special prayer that al-Ṭabarānī composed containing the mysterious *fawātih* *HM ʿSQ* at the beginning of the Sūrat al-Shūra (Qur’ān 42:1–2), and *KHY’S* of Sūrat Maryam (Qur’ān 19:1) and *’LMŞ* of Sūrat al-Aʿrāf (Qur’ān 7:1). These enigmatic letters are followed by the divine name *ahya ashir*

\(^{408}\) Ibid. We know of the existence of old monasteries called by these names in many regions inhabited by members of the sect in Syria, such as Mār Sim‘ān in Ṭartūs and Aleppo and Mār Jirjis in the same towns as well as in Ḥoms. However, the question of the existence of these monasteries as active Christian sanctuaries in the eleventh century demands further study.

\(^{409}\) MA, pp. 180–186. See the same tradition in the source: AAN, pp. 98–101. The traversing of long distances without moving from one place to another is known in Islamic mysticism as *tayy al-ard* (folding up of earth) and is a virtue attributed to the Imāms in Shi’ism; see M. A. Amir-Moezzi, *La religion discrète: croyances et pratiques spirituelles dans l’islam shi’ite* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2006), pp. 268–269.

chapter two

ahya, which is the Hebrew ehye asher ehye (I am what I am, Exodus 3:14). The comparison between the people of Israel and the true believers is also typical in Imāmī Shīʿī literature. Since the contents of this holiday is the Nawrūz, it is followed in the Majmūʿ al-aʿyād by the Persian New Year.

10.11 Nawrūz: The Persian New Year

Nawrūz or No-Rūz (Persian, new day) is traditionally celebrated at the spring equinox on 21 March. In the Nuṣayrī calendar it is fixed on 4 Nīṣān (equivalent to March/April) of the solar calendar. The fact that this holiday, like the previous one, is not located on the Muslim calendar but is fixed in the seventh month of a Babylonian/Hebrew calendar (and the first month of the Jewish biblical year) is confusing. Al-Ṭabarānī explains that this holiday takes place on the first day of the Persian year in the month of Favardīn Māh (the first month in the Persian calendar) when the Persian kings traditionally wore a crown of myrtles on their heads and the people sprinkled water on each other, a well known tradition still prevalent today. This doubling of the date for Nawrūz is confusing and it is possible that the eventual date of this festival changed over the course of time. The source for the mystical meaning of the day is al-Khāṣībī, who explains that the divinity appeared in the form of the Persian kings in the qubba al-Fārisīyya. Thus, on this holiday, the Nuṣayrīs are asked to read al-Khāṣībī’s poem Akālīl quds (crowns of holiness). They also have to read another tradition concerning the miraculous transport of Ibn Nuṣayr with the help of the crown of myrtles. In this case he is transported to India (Sind) to resurrect another dead believer of the Imam by sprinkling water on his body. This last tradition corresponds to the Zoroastrian doctrine of sprinkling water as a symbol of the resurrection of the dead after Ahura Mazda’s triumph over Ahrimān, or the victory of good over evil. In

411 MA, p. 186 in Arabic letters: ﺶﻘٌ ﻟﺽ ﻟﺎ ﻥ� ﻣ ﺞم
412 See, for example, in HUA, p. 31 and MA, p. 204.
414 MA, pp. 188–191. See the Akālīl quds, in DKH, fol. 56a–64b.
416 Concerning the meaning of Nawrūz in Zoroastrianism see, for example, M. Boyce, “Iranian festivals”, in E. Yarshater (ed.), The Cambridge History of Iran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 798–800; M. Boyce, Zoroastrians:
general, the Nuṣayrīs show great respect towards the Persians to whom, according to their doctrine, the divinity was revealed before the Arabs. According to the Nuṣayrīs, it is due to the sins of the Persians that the divinity was veiled to them and appeared among the Arabs.  

At Persian New Year, the Nuṣayrīs study the baṭīn al-Nawrūz (mystical meaning of the New Year), based on Mufaddal’s teaching. According to the latter, the Imām Ja’far taught that this day’s importance was “forgotten by the Arabs and remembered by the Persians”, a phrase repeated several times in the long Nawrūz chapter in the Majmū’ al-a’yād. The Imām reminded his disciples that this day commemorates a series of important events, such as the stabilization of Noah’s Ark, Abraham’s destruction of his father’s idols, Solomon’s crowning by David, the illusionary crucifixion of Jesus, and the day of the bay’a (oath of allegiance) of Ghadir Khumm. At the end of time it will be the day when the mahdī will kill the dajjāl (triumph of good over evil; compare this with the struggle of Ahura Mazda and Ahrimān). In order to remind the Arabs of Nawrūz, the Imām Ja’far is said to have worn a crown of anemones, asking his believers to give charity and explaining the symbol of the resurrecting water. He told his disciples that Nawrūz is based on a Persian tradition of pouring water on fire, as a symbol for the ma’nā’s personification in the form of Shervīn and his resurrection of the dead. The dead were resurrected wearing shining anemones. This event was commemorated by the Persian custom of pouring water on graves (nawāwīs, sing. nāwūs), wearing the crown of anemones, and their tradition of fire burning that represents the light of resurrection. Apart from the sanctity of fire, a well-known element of Zoroastrianism, other components of this strange tradition need explanation. Shervīn is Anushirvān (Persian, the eternal), the title of the Sassanid king Khusraw I (d. 579), considered a just

---

ruler. The creation of life as a result of the mixture of fire and water exists in Zervanism, a branch of Zoroastrianism, according to which fire represents the male and water the female; when they mingled they created the cosmos. In this doctrine, the fire represents Ohrmazd/Ahura Mazda the good god, and water stands for Ahrimān the evil god. This possible source of inspiration for the Nuṣayrīs may also explain their anti-feminine tendency.

An earlier epistle, al-Khašībī’s Fiqh al-risāla al-rāstbāshiyya, which seems to be one of al-Ṭabarānī’s main sources, provides a better understanding of the meaning of the resurrecting water. Here, al-Khašībī explains that on 4 Niṣān there occurred the famous miracle of the resurrection of the dry bones that God showed to the prophet Ezekiel, who is presented as one of the personifications of the ism. Ezekiel was ordered by the ma’nā to pour water on the dead bodies of the people of Israel, an act that gave them life and purified their souls from sin. Although the source of this tradition is the book of Ezekiel (35:25–26;

---


422 The anti-feminine nature of Nuṣayrī religion is reflected in many aspects of their doctrine. The masculine appellation of Fāṭima as Fāṭir is a typical example. According to one source, on the night of mid-Sha’bān, men cleanse their bodies as a symbol of their denunciation of those who associate femininity with Fāṭima; see KBS, p. 265. Another reason for the Nuṣayrī anti-feminine attitude is the association of women with evil and guile throughout history. The main examples are the calamities caused by Eve and the wives of Noah and Lot. Transmigration into women is considered a punishment for men. See HAD, p. 151. Nevertheless, unlike sinners who transmigrate into animals with no chance for regret, pious and obedient women transmigrate into men. See HIF, p. 98; HAD, pp. 149–150. In the ʿUmm al-kitāb, the rebelling angel ʿAzāzīl and his demons turn into beautiful women in order to tempt the angels to sin (compare with the Bible, Genesis 6:2–4). According to the Haft waʿl-ʾaẓilla, the women were all created from sins of the devil. See Halm, al-Ghunūsyya fi ʿl-Islām, pp. 128, 173. This anti-feminism can also be traced in early Ismāʿīlīsm in a tradition concerning a feminine aspect of the divinity called kūnī (be!, feminine form of the kun of the creation), which was responsible for the original sin in the world of light. This tradition was preserved in a rare treatise by the Ismāʿīlī dāʾī (propagandist) Abū ʿĪsā al-Murshid (tenth century). See S. M. Stern, Studies in Early Ismāʿīlīsm (Jerusalem: Magnes Press/Leiden: Brill, 1983), pp. 3–29 (Arabic text pp. 7–16). See also H. Halm, The Empire of the Mahdi: The Rise of the Fatimids, trans. M. Bonner (Leiden: Brill, 1996), p. 17.
36:1–14), while it is only hinted at in the Qurʾān (al-Baqara [2]: 343), the miracle of the dry bones is explained in Arabic by most of the Muslim commentaries on this last verse.423

Another tradition that is read at Nawrūz concerns a strange description of the qibāb al-Fārisiya (Persian cycles of time), based on anonymous epistles (rasāʾil, sing. risāla) that al-Ṭabarānī received from a certain group of ahl al-tawḥīd, but about which he gives no details. These epistles divide the Persian cycles into four layers or generations (tabaqāt, sing. tabaqqa) called by the names of Bahmān (the Persian Vohu Mana, the Good Thought of the Avesta):424 al-Bahmāniyya al-kubrā (great Bahmān), al-Bahmāniyya al-ʿuzmā (immense Bahman), al-Bahmāniyya al-hamrā (red Bahmān) and al-Bahmāniyya al-bayḍāʾ (white Bahmān). The list of the ashhāṣ of each layer leaves no doubt as to the Zoroastrian inspiration of the anonymous epistles, as for example the name of Hormūz (Ahura Mazda) as well as legendary and famous Persian kings from antiquity to the Sassanian period.425 Al-Ṭabarānī himself explains that these epistles contain the explanation of “the Persian religions from ancient times”426. The explicit appearance of a Zoroastrian or quasi-Zoroastrian text in the most important book of holidays of the Nuṣayrī religion demands further study concerning the influence of Iranian religions on Nuṣayrism.

At Nawrūz, the Nuṣayris are asked to read the traditional saying that the celebration of this day was held in the house of Ibn Nuṣayr in Basra. During the celebration, Ibn Nuṣayr is said to have revealed the betrayal of Ishāq al-Āḥmar and his group soon after he told his disciples about the people who betrayed Moses rather than the seventy people who were loyal to him after the sin of the Golden Calf (Qurʾān, al-Aʿrāf [7]: 155).427

423 See, for example, B. M. Wheeler, Prophets in the Quran: An Introduction to the Quran and Muslim Exegesis (London/New York: Continuum, 2002), pp. 250–252.
424 Concerning Bahmān, see Bar-Asher, “The Iranian component of the Nuṣayrī religion”, p. 222; bibliography p. 226 note 66.
425 Bar-Asher, “The Iranian component of the Nuṣayrī religion”, pp. 221–222. Most of these persons can be found in the famous Shahnameh of Firdawsī, who was a contemporary of al-Ṭabarānī.
426 MA, pp. 209–210. The name of Hormūz also appears in the version of Majmūʿ al-aʿyād of the Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī 3, pp. 390–391; here, some names of Persian kings, which were impossible to reconstruct in the original manuscripts of Strothmann, can be completed. However, the Silsila version seems to contain many printing errors in this part of the book in particular.
427 Ibid., pp. 203–205.
The chapter on Nawrūz in *Majmū‘ al-a‘yād* is the last in the book. It is also the longest, since it contains two other holidays, the “Great Thursday” and the Equinox of Mihrājān.

10.12 *Yawm al-Khamīs al-Kabīr: the holiday of “Great Thursday”*

As Strothmann explains in his introduction to his critical edition of the *Majmū‘ al-a‘yād*, “Great Thursday” was a Byzantine holiday on the Thursday that precedes Easter, and its date and contents were altered in Nuṣayrism.\(^{428}\) In the Nuṣayrī calendar this holiday is celebrated together with Nawrūz. Its content has nothing to do with Christianity and was completely replaced by Iranian symbols. The members of the sect are asked to read a tradition of Jannān al-Junbulānī, transmitted from his master, the *yatīm* Muḥammad ibn Jundab, and in his turn from Ibn Nuṣayr. According to this account, Ibn Nuṣayr explained that the mystical meaning of fire is the resurrection of the dead. The sacred fire appears in every cycle. For example, in the *qubba al-Ādamiyya* (the cycle of Adam) it appeared in the sacrifice of Abel, in the *qubba al-Mūsawiyya* (the cycle of Moses) it was in the burning bush from where God spoke to Moses, and in the *qubba al-Muḥammadiyya* (the cycle of Muḥammad) it was the testing of Ibn Saba’s belief, when ‘Alī ordered that he be burned. After this explanation, Ibn Nuṣayr asked his followers to perform a ritual with water and *ʿabd al-nūr* (the special wine for mystic sessions), in which they pour water on their faces and pray to be forgiven for their sins and be saved from the *adād*.\(^{429}\)

Although Christian symbols were completely excluded, there are some traces or hints of the original “Great Thursday”, also called “Holy Thursday”. In Christianity this holiday takes place on the Thursday before Easter, to note the day on which the Last Supper of Jesus was held. In Christianity “Great Thursday” commemorates Jesus’ washing the feet of his disciples and his betrayal by Judas. These two elements may be hinted at in the instruction of Ibn Nuṣayr that the face be washed and in the tradition regarding the betrayal of Ishāq al-Aḥmar.


\(^{429}\) MA, pp. 212–220.
10.13  
Mihrājan: the holiday of the autumn equinox  

In the Nuṣayrī calendar, the autumn equinox was fixed on 16 Tishrīn al-Awwal (October), instead of the original Zoroastrian date of 16 Mihr (the seventh month of the Persian calendar). Its content is identical to that of Nawrūz, since for the Nuṣayrīs, Mihrājan and the Nawrūz represent the two appearances of the maʿnā to the Persians every year in the qubba al-Fārisiya. The Nuṣayrīs’ celebration of these two holidays preserves some Zoroastrian symbols, such as the names of gods and kings, but cannot be considered as a continuation of the original Iranian religion. Nothing is left of the original cult of Mithra in Mihrājan. The Nuṣayrīs’ celebration of Nawrūz and Mihrājan seems to reflect the renaissance of these Iranian festivals in Shīʿī garb. It should be explained at this point that these two festivals had already been officially recognized by the ‘Abbāsid Empire at a time when Iranian culture and beliefs were mingled with a strong Shīʿī influence.

During the period of the creation of Nuṣayrism, two processes reached their peak: the Persianization of the Muslim empire (under the Buyids in particular) and the Islamization of Persian culture (especially through Shīʿī doctrine), or its Arabization by translation of Persian literature into Arabic. In the prayer composed by al-Ṭabarānī for Mihrājan, he uses words in Persian mixed with Arabic phrases: Yā Nowbahār! (Persian, Oh Early Spring!) zinhār! (protection!) be-Bahmān (by the Vohu Mana) al-azali bi-ʾl-zuhūr al-kanahwāri (Arabic, the eternal with the appearance in the form of clouds) wa-Rūzbeh al-salsalī (Salmān’s personification as Rūzbeh) be-mōbedh al-mōbadhān (Persian, by the supreme judge). In the same prayer there is also a hint of the enigmatic Persian Umm al-kitāb, when al-Ṭabarānī praises the maʿnā with the unusual expression sabbūh qaddūs (the most praised and holy),

431 MA, p. 10.
433 MA, pp. 224–225. mōbedh mōbadhān is the title of the highest judge in Sassanian culture, equivalent to the Arabic qāḍī ʾl-quḍāt. As for its religious use in Mazdakism as a divine title, the cult of Khusrāw, who appears among the Nuṣayrī divine personifications (for example in MA, p. 211), is also a Mazdean characteristic. See M. Guidi and M. Morony, “Mazdak”, EF VI (1991), p. 951.
which is also repeated in the text of Jābir ibn Abdallāh. Nevertheless, the *Umm al-kitāb* does not refer to the two Persian equinoxes. Al-Ṭabarānī concludes his book with a second prayer for Mihrajān, in which the Nuṣayris ask God to punish the infidels with eternal transmigrations of their souls and to grant his believers crowns of light on their heads and to return to the world of light. This last prayer contains a section in which al-Ṭabarānī praises God, referring to each of his merits in alphabetical order.

The following tables sum up the Nuṣayrī holidays, based on their complex double lunar and solar calendar system, according to the order of the *sana al-Khasibiyya*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lunar Calendar</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Holiday</th>
<th>Original contents</th>
<th>Nuṣayrī significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Month of Ramaḍān</td>
<td>Ramaḍān</td>
<td>Month of fast; revelation of the Qur’ān.</td>
<td>Month of silence of ‘Ali’s father and John the Baptist’s father. Every night represents a Nuṣayrī saint.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Shawwāl</td>
<td>‘Īd al-‘Aḍhā</td>
<td>Break of the fast of Ramaḍān.</td>
<td>The emanation of Muḥammad from the ma‘nā; the abolition of the taqiyya at the end of time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10–13 Dhū ’l-Ḥijja</td>
<td>‘Īd al-Ghadīr</td>
<td>The sacrifice of Ismā‘īl.</td>
<td>The habṭa; the end of time and return of the mahdī to maintain justice.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

434 MA, p. 223 line 8, compare with UK, fol. 22a, 46a, 124b, 144b, 152a, 189a; Halm, *al-Ghunūsīyya fī ‘l-Islām*, pp. 95, 96, 105, 135. See this expression in KHC, fol. 10b. The blessing *sabbūh qaddūs* is used in ʿImāmī literature as that of the angels praising God while surrounding his throne; see, for example, al-Majlīsī, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 26, pp. 87. In *Umm al-kitāb* every mystic who hears the divine Imāms’ explanation declares that: “Indeed ‘Ali and Muḥammad are *sabbūh qaddūs*”.

435 MA, pp. 225–228.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Holiday</th>
<th>Original contents</th>
<th>Nuṣayrī significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21 Dhū 'l-Ḥijja</td>
<td>'Id al-Mubāhala</td>
<td>Conversion of the Christians of Najrān to Islam after their leader was impressed by the prayer of the ahl al-bayt.</td>
<td>Conversion of the Christians of Najrān after they understood the divine nature of ‘Alī, Muḥammad and Salmān.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 Dhū 'l-Ḥijja</td>
<td>'Id al-Firāsh</td>
<td>The day ‘Alī sacrificed himself by replacing Muḥammad in his bed the night the latter was supposed to be murdered by the Meccans.</td>
<td>Identical to Imāmī tradition, except for the prayer to the divine ‘Alī.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Muḥarram</td>
<td>Yawm ‘Ashūr(ā)</td>
<td>Mourning of the martyrdom of Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī in Karbalā’.</td>
<td>Docetic doctrine maintains that Ḥusayn’s death was only apparent, thus mourning is forbidden. The same applies to Jesus who was sacrificed only in appearance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Rabī al-Awwal</td>
<td>Maqtal Dulām</td>
<td>A popular (not formal) Shi‘ī festival of the death of Caliph ‘Umar.</td>
<td>Day of celebration of all the demonic leaders in history such as: Pharaoh, Goliath and ‘Umar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Sha‘bān</td>
<td>Laylat Niṣf Shabān</td>
<td>A night of divine blessing, in which ‘Alī used to spend the night reading from the Qur’ān and praying.</td>
<td>Spiritual ziyāra (pilgrimage replaced by a prayer) to Ḥusayn and to al-Khaṣibi; spiritual ziyāra of Ibn Nuṣayr and the five holy ahl al-Bayt; vision of Salmān of ‘Alī’s prophecy of the night of the Last Judgment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Solar Calendar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Holiday</th>
<th>Original contents</th>
<th>Nuṣayrī significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17 Ādhār (March)</td>
<td><em>al-Sābīʿ Ashar min Ādhār</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>Celebration in honor of Ibn Nuṣayr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Nīsān (end March–April) / Favordin Māh 1</td>
<td><em>Nawrūz</em> (Zoroastrianism)</td>
<td>Persian New Year, vernal equinox.</td>
<td>Commemoration of the <em>maʿnā</em>’s appearances in the <em>qubba al-Fārisiyya</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Yawm al-Khamīs al-Kabīr</em> (the same day as Nawrūz)</td>
<td>Great Thursday/ Holy Thursday (Christianity)</td>
<td>Thursday before the Last Supper of Jesus (Easter).</td>
<td>The appearance of the <em>maʿnā</em> in fire.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Tishrīn al-Awwal (October)</td>
<td><em>Mihrājān</em> (Zoroastrianism)</td>
<td>Persian Festival of Mithra, autumnal equinox.</td>
<td>Same contents as that of Nawrūz.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nuṣayrī sources give several explanations for the fact that the calendar contains twelve months. The most important tradition cites Muḥammad ibn ’Umar, who explains that the twelve months, like the twelve hours of the day, represent the twelve Imāms.436 Another tradition explains that the twelve months represent the twelve sons of ’Abd al-Muṭṭalib (the Prophet Muḥammad’s grandfather) and the four holy months (of the ḥajj: Dhū ’l-Qa‘da, Dhū ’l-Ḥijja, Muḥarram and Rajab) correspond to the four children of the Prophet (who did not survive).437

Also interesting are the Nuṣayrī explanations for the meaning of the word ‘*īd* (holiday). All the explanations to be found are given by al-Jillī, who was the first to organize the sect’s calendar. In his *Bāṭin al-ṣalāt*, he uses the root of the word, ‘*w.d* (‘āda or aʿāda, to return). Thus, he replaces the word ‘*īd* by a parallel, the word *rajʿa*, i.e. the return of the *mahdi* at the end of time. In other words, all the holidays represent the same apocalyptic expectation of the *muwahḥidūn*.438 Al-Jillī continues

---

436 *IM*, pp. 251–253.
437 *MKH*, p. 196.
438 *KBS*, p. 253.
his discussion with a more complex explanation for the same root “to return”, which is that every holiday represents the return of the appearance of the divinity in the form of one of the ashhās in order to give the believers a chance to return (i‘āda) to the state before the yawm al-azilla and their fall into the material world. In his Risāla al-Masīhiyya, al-Jīlī explains that the word ʿīd is a parallel of ʿawda, which means “return”, since Jesus returned to his believers after his occultations (ghaybāt) in the form of each of his twelve Apostles and will return at the end of time. The apocalyptic doctrine is repeated in al-Khaṣībī’s Dīwān. It is referred to in typical Shī‘ī terms: “the white return” (al-rajʿa al-baydāʾ), “the great return” (al-rajʿa al-kubrā) and “the day of resurrection” (yawm al-qiyāma).

At the end of time, after the return of the mahdī to avenge the murder of Ḥusayn (even if only in appearance) and to kill all the enemies of the Imāms (the addād and their followers), the Nuṣāyris will return to their original state, namely they will return to the world of light. Until then, the mystics will concentrate their efforts to elevate their souls to a higher spiritual level. Some of them, who purify their souls, will reach the world of light even before the Day of Judgment.

439 Ibid., p. 254.
441 DKH, fol. 10a, 25b–27b, 39b, 40a, 86b, 87b, 93a–94b.
IDENTITY BETWEEN SUNNA AND SHİ‘A

The attitude of Sunnīs and Shī‘īs towards the religious identity of the Nuṣayrī sect in Middle Ages has not yet been studied or examined in its larger historical context. This subject is of tremendous importance for the understanding of the Shī‘ī–Sunnī ideological conflict as well as for the understanding of background interests in modern Middle Eastern politics. Since the ‘Alawīs have become a leading group in Syria, it is possible to talk today about a Shī‘ī–‘Alawī–Sunnī triangle as a prominent political axis, involving struggles and negotiations between many countries in the Middle East (mainly Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt and Saudi Arabia). However, during most of the medieval period, the Nuṣayrīs were a small minority in Syria and Lebanon, with very limited involvement in the turbulent political events of their region. Their perpetual state of war and instability raised suspicions against the strange Shī‘ī sect located in a territory inhabited by a Sunnī majority. Moreover, this small minority was ruled for most of the time by Sunnī dynasties (‘Abbasids, Seljuks, Ayyubids and finally Ottomans) when this western part of the Muslim world was in permanent conflict with the Fātimid–Ismā‘īlī empire in Egypt and North Africa as well as with the Shī‘ī empires in the east (Buyids, Safavids and others in Persia).

The brief era of Shī‘ī dominance (mid-tenth century to mid-eleventh century) in Iraq and Syria was a crucial period for the creation of the Nuṣayrī identity. This identity is based on the personality of al-Khasībī, who served as an example of the right believer, and who used taqiyya in a way that would enable the sect to survive, and later on even to ensure the protection of strong allies and the legitimization of some of the leaders of the sect by the Imāmī Shī‘ī authorities in modern times. However, in the orthodox Shī‘ī world, crystallized after the ghayba, a debate was developing as to the question of whether the Nuṣayrīs were

---

1 This chapter is partly based on my doctoral dissertation, Les Nuṣayrī–‘Alawī entre Sunna et Shī‘a—refus et acceptation selon les sources arabes médiévales et modernes (Paris: Sorbonne, 2005) in which this issue was discussed for the first time.
to be considered a dangerous, excommunicated group of Ghulāt or a branch of Shi’ism and an important potential ally in Syria.

In the study of the identity of the Nuṣayris between Shi’ism and Sunnism, three major factors should be considered: the taqiyya of al-Khaṣībī among the Nuṣayris, the suspicions of the Sunnīs that the members of this sect were collaborating with their enemies, and the Shi‘ī internal polemic concerning their attitude towards the sect.

1. Two Shi‘ī attitudes

In this chapter, an attempt is made to prove that the Shi‘ī attitude towards the Nuṣayris is not homogeneous, since there are two coexistent judgments concerning the Ghulāt in Imāmī literature. The most prominent attitude is a negative one. When asked about the Ghulāt, Imāmī scholars explain that the Imāms had declared their excommunication (barā’a) and usually add their own negative opinion concerning them. Although the Ghulāt appear in the late Imāmī literature as a marginal excommunicated group of heretical Shi‘īs, this image does not seem to correspond to historical truth. It may be claimed that the Ghulāt were a group belonging to an inner circle of the Imāms.

1.1 Al-Majlisi’s excommunication of the Ghulāt

The most prominent example of the negative Shi‘ī attitude towards the Ghulāt is the view of the famous Imāmī scholar Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlī (d. 1110/1699 or 1111/1700), a leading figure in the conservative line of the Shi‘ā. Although the focus here is on medieval writings, and al-Majlī lived at the end of the Safavid period, his famous Bihār al-anwār represents a summary of the medieval literature. In his chapter on the “refutation of extremism” (nafy al-ghulūw), he cites medieval Imāmī scholars, mainly the two Iraqis Abū ʿAmr al-Kashshī (d. 340/951) and Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067). Their opinion is that the Ghulāt are heretics (kuffār, sing. kāfir) and polytheists (mushrikūn), that the Imāms had declared their excommunication (barā’a), and that they are all doomed to burn in hell. The Imām Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq is cited saying:

Warn your young people against the Ghulāt so that the latter will not corrupt them, since the Ghulāt are the worst of God’s creation, reducing God’s might and considering his servants as God. In the name of God!

The Ghulāt are worse than the Jews and Christians and the Magians [Zoroastrians] who are polytheists. Then he [Ja’far] said: if a ghālī were to return to us we would not accept him, but if a muqāṣṣir [deficient Shīʿī] were to join us we would accept him. Then he was asked: Why is that so, O son of the messenger of God? He replied: The ghālī usually neglects prayer, almsgiving, fasting and the pilgrimage [pillars of Islam] and he can never get rid of his habits and return to the worship of God, while when he knows about the obligation, the muqāṣṣir obeys it.³

Al-Majlisi’s resentment of the Ghulāt derives mainly from the tendency of these mystics to neglect the zāhir, the obligations of Islam. Hence, the neglect of the bāṭin by the muqāṣṣir seems to him less problematic. According to al-Majlisi, the ghulūw is alien to Islam and derives from Christianity and Judaism. The view of Jesus, a prophet in Islam, as God himself, is considered the view of a Christian ghulūw. According to Shīʿī tradition, ‘Alī declared: “I repudiate the Ghulāt as Jesus’ repudiation (barāʾa) of the Christians”.⁴ The Jewish ghulūw is considered more dangerous, since it penetrated into Islam through a convert. According to a Shīʿī tradition, a Jew called ‘Abdallāh ibn Saba’, an important ghālī and a Nuṣayrī saint, who was of Yemeni origin and had converted to Islam, translated his exaggerated admiration for the biblical Joshua into an exaggerated admiration of the Muslim ‘Alī. ‘Abdallāh ibn Saba’ explained that ‘Alī is the wasī of Muḥammad, his spiritual successor, as Joshua was to Moses. Ibn Saba’ was the first to claim that the rule of ‘Alī was a religious duty (fard), not only a political claim, the first to curse ‘Alī’s enemies and declare their heresy, and the first to deny ‘Alī’s death. Ironically, the “exaggerated” claims of Ibn Saba’ eventually became the fundamental doctrines in Imāmī Shiʿism. Aware of this fact, al-Kashshī and al-Nawbakhtī both write at the end of their biography of Ibn Saba’: “This is the reason why those who deny the Shiʿa claim that the source of their belief is taken from

³ Ibid., pp. 265–266. The claims concerning the Jews and Christians here contradict those later in the same chapter, which say that the ghulāt are worse than Jews and Christians since they are monotheists and the ghulāt are polytheists. See ibid., p. 304.
⁴ Ibid., p. 266.
Judaism [ašl al-rafd (al-Kashshī: al-tashayyu' wa-‘l-rafd) ma’khubh min al-yahūdiyya]”.5

The Nuṣayrī al-Jillī also dedicated a long paragraph to attacking the doctrine of *tafwīd* (delegation), which is prominent in Ghulāt thought. According to this doctrine, God delegated his powers to the Imāms to turn them into superhuman or even divine persons. In Nuṣayrī theology, the understanding of the *tafwīd* is an intermediate stage in the spiritual progress of the mystic between *taqṣīr* and *tawḥīd*, i.e. between the understanding of only the exoteric religion and the understanding of the esoteric meaning.6 Modaressi assumes that there was an offshoot called Mufawwida among the Iraqi Shī‘a of the post-ghayba period (tenth century) who believed that God had delegated some of his powers to the Imāms. According to his hypothesis, this group was opposed by the *muqasṣira* advocating the *zāhir* only and insisting that the Imāms were human beings.7 Al-Majlisi’s view represents a continuation of the conservative thought of the *muqasṣira*. He rejects the Ghulāt’s fundamental concept of the divine Imām and Docetism:

> It is our view concerning the Prophet and the Imāms, peace be upon them, that some of them were killed by the sword and some were poisoned and that it has happened to them in reality and it was not by illusion (*mā shubbiha amruhum*) … those who claim it do not belong to our religion in any sense.8

As to the term *tafwīd*, instead of rejecting it, al-Majlisi limits its meaning to the delegation of the ability to give the right commentary to God’s words transmitted to the Prophet Muḥammad.9 Al-Majlisi also stresses that no autonomy was given to the Imāms: “They permit [only] what God permits, and forbid only what he forbids and they do only what God asks them to do, because they are not more than respectable

---

6 *FRR*, p. 114.
9 Ibid., p. 332.
human beings. They are able to know God’s will, as do prophets, by inspiration (wahy)”.10  

A harsh verdict appears at the end of the chapter:

Shaykh al-Mufid (d. 413/1022) explained: ghulūw in Arabic means to go beyond the limit and to deviate from the object. God said: “People of the Book! Do not exaggerate in your religion and do not say concerning God what is wrong” (Qur’ān, al-Nisā’ [4]: 170), so he forbade going beyond the limit concerning Jesus and warned them from deviating from what is said [in the holy book]. Hence he considered what the Christians believed to be ghulūw…and the Ghulāt pretending to be Muslims [al-muṭāzalīn bi-‘l-Islām] are those who attributed divinity to the Imāms…and they are infidels led astray; the commander of the believers’ [‘Alī’s] verdict was to kill them and to burn them in fire and the Imāms’ verdict was that they are infidels and deviate from Islam.11

The verdict of al-Mufid, the famous Imāmī scholar from the Buyid period, is backed by that of one of the four sūfarāʾ (mediators), Abū Ja’far Muḥammad, who cursed Ibn Nuṣayr in public:

We have no need to judge them [the Ghulāt] and to clarify their matter since Abū Ja’far, may God have mercy upon him, [already] concluded concerning the ghulūw as follows: Know that the ghulūw concerning the Prophet and the Imāms is merely in the belief that they were Gods or God’s assistants in the [ordering of] cults or the creation and the [control of] the welfare of people, or the belief that God is incarnated in them or united himself with them, or the belief that they knew the absent [al-ghayb, one of God’s names, or simply “esoteric matters”] without any divine inspiration, or the belief that the Imāms were prophets or the belief in the transmigration of the soul from one of them to another, or the belief that their knowledge dismisses them from all obligations and they are not obligated to neglect the sins. All these beliefs are [considered] atheism [iḥlād], heresy [kufr] and deviation from the religion [of Islam]…[Abū Ja’far concludes with the same order of the Imāms to kill them].12

This verdict cited by al-Majlīsī concerns the Nuṣayrīs as well, since they appear previously among the other Ghulāt in the same chapter of “refutation of ghulūw”, citing al-Kashshī:

A man called Muḥammad ibn Nuṣayr al-Namīri/Numayrī from Basra claimed that God did not appear except in this era and that he is only

---

10 Ibid., p. 339; see also HK, p. 444.
11 Al-Majlīsī, ibid., pp. 324–325. See also the same verdict in ibid., p. 342.
12 Ibid., p. 336.
'Alī and the small group [ṣirḥidma] of the Nuṣayrīs belongs to him. They are a group [believing in] antinomianism [iḥāḥiyya] who neglected the obligations and laws and permitted what is forbidden and prohibited. One of their claims is: the Jews are right although we are not from them and that the Christians are right although we do not belong to them.

Although al-Majlisī’s severe judgment is not included in a fatwā, it can be considered as one representing the view of the conservative Akhbārī branch of Shi‘ism, propagating the reliance on the Qurʾān and Ḥadīth as the only sources of law and rejecting independent interpretation (ijtihād). The accusations against the Ghulāt in general, and the Nuṣayrīs in particular, contain the most severe terms of heresy and may give the impression that they were totally rejected by the Shi‘a. However, it seems that al-Majlisī’s choice of citations from the medieval scholars was selective, since another view concerning the Nuṣayrīs existed in the Middle Ages, and continues to have influence on Shi‘i thought until today.

1.2 An indulgent Shi‘i view concerning the Nuṣayrīs

As already noted, the view of al-Majlisī does not represent the Shi‘a as a whole, but only the conservative line of the muqassira and later the Akhbārīs. As is to be expected, a less severe judgment is maintained by the other offshoot of the Shi‘a, those who legitimize the bātin and the ta‘wil or at least permit the ‘ulamā‘ to allow the use of ijtihād concerning the Qurʾān and the Ḥadīth. Since this branch, called Uṣūlī, became much stronger than the Akhbārī in modern Shi‘ism, it merits special attention. The famous heresiographical book Firaq al-Shi‘a (sects of the Shi‘a) by al-Nawbakhtī (d. 310/922) reflects a different view from that of al-Majlisī. The very title of the book reflects the idea that there are many sects that deserve the title “Shi‘a”, an opinion criticized by the publishers of the book in Lebanon (1984). For al-Nawbakhtī,

---

15 See the introduction by the Lebanese editor and the publisher at the beginning of the book: al-Nawbakhtī, Firaq al-Shi‘a, p. a and the preceding one, which has no number.
the schism is a normal and legitimate phenomenon in Shi‘ism. At the beginning of his book he notes:

The Shi‘i sects and others were divided as to the issue of the imāma [the question of who is the legitimate Imām] in every period after the death of each Imām and [even] when he was alive, since the Prophet Muhammad died, and in the present book we mention what we have gathered concerning its sects [of the Shi‘a], their views [ārā’, sing. ra’y] and their polemic [ikhtilāf], as well as what we have not mentioned for reasons [‘ilal, sing. ‘illa] of their division and polemic.16

Al-Nawbakhtī informs us that after the death of the eleventh Imām Hasan al-‘Askārī the Shi‘a was divided into fourteen sects, and that the Imāmiyya (today the orthodox Shi‘ism) was only one of them.17 Even though al-Nawbakhtī considers only the Imāmiyya, to which he belongs, as the right group, his criticism of the other sects is very limited. When dealing with Ibn Nuṣayr, al-Nawbakhtī accuses him of adultery and deems his sect, the Namiriyya/Numayriyya, to be Ghulāt.18 Nevertheless, al-Nawbakhtī never regards any of the sects as heretical (kāfir) or as atheist (ilhād). As Muhammad Javad Mashkur notes in the introduction to his French translation of Firaq al-Shī‘a, “Nawbakhtī, like Shahrastānī, is content with loyally reporting the opinions of the different sects, and it is only very rarely that he calls down the divine curse upon those who wanted to elevate their leaders to the level of God”.19

Mashkur’s comparison between the attitude of al-Nawbakhtī and that of the Shi‘ī scholar Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153), author of the famous Milal wa-‘l-nihal, is correct. In this book, the belief of the Nuṣayris regarding the Imāms as divine incarnations is presented as their theory (qawl), not as a heresy. In

16 Ibid., p. 2.
17 Ibid., pp. 96–112.
18 Ibid., pp. 93–94.
addition, he concludes his chapter with the phrase: “We have finished our discussion of Islamic sects”, without excommunicating the Nuṣayris.\footnote{Al-Shahrastānī, \textit{Al-milal wa-'l-nihal}, pp. 192–193.} Gimaret and Monnot note that the tone of al-Shahrastānī is moderate. The latter presents the diverse doctrines of Islamic sects as theories or theses (\textit{qawl}, pl. \textit{aqwāl}/\textit{madhab} pl. \textit{madhāhib}) and not as heresies or matters of defamation (\textit{dālālāt}/\textit{fādā’īh}), a typical Sunnī terminology. Al-Shahrastānī accuses the Ghulāt of confusion (\textit{hayra}) but not of heresy (\textit{kufr}).\footnote{Gimaret and Monnot, \textit{Shahrastani}, pp. 44–45.} If it is in doubt that al-Shahrastānī represents Imāmī Shīʿī thought because of his questionable identity, another example of an indulgent attitude towards the Nuṣayris may be used, that of an Imāmī religious authority, al-ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī (d. 726/1325). The view of al-Ḥillī, who is considered a pioneering medieval Usūlī thinker, is opposed to that of the Akhbārī al-Majlīsī, as to the status of the Ghulāt.

The studies of Henri Laoust concerning pluralism in Islam\footnote{A collection of his articles on this subject were gathered in H. Laoust, \textit{Pluralisme dans l’Islam} (Paris: Geuthner, 1983).} back the hypothesis concerning the existence of another attitude towards the Nuṣayris in Shīʿism that is more moderate. In his studies he uses the example of al-Ḥasan ibn Yūsuf al-Ḥillī, an important Imāmī theologian, who succeeded in influencing the ruler of Persia, the Ilkhānid Oljeitu, to convert to Shīʿism and to declare Shīʿī Islam as the state’s official religion at the beginning of the fourteenth century. The struggle between the Ilkhānate and the Mamlūks became, for a short time, a Shiʿī–Sunnī struggle (before the next Ilkhānid ruler converted to Sunnism). At the ruler’s demand, al-Ḥillī wrote his \textit{Minhāj al-karāma fī maʿrifat al-imāma}, which was refuted by the famous Mamlūk theologian Ibn Taymiyya in his \textit{Minhāj al-sunna}. The polemic between these two scholars is relevant to this study. The attitude towards the Nuṣayris was one of the issues of controversy. While for Ibn Taymiyya the Nuṣayris were the worst heretics, for al-Ḥillī they were Muslim Shīʿīs who were to be condemned only for their exaggerated admiration of ʿAlī. This relative indulgence is explained by Laoust as an attempt by al-Ḥillī to unite “the big family of the Shīʿī diaspora”. Laoust does not consider this attitude to be a real religious reconciliation between the Imāmiyya on one hand, and the Nuṣayriyya and other non-orthodox Shīʿī sects on the other, but rather a tactical need for their collabora-
tion under Mamlûk rule. Indeed, al-Ḥillî’s *Khulāṣat al-aqwāl* demonstrates an extremely negative attitude concerning the founders of the Nuṣayrî sect. Ibn Nuṣayr is mentioned as a scholar who was cursed by the Imām ‘Alī al-Hādī, and al-Khaṣibî is described as “possessing a corrupted theology, a liar, a holder of a cursed belief which should be rejected”. Nevertheless, another description of Ibn Nuṣayr appears elsewhere in the same book, where he is mentioned as being presented in the book of ḍuʿafāʾ (unreliable transmitters of Ḥadīth) of Ibn al-Ghulāfî (Imāmī scholar of the eleventh century) as the eponym of the Nuṣayrî sect, but is described as “one of the most respected men of Basra in knowledge” (*min afād il ahl al-Basra ʿilman*). It is interesting that the Nuṣayrîs and their founders are condemned by al-Ḥillî but are never excluded from the Muslim community as they are by al-Majlisî. They are cursed but not declared heretics or atheists. The reason for this indulgence seems to be more complex than a tactical alliance against the Sunnî enemy.

1.3 *The ambivalent attitude towards the Ghulāt*

It is difficult to reach a decisive conclusion concerning the question of the difference between Mufawwaḍa and Muqaṣṣira and between the Uṣūlî and the Akhbārîs attitude towards the Nuṣayrîs. Although it seems that the Uṣūlî permission for *ijtihād* enables a more liberal view concerning mystical sects, a further study covering more sources should be undertaken. The indulgent attitude towards the Nuṣayrîs is perhaps not merely the result of the late Uṣūlî–Akhbārî conflict but also that of the special status of the Ghulāt in early Shī’ism.

The Imāmī ambivalence does not concern merely the Nuṣayrîs, but also the Ghulāt who preceded them. In his study of early Shī’ism, Leyakat Takim notes that in Imāmī literature there is an ambivalent attitude towards Jābir ibn Yazīd al-Jufî, a well-known ghâlî from Kufa (and a Nuṣayrî saint). Some consider him an “extremist” and some a reliable transmitter of traditions. Shī’i biographers even defend

---

27 Ibid., p. 405.
him against the Sunnī accusation of insanity by explaining that his behavior was a result of his practice of *taqiyya* in order to prevent his arrest by the Umayyad authorities. Al-Ḥillī is content to describe Abū 'l-Khaṭṭāb as a “cursed person” (*malʿūn*) and Mufaḍḍal as an unreliable transmitter (*daʿīf*) who backed Abū 'l-Khaṭṭāb but attacked the other Ghulāt. He cites al-Kashshī’s condemnation and praise of Mufaḍḍal (*barāʾa* and *madhī*-thanā*'). The ambivalence begins with the first *ghālī* ‘Abdallāh ibn Saba’. According to Imāmī tradition, when ‘Alī ordered that Ibn Saba’ be burnt because he claimed the divinity of the Imām, his followers urged him to reconsider, saying: “Would you kill a person who propagates love for the family of the Prophet and loyalty to the Imāms and the denunciation (*barāʾa*) of your enemies?” ‘Alī then changed his decision and expelled him to al-Madāʾin. This decision was merely symbolic, since it was difficult to excommunicate the Ghulāt who were the most zealous propagators of the Shīʿa. Al-Khaṣībī was not the first *ghālī* who was also considered an Imāmī authority. Mufaḍḍal ibn ‘Umar, the most cited *ghālī* in the Nūṣayrī literature and a saint in their theology, appears in al-Majlisī’s *Bihār al-anwār* as an important Imāmī authority. For example, Mufaḍḍal is one of the witnesses to the transmission of the *wasīyya* (spiritual testament to lead the community) from the Imām Jaʿfar to his son Mūsā ‘l-Kāzīm. He is said to have received personal instructions from Jaʿfar in matters of medicine, theology and liturgy. It is also mentioned that Jaʿfar ordered that Mufaḍḍal be cursed when he heard that he claimed the Imām’s ability to control the welfare of people (rizq). Like al-Ḥillī, al-Majlisī also accuses Mufaḍḍal of backing Abū 'l-Khaṭṭāb. It is interesting to note that al-Nawbakhtī does not mention Mufaḍḍal in his *Firaq al-Shīʿa*, a fact that indicates he did not consider him to be a *ghālī* at all.

30 Al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq al-Shīʿa*, p. 22.
32 Ibid., vol. 59, p. 259.
33 Ibid., vol. 48, p. 22.
34 Ibid., vol. 88, p. 200.
36 Ibid., p. 323.
In his *taqiyya* al-Khašîbî makes a clever use of Mufadḍal’s mystical traditions, which he cites in his writings for his sect and also of his orthodox traditions in the book dedicated to the Imāmī Ḥamdānīds.

The explanation for this odd ambivalence seems to be the awareness of the Imāmī scholars that the Ghulāt, whom they rejected as heretics after the *ghayba*, had been the main developers of theological ideas in the Shi‘a, such as the obligation to curse the first three Caliphs and the *sahāba* who rejected ‘Alī, the belief in the divine light transmitted from one Imām to his successor and that of the return of the Imām at the end of time (*raj‘a*). All these beliefs were originally considered as *ghulūw* but were later adopted by orthodox Shi‘ism. Some beliefs of the Ghulāt were rejected but preserved in some circles that later became mystical sects, such as Shaykhism and Bahā‘ism in nineteenth-century Persia.

Muḥammad Amir-Moezzi’s work on early Shi‘ism sheds light on the status of the Ghulāt. Basing his theory on early Imāmī sources, *Baṣā‘ir al-darajāt* of al-Ṣaffār al-Qummi (d. 290/930) in particular, he concludes that the original Shi‘ī community contained two circles, external and internal. The first was the mass of believers, the ‘āmma, initiated only in the exoteric religion, the *zhāhir*. This external circle was not far from Sunnism in theological matters. The second was the inner circle, the exalted minority of the *khāṣṣa* who were close to the Imām, and who were initiated into the mystical knowledge, the *bātin*. In this internal circle the main ideas of the Shi‘a were shaped, based on the idea that the Imām possessed supernatural powers and shared mystical knowledge (*‘ilm*) with his close intimates. This two-cycle structure was a means to preserve *taqiyya*. When someone from the inner circle exposed its secrets, the Imām cursed him not for his words, but for violating the *taqiyya*. In most cases, this condemnation did not involve excommunication, and some Ghulāt passed from the inner circle of an Imām to that of his successor (such as the passage of Ibn Nuṣayr from the circle of ‘Alī al-Hādī to that of Ḥasan al-‘Askarī).

---

37 See, for example, the tradition in which Ja‘far is said to explain to Mufadḍal the levels of transmigration: *ARM*, pp. 22–23.
38 *HK*, pp. 392–444.
40 Ibid., pp. 313–315.
A paragraph in the *Umm al-kitāb* backs the hypothesis that the Ghulāt were criticized for violating the *taqiyya* and not for the contents of their preaching. According to this paragraph, some known mystics, such as Jābir al-Juʿfī and Jābir ibn ʿAbdallāh, claimed before the Imām al-Bāqir that Ibn Sabaʾ did not deserve his cruel death and that they believed in the same doctrines for which he was killed. Then al-Bāqir explained to them that Ibn Sabaʾ should not have revealed a secret that would be revealed only by the *mahdī* at the end of time.⁴¹

From this some important conclusions can be drawn. The Ghulāt were not a marginal group but a part of the inner circle of the Imām. The Ghulāt transmitted traditions directly from the Imām and preached in his name. Sometimes they claimed openly to have received esoteric knowledge from him and were accused of *ghulūw*. Some of the Ghulāt took a further step and claimed that they also received divine powers from him. They were then excommunicated and sometimes even put to death by the Sunnī authorities. After the *ghayba* there was a need to consolidate the Shiʿa in order to prevent the annihilation of the Shiʿī community that had been left without an Imām. The inner circle remained without its source of legitimacy, and its role in creating new ideas became unnecessary and even disruptive in the formation of a theology that would be adequate for the majority of the Shiʿīs, the ʿāmma. In this light we should understand the excommunication of the Namīriyya/Numayriyya and later of the Nuṣayriyya as part of the general rejection of the mystic groups during the creation of a moderate Imāmi Shīʿīsm. The Nuṣayrī leaders continued the work of the inner circle by developing and summing up the traditions of the mystics.

To conclude, two attitudes were developed towards the Nuṣayrīs. One attitude rejects them totally together with the rest of the Ghulāt, considering their mysticism to be a dangerous rival to Imāmi orthodoxy. Another attitude is more indulgent for theological as well as tactical reasons, knowing that the Ghulāt come from the same source as the Imāmiyya and share some mutual beliefs and the same history, and that as such, they can serve as useful political allies if needed. These interests were as relevant in late medieval history as they are still today.

---

2. The Sunnī takfir against the Nuṣayrīs

While it is possible to speak of two attitudes in Shī‘i thought, in Sunnī medieval literature there is conformity as to the total rejection of the Nuṣayrīs. The Sunnī scholars used takfir, a declaration of their heresy (kufr), since Shī‘ism was viewed as a problematic Islamic belief, and its extremist version, that of the Ghulāt, was considered completely unacceptable. The Shāfi‘ī heresiographer ‘abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1037), in his Farq bayna ‘l-firaq, considers the Nuṣayrīs, whom he calls by their old name Namīriyya/Numayriyya, heretics together with the rest of the Ghulāt, since “they believe in other Gods not in Allāh”.42

His main accusation is that the sect believes in the incarnation (ḥulūl) of God in Ibn Nuṣayr as well as in the five members of the Prophet’s family: Muḥammad, ‘Alī, Fāṭima, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn (the ahl al-kisāʾ),43 a view that is in fact totally rejected in Nuṣayrī theology. Laoust explains that, as in the case of indulgence towards the Shī‘īs, the Sunnī attack also has political interests. The Farq bayna ‘l-firaq represents Sunnī restoration under Caliph al-Qādir (d. 422/1031) after the domination of the Shī‘ī Buyids.44 The hostility towards the Shī‘īs during the lifetime of ‘abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī would intensify in the late Middle Ages (twelfth–fourteenth centuries) following the extremely violent activity of Shī‘ī sects in Syria and Iran against the Sunnī authorities, particularly of the “Hashīshi” Niẓārī-Īsmā‘īlīs. Contrary to historical truth, Shī‘īs were held to blame for the fall of the western Mediterranean coast and Jerusalem in particular into the hands of the Christian Crusaders.45

Another typical Sunnī argument after the thirteenth century, this time based on historical fact, is the accusation against the Shī‘īs that they collaborated with the Mongols to destroy the ‘Abbāsid caliphate.46 The peak of this anti-Shī‘ī polemic is evident in the writings of Ibn Taymiyya, the well-known Sunnī Ḥanbālī scholar of the fourteenth century, whose attack against the Nuṣayrīs was part of a general takfir of all the Shī‘ī sects in Syria. Ibn Taymiyya represents the most severe Sunnī

42 ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, al-Farq bayna ‘l-firaq, p. 239.
43 Ibid., p. 242.
46 For the historical events that confirm this accusation, see Halm, Shiism, p. 184.
attitude towards the Nuṣayrīs, which was not content with declaring them heretics, but also demanded their extermination.

2.1 *The fatwā of Ibn Taymiyya*

The *fatwā* of Ibn Taymiyya was discussed earlier from a historical perspective. In this chapter the document itself and two other related documents are examined, as well as their significance to the Sunnī attitude towards the Nuṣayrī sect. Since the last translation of this document into English a century and a half ago by E. Salisbury (*JAOS*, 1851) suffered from many omissions and was criticized for its inaccuracy by St. Guyard, a new translation is offered here (see Appendix 8). St. Guyard’s article concerning this *fatwā*, and containing its translation into French, dates from the end of the nineteenth century. The Arabic text used by St. Guyard, which was taken from the manuscripts of the French Societé Asiatique, seems to be the most reliable Arabic source, since other versions of the same *fatwā* published later on were altered or touched, as explained below. The text contains two parts, an anonymous *istiftā*, which is a judicial consultation, and a *fatwā*, a judicial decision by Ibn Taymiyya. The study of the two parts reveals considerable differences between them. The first part shows a great deal of knowledge of the Nuṣayrī religion, albeit superficial and inaccurate. However, this knowledge is not evident in Ibn Taymiyya’s response. Since other *fatwās* of Ibn Taymiyya are dealt with later, *fatwā* (a) is treated as the main one.

(a) *istiftā*

What is the view of the noble scholars the religious leaders about the Nuṣayrīyya, may Allāh forgive them? How could they help to unveil the clear truth and oppress the owners of lie, concerning the Nuṣayrīyya, who believe in the permissibility of wine, in the transmigration of the souls, in the antiquity of the world and the denial of the resurrection?

---

47 This chapter is partly based, with some additions and added translations, on Y. Friedman, "Ibn Taymiyya’s *fatāwa* against the Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawī sect" *Der Islam*, 82/2 (2005), pp. 349–363.
49 This hint, although not emphasized or detailed, was given by Dussaud in his *Histoire et religion des Nosairis*, pp. XXV–XXVI, 29–30.
of the dead and [the existence of] heaven and hell out of our world. [They believe] that the five prayers represent five names which are ʿAlī, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, Muḥsin and Fāṭima, that the mentioning of these five releases them from the cleaning from impurity and from the rest of the obligations of the prayer. [See the rest in Appendix 8.].

fatwā

These people called Nuṣayriyya, they and the other kinds of Qarmatians, the Bāṭinīs, are more heretical than the Jews and the Christians and even more than several heterodox groups. Their damage to the [Muslim] community of [the Prophet] Muḥammad, may God pray for him and bless him, is greater than the damage of the infidels who fight [against the Muslims] such as the heretic Mongols, the Crusaders and others, since they [Nuṣayris and other Bāṭinīs] are pretending before the uneducated Muslims that they are Shiʿīs and loyal to the People of the House [ahl al-bayt] but in reality they do not believe in God, in his messenger, in his holy book, in obligation or prohibition, [they do not believe] in reward and punishment, in paradise and hell, or in any of the messengers prior to Muḥammad, may God pray for him and bless him, nor in one of the previous religions [prior to Islam]. They rather use the words of God and his messenger that are known to the Muslim scholars and would give them allegoric interpretation based on matters they invent and call them the esoterical sciences. [See the rest of the answer in Appendix 8.]

While the question focuses on the Nuṣayrīs, the first line of the response shows clearly that Ibn Taymiyya considered them to be part of the Ismāʿīlī branch of Shiʿism. Moreover, as will be demonstrated, it becomes clear in the following part of the fatwā that he is mainly addressing the Ismāʿīlīs. The name Nuṣayriyya is mentioned only once in the entire fatwā, in the opening phrase cited above. In another part, Ibn Taymiyya mentions the various names of the sect under discussion: Mulāhīda, Ismāʿīliyya, Qarāmiṭa, Bāṭiniyya, Khurramiyya and Muḥammara, but the name Nuṣayriyya is missing. All these names, excluding the pejorative name Mulāhīda (apostates) are included in the list of names given by al-Ghazālī’s Fadāʾih al-bāṭiniyya (twelfth century), which deals exclusively with the Ismāʿīlīs: Bāṭiniyya, Qarāmiṭa, Qarāmiṭa, Khurramiyya, Khurramiyya, Ismāʿīliyya, Sabʿiyya, Bābakiyya, Muḥammara and Taʿlīmiyya.50

---

Nevertheless, other versions of the same fatwā differ from that of St. Guyard. There are serious discrepancies between the versions appearing in three collections of Ibn Taymiyya’s fatāwā: al-Fatāwā ’l-kubrā,51 Mukhtašar al-fatāwā ’l-Misriyya52 and another Majmū’ fatāwā.53 In these three versions, the same paragraph occurs with the list of the names of the sect, but in a different order and with the addition of the Nuṣayris: Mulāhidā, Qarāmiṭa, Bāṭiniyya, Ismāʿiliyya, Nuṣayriyya, Khurramiyya and Muḥammara. It seems reasonable that St. Guyard’s version is Ibn Taymiyya’s original text, while the other three versions, printed a century later, have been altered.

It appears that these versions were altered from their original form to agree with the version of a disciple of Ibn Taymiyya, the author of the Mukhtašar, Badr al-Din Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Baʿlī (d. 778/1376).54 Al-Baʿlī even permitted himself to add one line to his master’s fatwā. On the assumption that the original list of names of the discussed sects is the version of St. Guyard, then the Nuṣayris are mentioned only once in the opening of the fatwā. The hypothesis that the fatwā is focused on the Ismāʿili, not the Nuṣayris, is also based on semantic arguments.

The theological accusations against the sect are all directed against Ismāʿili doctrines. It is true that some could also be relevant to the Nuṣayriyya, such as the allegorical interpretation of Islamic law and the influence of Greek philosophy. Nevertheless, the other accusations, such as the inspiration of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ,55 do not seem to be related to the Nuṣayris. Even if we doubt that Ibn Taymiyya is focusing on Ismāʿili theological issues, it is clear that he points to specific historical accusations which most likely do not refer to the Nuṣayris,

---

54 See a short biography of this shaykh in al-Baʿlī, Mukhtašar al-fatāwā ʿl-Misriyya, p. 15.
but are directed at the activities of the Ismāʿīlī sect and *daʿwa* (propaganda) in the course of the preceding centuries. These accusations mainly consist of the killing of pilgrims in Mecca (294/906), stealing of the Black Stone of the Kaʿba (318/930–341/952), collaborating with enemies of Islam (mainly the Crusaders and the Mongols), taking over Egypt for two centuries (the Fātimids 359/969–567/1171) and helping the Mongols to murder the Caliph of Baghdad (656/1258).56

In conclusion, Ibn Taymiyya’s *fatwā* demonstrates his confusion between Nuṣayrīs and Ismāʿīlīs that probably originated from his incorrect assumption that the Nuṣayrīs are a splinter group of the Ismāʿīlī sect. This could be explained by the fact that during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the Nizārī branch of Ismāʿīlism took possession of numerous fortresses in the Nuṣayrī mountains, what is now called Jabal Anṣāyriyya in Syria. As a result, the Ismāʿīlīs and the Nuṣayrīs shared the same geographical territory for the two centuries previous to the time of Ibn Taymiyya.57 In addition, there are several similarities between the two groups concerning certain theological issues, such as cyclical history and emanative creation, since the Ghulāt influenced both Nuṣayrism and early Ismāʿīlism. Al-Ṭawīl, the modern ‘Alawī historian, in his history *Tārikh al-‘Alawiyyīn*, describes peaceful meetings between the two sects at ʿĀna, and then in Ṣāfīṭā in 690/1291, in an attempt to unify the two groups.58 Whether those meetings took place or not, the similarity between the two sects, who were under the influence of Neoplatonic thought and developed from the same Shiʿī source, cannot be doubted.

Ibn Taymiyya’s text not only reflects confusion between Nuṣayrīyya and Ismāʿīliyya, but also demonstrates the gap between the vast knowledge available about the Ismāʿīlīs, and the poor information about the Nuṣayrīs. This difference in the information available to Sunnīs about the two groups can be explained by the fact that the Ismāʿīlī doctrine had been disseminated throughout Egypt and Syria by the Fātimid Empire’s *daʿwa* (propaganda) during the tenth century and by its Nizārī branch in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Unlike them, the Nuṣayrīs, who were weak and oppressed herdsmen, developed a


58 *TA*, p. 365. There is no trace of these meetings in other sources.
strong tradition of *taqiyya*. A phrase in the main *istiftāʾ* (a) provides another explanation:

Their ways were concealed from many people during the period of the Crusader occupation, [as they were] isolated in the coastal lands; when Islam came, their manners and wrong beliefs were veiled.59

Ibn Taymiyya’s lack of knowledge concerning the Nuṣayrīs can also be demonstrated in the other *fatwās* he issued against the sect in Syria.

2.2  *Other fatwās: against Nuṣayrīs and Druzes and the Nuṣayrī mahdī case*

Two other *fatwās* of Ibn Taymiyya, (b) and (c), dealing with the Nuṣayrīs, are preserved in *al-Fatāwā al-kubrā*. Since these two are shorter than the main *fatwā* studied above (a), their translation is presented here, not in the Appendix.

The following short *fatwā* (b) is a general legal decision about how the Nuṣayrīs and Druze sects should be treated by Muslims:

(b)  *istiftāʾ*

A question has been raised: what is [Islam’s] judgment for the Durziyya and the Nuṣayriyya?*

*fatwā*

These Durziyya and Nuṣayriyya are heretics according to [the judgment of] all Muslims; their [methods of] slaughter is not permitted for eating nor [can a Muslim] marry their women. They refuse to pay the *jizya* [poll tax] and are considered *murtaddūn* [sing. *murtadd*, apostate]. They are neither Muslims, nor Jews, nor Christians. They do not accept the obligations of the five prayers, the fast of *Ramaḍān* or the pilgrimage. They do not forbid what Allāh has forbidden [such] as [eating] car- rion and [drinking] wine. Even if they apparently declare their belief [in Islam] and accept its doctrines, they should still be considered her- etics by all Muslims. Regarding the Nuṣayriyya, they are a sect of Abū Shu’ayb Muḥammad ibn Nuṣayr, who was one of the extremist Shīʿīs who believed that ʿAlī is God. They [the Nuṣayrīs] recite the [confes- sional] phrases: I testify that there is no other God but Ḥāydara [lion,

one of ‘Ali’s nicknames] the transcendent the esoteric/ and that there is no Veil but Muhammad the righteous the faithful / and that there is no path to him but Salmān the powerful.\textsuperscript{60}

This fatwā could be, among others, a later addition of Ibn Taymiyya’s disciple Badr al-Dīn al-Bā’lī, since in some versions of the \textit{al-Fatāwā al-kubrā} this specific fatwā does not appear at all.\textsuperscript{61} Texts by al-Bā’lī, the Ḥanbalī shaykh of Ba’albak, reflect an effort to include the Druzes in the attack against the Nuṣayrīs. The same effort is revealed in his \textit{Mukhtaṣar} version of the principal fatwā (a), in which the opening phrase of Ibn Taymiyya is as follows: “This people called the Nuṣayrīs”; al-Bā’lī adds a comment “settled in the Druze mountains of Syria”.\textsuperscript{62} This geographical detail does not exist in any other version of the main fatwā (a) of Ibn Taymiyya against the Nuṣayrīs. We should understand this inclusion of the Druzes as the need of al-Bā’lī to attack this sect, which was widespread in his own region.

The second short fatwā (c) deals with the case of the Nuṣayrī mahdī, the revolt in Jabala that took place in 717/1317.

\textit{istifṭā’}

A question: about a group of herdsmen who believed in the Nuṣayrī doctrine; all believed in a man about whom they had variety of opinions. Some claimed he was God, some said he was a prophet sent [by God], others said he was Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan, meaning the mahdī. They ordered that anyone who should meet him [the mahdī] should prostrate themselves before him. In doing so they revealed their heresy [as they did in] cursing the Prophet Muḥammad’s Companions. They revealed their refusal to obey and their determination to fight. Are we obliged to fight them and kill their warriors? Are we permitted [to hold as captives] their children and [to confiscate] their property?


\textsuperscript{61} In the version used here (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1987), the fatwā against the Nuṣayrīs and the Druzes is the one preceding the fatwā against the Nuṣayrī mahdī. In another Egyptian version, this fatwā does not appear at all; see \textit{al-Fatāwā al-kubrā} (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥaditha, 1966), vol. 1, pp. 357–359.

fatwā

Praise be to God. These [Nuṣayrīs] should be fought as long as they resist, until they accept the law of Islam. The Nuṣayriyya [springs] from the worst heretical people guided by the devil, they are from the worst murtaḍḍūn [apostates]; their fighters should be killed and their property should be confiscated. [The next part is a discussion about the question of how their children should be treated and whether they should be taken as slaves] . . . The Nuṣayriyya do not conceal their matter [i.e. their religion]; moreover, all Muslims know them well. They do not pray the five prayers, they do not fast during Ramadān, nor do they carry out the pilgrimage. They do not pay zakāt (alms), and they do not admit that it [paying zakāt] is an obligation. They permit [drinking] wine and other prohibited things. They believe that ʿAlī is God; they recite: “I testify that there is no other God but Ḥaydara the transcendent the esoteric/ and that there is no veil but Muḥammad the righteous the faithful/ and that there is no path to him but Salmān the powerful” . Even if they do not reveal their extremism, and do not declare that this liar is the expected mahdī, they should be fought. This was ʿAlī ibn Abī Tālib’s case [when he was] ordered by the Prophet to deal with the khawārij63 . . . [the following part is a discussion about their spoils and how they should be treated if they surrender or show regret] . . . they should be compelled to obey Islamic law; if they refuse they must be killed . . . Those who lead them astray should be put to death even if they show regret . . . so, without any doubt, this devil [the Nuṣayrī mahdī] must be killed. God knows better.64

The two short fatwās (b, c), show clearly that Ibn Taymiyya’s knowledge of the Nuṣayrī doctrines is not based on the sect’s own sources, but on the information he had received from local Syrians that is included in the main istiftāʾ (a). This assumption is based on the fact that, in his accusations in the two short fatwās, Ibn Taymiyya repeats the information mentioned in the anonymous question. This is evident when he cites from the main istiftāʾ (a), almost word for word, the Nuṣayrī shahāda (declaration of belief) about the Nuṣayrī triad of ʿAlī-Muḥammad-Salmān.

The two short fatwās (b, c) mention other elements from the main istiftāʾ (a): the belief in ʿAlī’s divinity and the rejection of the pillars of Islam.65 Ibn Taymiyya’s only addition to the information in the

63 The Khawārij were the deserters of the camp of ʿAlī and later a Muslim sect. See G. Levi Della Vida, “Khawārij”, EI2, V (1985), pp. 1106–1109.
"istiftāʾ (a) is the fact that the Nuṣayrīs are followers of Muḥammad ibn Nuṣayr, a fact known to Muslim heresiographers since the twelfth century. Ibn Taymiyya appears to have used the information concerning the Nuṣayrī sect included in the question he received from local Syrians, who were probably better informed about the sect’s faith. But even that knowledge detailed in the first istiftāʾ (a) could have been based only on oral information and rumors, because the istiftāʾ (a) does not refer to any specific book, and explains that the Nuṣayrīs conceal their religion from the Muslims. Even the two short istiftāʾs (b, c) do not reveal more information concerning the Nuṣayrīs than the main istiftāʾ (a). Although the two short fatwās (b, c) focus on the Nuṣayrīs without confusing them with other sects, they give a very limited, superficial and sometimes even wrong description of their religion.

Ibn Taymiyya was wrongly informed about the Nuṣayrīs, to the extent of confusing them with the Ismāʿīlīs. When he needed to describe their doctrines, he cited from the anonymous istiftāʾs concerning the Nuṣayrīs, since he did not have any other source of information.

2.3 Context and significance of the fatwās

The study of Ibn Taymiyya’s three fatwās against the Nuṣayrīs offers some conclusions concerning the order in which they were written. While the third fatwā (c) clearly refers to the Nuṣayrīs’ messianic uprising (717/1317), the second (b), dealing with the Druze and Nuṣayrī sects, cannot be associated with any precise period. Nevertheless, the first and main fatwā (a) studied by St. Guyard should be placed first historically, since elements from its istiftāʾ are repeated in the two later fatwās. It could have been written in 705/1305 when, according to the historian Ibn al-Wardi (d. 748/1348), Ibn Taymiyya issued a fatwā against the Nuṣayrīs, and participated in a raid against them to secure the roads of al-Zānimayn as a part of the Mamlūk raid against the Shīʿīs of Qisrawān. But it seems more likely that it was written in

66 Ibn Taymiyya, ibid., p. 513.
67 See, for example, al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153), Al-milal wa-ʾl-nihāl, pp. 192–193.
the same period as the second short *fatwā* (c), that is, at the time of the *mahdi*’s revolt. This seems to have been the view of the historian al-Maqrizi (d. 1364/1441) who cited a portion of the main *istiftā*’ (a) almost verbatim, when describing the uprising. Al-Maqrizi notes that the Nuṣayrīs believe in “permitting [the drinking] of wine, [believe in] transmigration, the antiquity of the world, deny the resurrection, deny paradise and hell, and that the five prayers are manifested by Ismā’īl [in the *istiftā*’ by ‘Ali, a difference that should again raise the question concerning Sunnī acquaintance with the Nuṣayrīs], Ḥasan, Ḥusayn, Muḥsin and Fāṭima…and that God is ‘Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib”.70 The *fatwā* of Ibn Taymiyya was issued because of the need of the Mamlūks for the religious legitimacy to exterminate the sect. This explains why Ibn Taymiyya, in his main *fatwā* (a), shows much fear in accepting their assistance, which might lead to the opposite result—their acceptance as part of the Muslim community. In order to express his fear, Ibn Taymiyya compares them with the *munāfiqūn* (hypocrites), who are Muslims from the period of the Prophet Muḥammad who had not truly converted and only harmed Islam from within.71 He adds: “using these hypocrite infidels…in Muslim battle camps, castles or corps is like using wolves to pasture sheep”.72 Ibn Taymiyya’s fear seems also to be due to the lack of motivation to liquidate the Nuṣayrīs, who cultivated Muslim lands and even contributed to the struggle against foreign invaders. In the main *istiftā*’ (a) there is a question that demonstrates how marginal a subject the Nuṣayrīs were in the Muslim political agenda of the time, and how low the motivation to exterminate them:

Is it permitted to kill the above-mentioned Nuṣayrīs and to confiscate their property, or not?…Is this better and more rewarding than preparing the war against the armies of the Mongols in their territory [that of the Nuṣayrīs] and the attack of the Chinese territory, and that of the Zanj [Africa], or is this [oppressing the Nuṣayrīs] better? Can a Nuṣayrī
holy fighter be considered a murābiṭ [pl. murābiṭūn, frontier defender] and should he be rewarded as a murābiṭ in the border towns by the sea preventing the invasion of the Franks [Crusaders], or is this [oppressing them] more rewarding? Is it obligatory for someone who knows the doctrine of the mentioned [Nuṣayris] to publish their matter and to help eliminate their heresy and spread Islam among them? Then maybe God may turn their descendants and their into sons Muslims, or is it permitted to him to overlook and ignore [their heretical doctrine]?73

Ibn Taymiyya’s judgment, that the Nuṣayris had sinned with ridda (apostasy) and deserved death, had no influence in the long term. Even the motivation to convert them by force did not last long, and mosques built in their villages by the Mamlūks were never used for prayers. The sect has survived to this day in the same territory while preserving its original religious beliefs.

However, the main interest concerns the question of the influence of the fatwās of Ibn Taymiyya, or how they shaped the general view of Sunnī scholars towards the Nuṣayri sect. Although they did not succeed in achieving their immediate goal to exterminate the sect, they certainly had a great influence on Sunnī thought in the short and long terms. The main fatwā (a) of Ibn Taymiyya is cited by almost every Sunnī who wishes to attack the Nuṣayris as heretics, from his time to the present. The question as to whether his fatwā applies to only the members of the Ḥanbalī school of law or to all Muslims demands a separate study. Although Ḥanbalism was limited to the Arabian Peninsula following the influence of Ḥanafism in Syria under the Ottoman Empire, Ibn Taymiyya was viewed as Shaykh al-Islam by many admirers from all four schools of Sunnī Islam. Ibn Taymiyya himself tried to present his view as that of the Ḥanbalīs, the Ḥanafīs, the Shāfiʿīs and the Mālikīs.74 There is no doubt that his view was adopted by some of the most important Sunnī scholars of the Mamlūk period: the Syrian Ibn Kathīr (d. 632/1234) and the Egyptians al-Maqrīzī (d. 774/1372) and Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī. Nevertheless, the fact that no other fatwā against the Nuṣayris can be found in any Muslim source indicates that Ibn Taymiyya is the only eminent scholar to have explicitly declared their heresy and that his takfīr was not echoed by other important scholars.

73 Ibid., p. 166.
2.4  Refutation of Nuṣayrīs together with Shīʿism

There is a fundamental difference between the Shīʿī attack against the Nuṣayrīs and the attack of Ibn Taymiyya. The Imāmī critics reflect a theological controversy inside the Shīʿa concerning the limits of mystical interpretation. Ibn Taymiyya’s attack is part of his general refutation of Shīʿism. In his Minhāj al-Sunna, Ibn Taymiyya explains that the goal of Shīʿism, called rāfida (opposition), is to destroy Islam (hadm al-İslām). The Shīʿīs are to blame because of their invention of the taʾwīl, the allegorical interpretation of the Qurʾān, which is for Ibn Taymiyya a tahrīf, a falsification of the original meanings. For him, Shīʿism is an invention of the convert Jew ʿAbdallāh ibn Sabaʿ, a mixture of Judaism, Christianity and ghulūw. Taqiyya is viewed as doctrine of lies and hypocrisy in order to conceal heresy and bidʿa (innovation, a doctrine added after the time of the Prophet Muhammad). However, a worse accusation is that the Shīʿīs legitimize the most extreme heretical groups—mainly the Nuṣayrīs and the Ismaʿīlīs. For Ibn Taymiyya, these two sects are infidels who attribute divinity to human beings, such as their šaykhhs and their admired saints, who believe in Zoroastrian and Sabean heretical doctrines under cover of Shīʿ identity. In the Majmūʿ al-fatāwā, Ibn Taymiyya explains that “their religion [that of the Shīʿīs] admits into the Muslim community every heretic and apostate, as they did when they admitted the Nuṣayrīs”. In a picturesque description, he explains that: “Heresy enters [Islam] through the door of Shīʿism”. As proof for the rightfulness of his views, he claims that ʿAlī himself ordered the burning of Ibn Sabaʿ for his ghulūw and his demand that the first three caliphs be cursed, and that the Nuṣayrīs attributed to Jaʿfar al-Sādiq words he had never said. He adds that their isolation in mountainous territories contributed to their igno-

---

76 Ibid., vol. 3, p. 404.
77 Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 21–23.
78 Ibid., pp. 68–69.
80 Al-Ḥanbalī, Majmūʿ fatāwā, vol. 4, p. 471. See the same accusation in ibid., vol. 28, p. 528; vol. 35, p. 415.
81 Ibid., vol. 22, p. 367.
83 Al-Ḥanbalī, Majmūʿ fatāwā, vol. 13, p. 244.
rformance of Islam,84 that the Nuṣayrīs flourished only under foreign rule85 and that they collaborated, as he claims, with all the enemies of Islam.86 In an exceptional accusation against the Nuṣayrīs, Ibn Taymiyya links them with Şūfism, more particularly with the Şūfi Shaykh ʿAfīf al-Dīn Sulaymān al-Tilimsānī (d. 690/1291). This is an interesting detail that is not confirmed elsewhere.87

Despite the marginalization of Ḥanbalism in the centuries that followed, it seems that the fatwā of Ibn Taymiyya gave legal confirmation for the views of Sunnī authorities concerning what they called the “Nuṣayrī heresy”. As a result, the Ottomans, who were to succeed the Mamlūk dynasty in the sixteenth century, would leave the Nuṣayrīs (concentrated in present-day Syria and north Turkey) without any legal status, as opposed to monotheistic groups, until the nineteenth century.88 Unfortunately, since there are no reliable sources concerning the situation of the Nuṣayrīs between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries, we cannot estimate the influence of the Sunnī takfīr on the sect’s situation during this long period.

3. The Nuṣayrī identity through the Dīwān of al-Khaṣībī

As to the question of the image of the members of the sect concerning their own identity, determining the self-image of a sect is a difficult task. A religious identity may change through centuries of historical turbulence, immigration, and different external influences. Although the Silsilat al-turāth sheds new light on the Nuṣayrī religion, it contains

---

85 Ibid., vol. 6, p. 418.
86 Ibid., vol. 7, pp. 211, 414. See the same accusation in the main fatwā (a) in Appendix 8.
87 According to Ibn Taymiyya, the Nuṣayrīs admired al-Tilimsānī who advanced the Şūfi doctrine of wahdat al-wujūd (unity of being). He wrote a book for them and said when asked about his relations with them: “A part of me is Nuṣayrī [and the other is Şūfi]”; see ibid., vol. 2, pp. 626–627.
sources mainly from the ninth to the eleventh centuries. In order to answer a general question as to the Nuṣayrī identity, a source is needed that represents a wider historical period, the Dīwān of al-Khašībī, the best and only example of a pseudo-epigraphic composition. The Dīwān (see Appendix 1) was written by several shaykhs throughout the history of the sect, and as a result, it contains several levels of Arabic, a variety of styles, and even internal doctrinal evolution. Every Nuṣayrī poet added his poem in the name of al-Khašībī, in order to explain doctrines, to memorize his biography, and to canonize his doctrines.89 The Dīwān of al-Khašībī has not been studied before, although it is a crucial document for the understanding of the Nuṣayrī religion. Here for the first time an English summary of the part of the Dīwān which can be proved to have been originally written by al-Khašībī (see Appendix 6) is offered. In Chapter 2 the Dīwān was used extensively as a reference for the sect’s theology. In this chapter, Nuṣayrī identity is presented as it is reflected through the document.

In the original parts of the Dīwān, al-Khašībī attacks the Imāmī Shi‘īs whom he calls muqāṣṣira. In the later additions, the attacks concentrate mainly on sects that are found in Iraq and Syria. These attacks were important for the creation of the sect’s identity: the split from the Imāmīs and the definition of what are considered by the Nuṣayrīs as heretical doctrines. Some of the groups are known by their names, but there appear to be other groups, while some sects cannot be identified at all since they no longer exist and do not appear in other sources. The cursed groups have nicknames, which are repeated in the Dīwān,90 and are used to dishonor them.

i. Main groups and streams
   - muqāṣṣir/muqāṣṣirānī/man qaṣṣara fī ʿilm/sāqīt (deficient Shi‘īs/Imāmīs).

89 Since the Damascus version of this Dīwān is later than that of Manchester (see Appendix 1), it probably contains some new poems, written after the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This may explain why Habīb thought that the Manchester version is incomplete; see S. Habīb, Dīwān al-Khašībī maʿa sharḥ li-ʾl-rumūz al-bātiniyya al-wārida fīhi: dirāsa wa-tahqīq wa-sharḥ (Beirut: Muʿassasat al-ʿĀlamī li-ʾl-Matbūʿāt, 2001), p. 21.

90 For the nicknames of the rival sects in the Dīwān, see DKH, fol. 19a, 27b–28a, 44b–45a, 53b, 62b–63a, 71b, 89a, 98a, 99a.
• nāṣib/murji/marjū (nāṣibīs, who are hostile to the Imāms, murjiʿīs, who accept authority, i.e. Sunnis).
• Hashwī (Hashwis, “populists”—literalists, who base theology only on tradition, maybe referring to the Ḥanbali Sunnis).
• Ḥanafiyya (Ḥanafī Sunnis).
• Muʿtazil/Jahmī (Muʿtazila, rationalist theologian/Jahmīs, a Muʿtazili group).
• Ḥallāja/Hālijin/haljawā /[followers of] Ḥallāj (Sufis).

ii. Rival sects
• ahmarī/ahmarānī/ahmariyīna/[whose followers are] ghāliyyūna (Ishāqīs followed by Ghulāt).
• Shārī/Shārīʿ (Shārīʿīs, Shiʿī followers of Shārīʿī, a rival of Ibn Naṣair).
• Bātrī (Batriyya, a Zaydī sub-sect).
• samʿal/samʿalī/samʿaliyyūna/[followers of the] Qarmatī (Ismāʿīlis/Qarmatians).
• Fadah/Fadāhī/Fadāhiyyat hāmān, wāqif/wāqifīn/ahl al-waqq wa-l-ḥira (the Fadāhīs appear as part of the Wāqifīs/Sevener Shiʿīs).
• ’Azqara/ʿAzqariyyāt (Azāriqa, a group of the Khawārij).

---

92 The Muʿtazilīs mentioned here may not be the well-known group, but rather another sub-sector of the Nuṣayris; see MN, fol. 137b; Bar-Asher and Kofsky, The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawi Religion, p. 19.
94 Al-Shahrastānī, al-Milal wa-ʾl-nihal, pp. 145–149.
95 Concerning the Zaydis and the Batris, see al-Shahrastānī, al-Milal wa-ʾl-nihal, pp. 153–156, 159–160.
iii. Unidentified groups

- labādī, banjī/banjawī/banjīyya.

This list reflects all the groups rejected by the Nuṣayrīs. Concerning their attitude to the Sunnīs, they follow the Shīʿī hard line of considering them as the nāṣibīs, i.e. enemies of the Imāms. This hostility to Sunnism is an echo of the accusations made against the Imāmīs. While the relations between Nuṣayrīs and Imāmīs are characterized by mutual criticism, those between Sunnīs and Nuṣayrīs are characterized by mutual hostility and unquestioned takfīr:

\[
\text{Imāmī Shīʿīs} \quad \text{Ghulāt} \quad \text{Nuṣayrīs} \quad \text{kufār} \quad \text{Sunnīs}
\]

\[
\text{Imāmī Shīʿīs} \quad \text{muqāṣṣira} \quad \text{Nuṣayrīs} \quad \text{nāṣiba} \quad \text{Sunnīs}
\]

3.1 Muslims

Having verified the negative means for Nuṣayrī self-identification, the positive definition as it appears in the Dīwān (backed by other sources of the sect) is now considered.

The Nuṣayrīs consider themselves complete Muslims, because they combine zāhir and bātin.\textsuperscript{100} The Qurʾān is the most cited book in their literature and it appears in the Dīwān as the holy book of the sect.\textsuperscript{101} We may doubt the authenticity of al-Jannān’s declaration in his Īdāh al-miṣbāh: “The religion for God is Islam” (inna ’l-dīn ’ind Allāh al-Islām; Qurʾān, Āl ’Imrān [3]:19),\textsuperscript{102} a citation from the Qurʾān that also appears in al-Adhanī’s Kitāb al-majmūʿ (chapter 16).\textsuperscript{103} The problem of the Īdāh al-miṣbāh’s reliability is dealt with in Appendix 1. But the terminology of the Nuṣayrī medieval leaders is typically Islamic: al-Jillī describes the duties of the zāhir and bātin as the sharīʿa (Islamic law) and cites another verse from the Qurʾān describing the religion as that of Islam: “Today I have concluded your religion for you and completed my blessing upon you and I have made Islam a religion for your satisfaction” (Qurʾān, al-Māʾida [5]:3).\textsuperscript{104} Al-Ṭabarānī, in his

\textsuperscript{100} DKH, fol. 22a, 122a.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., fol. 30b.
\textsuperscript{102} IM, p. 257.
\textsuperscript{103} BS, p. 26.
\textsuperscript{104} KBS, p. 270.
Hāwī fi 'ilm al-fatāwā, explains that the message of Islam is universal, since it is the same as that of all the monotheistic religions, but Islam is the most exalted revelation:

It is true that Islam is the conviction in God’s appearance and belief [īmān] and faith in him is by the truth of the esoteric knowledge [bi-haqīqat al-ma’rifa]. Even if the religious laws [sharā‘i, pl. of shari‘a] differ as to the prohibitions and permissions, in fact they do not differ because [all] the prophets and messengers referred to one God and there is no difference between them in the issue of the worship of God, except the fact that the Muhammadi appearance is exalted and that of the others [the messengers of other monotheistic religions] is less respectable. This is based on the exalted [God’s] words: “The might is to God, to his messenger and to his believers” [Qur’ān, al-Munāfiqūn (63): 8]. As to the other [monotheistic religions] he said: “Fight against those who do not believe in God, or in the last day [of judgment] and who do not prohibit what God and his messenger prohibited, who do not believe in the true religion, who have received the Holy Book [monotheistic religions], until they pay the jizya [poll tax] and are subordinated” [Qur’ān, al-Tawba (9): 29]. This description is not appropriate to someone who believes that he has a true heart and believes that the truth is in his heart and that Islam is not obligatory. How could such a person obtain the knowledge of the tawḥīd and the truth? . . . That is the reason why the master Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Husayn ibn Ḥamdān al-Khāṣibī, may God sanctify his soul, made his disciple know the Qur’ān by heart. But when we saw that it takes a long time and life is short so we abridged and permitted the study of only the short chapters [al-juz‘ al-mufassal,105 i.e. chapters 49 to 114], because they contain all the principles of the Qur’ān.

Al-Hasan ibn Shu’ba also uses Islamic terminology when he cites in his Ḥaqā‘iq asrār al-dīn the words of the Imām ʿAlī al-Ridā, that one who believes that God has a form, “deviates from the religion of Islam [kharaja ‘an millat al-Islām], because [knowing] God is only by extreme mystical monotheism [al-tawḥīd al-khālis]”.106

---

105 The chapters in the Qur’ān are divided into tuwal (very long chapters), mi‘un (approximately a hundred verses), mathāni (under a hundred) and mufassal (divided [by the basmala]), which are the short verses. See, for example, A. al-Laithy, What Everyone Should Know about the Qur’an (Antwerp: Garant, 2005), pp. 59–61.

106 HAD, pp. 35–36.
3.2 Ja’farī Shīʿīs

It is reflected through all the Dīwān, as well as other writings of the sect, that the Nuṣayrīs consider themselves Twelver Shīʿīs107 who believe that the Imāms are the sources of knowledge and expect the return of the last Imām, Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan as the mahdī. In his qasīda called Akālīl qudus (crowns of sanctity), al-Khaṣībī says:

(Describing the Prophet Muḥammad)
How exalted is the pure father of Qāsim/ the endless light of eternity
And the messenger the seal (of prophecy)/ the observer the resurrector
The ruler, the wise/ who knows everything in detail
Details of good virtues
(1. ʿAlī—the first Imām)
As to the abstract [who is] your Lord/ it is ʿAlī which is as result
An Imām which gave you life/ who fed you with wisdom
Who guided you to success/ and you have seen with your own eyes
From the glorious divinity
(2. Ḥasan and 3. ʿUsayn)
As to the two grandsons, you would be saved/ in front of me as would be saved
By them those who to the heaven/ would exalt with no regret
Who would be unlimited in their/ exalting the best journey
In the sky of birds
(4. ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn:)
As to the fourth [Imām] our lord/ ʿAlī is the most excellent rewarder
It is he who possesses the divine throne and/ who is the proof of God’s religion
The scales and balance/ and of him who is called the master
Of the pure believers
(5. Muḥammad al-Bāqir)
As to the fifth of the veils/ he is the composer and provider of the holy books
Creator of the Lord’s wisdom/ [saying:] from me it emanates from absence
From flowing abundant knowledge/ of he who opens knowledge (yabquru ʿl-ʿilm)
Of the vague secrets
(6. Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq:)
As to the well-known Lord al-Ṣādiq/ he is [reflected] in the knowing speaker (nātīq)
The breaker the reconnecter [al-fātiq al-rātiq] the first and the pre-existent
The changer [of fate] maintaining of wealth/ [owner] of the sea of God’s knowledge

107 The term Shiʿa is repeated several times throughout the Dīwān; see, for example, DKH, fol. 8a, 23b, 42b, 45a, 49b, 55a, 60b. As to their identity as Twelvers, see ibid., 25a, 59a (includes the names of all the twelve Imāms), 85b, 118a.
Who prays in the mornings.
7. Mūsā ʿl-Kāzīm)
As to the seventh, he is for defence/ my Imām my master Mūsā
Pillar of religion and of the world/ meaning [ma’na] of heaven of the shelter
Flowing of good happiness/ from him would profit the Shi’a
The best of the benefit is from him
(8. ʿAlī al-Riḍā)
As to the eighth you would scorn an Imām/ alas! if you only knew
How powerful and admirable/ and [his] enormous eternal light
Possessing knowledge he existed for eternity/ he who was the candle of God
In the darkness for the travelers
(9. Muḥammad al-Jawād)
As to the ninth you would turn/ to the Imām as a guided instructor
All the people are guided by him/ any one of his [believers] takes example
from him
This one is the winner the luckiest/ he who prays for the ninth
This one declines losing
(10. ʿAlī al-Hāḍī)
As to the tenth, you would ignore/ [even] if you would try hard you could
not grasp
A complete and perfect Imām/ first light of extreme love
The water’s source of creatures and the fountain/ and the pillar of religion
is my lord.
And the lord of all my observers
(11. Ḥasan al-ʿAskārī)
As the eleventh it is my Imām/ the owner of the emigration [hijra]
Who keep silent as to his [apparent] weakness/ and who restrains his power
Until the return [rajʿa] and the fight back / as to the mahdī, he is God’s sword
Master of every patient
(12. Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan the mahdī)
As to the twelfth/ the first and the last
The esoteric and the exoteric (al-bāṭin wa-ʾl-zāhir)/ the owner of might and
rule
Who grants support and is the saver/ who maintains the vengeance
Who obtains the revenge
An Imām who would possess earth/ and maintain his obligated rule
Over the creatures as he would judge/ and all his judgment would be accepted
There will be no length or width/ but only Islam would be seen
A religion between the edges of earth

It is clear from this poem that the Nuṣayrīs accept the principle of the
twelve Imāms, adding their mystic interpretation as to their divine
nature. Since they claim to understand the two aspects of Islam, the

\[108\] DKH, fol. 58a–61a.
esoteric and exoteric, the Nuṣayrīs consider only themselves as being the “true Shiʿa” (Shīʿat al-ḥaqiq) and the “Shiʿa of the pure believers” (Shīʿat al-athār). Since most of the sect’s traditions are transmitted by the mystic disciples of the Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (mostly Mufadḍal ibn ʿUmar), the Nuṣayrīs also call themselves Jaʿfariyya (followers of Jaʿfar) or Shīʿat Jaʿfar. This identification as Jaʿfarīs enables the Nuṣayrīs to re-establish their connection with the Imāmī Shiʿīs when necessary. Indeed, in the twentieth century the Nuṣayrīs embraced Imāmī Jaʿfari law, after a century of isolation, with the help and instruction of Shiʿī scholars in Lebanon, Iraq and Iran.

3.3 Ghulāt

The Nuṣayrīs were always aware that they were accused of ghulūw. However, they never associated themselves with the Ghulāt and even accused them of heresy, mainly for two reasons: the Ghulāt’s consideration of ʿAlī as an incarnation (ḥulūl) of God, not an illusionary vision (docetism), and because of their separation of divinity between Muḥammad and ʿAlī who are a single entity. For example, the followers of Ishāq al-Aḥmar are called Ghulāt and are considered heretics. But al-Khasībī’s Dīwān reveals an interesting method of confrontation with the accusation of ghulūw. Instead of rejecting it, al-Khasībī uses the term ghulūw as a positive term (“zeal” instead of “fanaticism”) by attributing to the sect the ghulūw ilā Allāh (the zeal for God), ghulūw ilā ʾl-mawlā (zeal for the Lord) or ghulūw ilā ʾl-tawhīd (extreme

109 Ibid., fol. 8b, 62a, 99b. The expression Shīʿat al-ḥaqiq also appears in the Dīwān of Makzūn al-Sinjārī; see, for example, DMS, p. 88.
110 Ibid., pp. 23b, 39b.
111 HIF, p. 80.
113 See, for example, DKH, fol. 18b.
114 See, for example, HAD, p. 142; KBS, p. 248.
115 DKH, fol. 11a.
116 Ibid., fol. 23b.
monotheism).\textsuperscript{118} In one place in the \textit{Diwān} al-Khaṣībī even addresses his disciples, saying: \textit{yā Ghulātī} (my Ghulāt! i.e. zealous believers).\textsuperscript{119} In one of his \textit{qaṣīdas}, he even replaces the term Ghulāt with the word \textit{ghāliya} (pl. \textit{ghawālin}),\textsuperscript{120} a sort of perfume, to imbue it with an even more positive sense. In the \textit{Diwān}, the frequently repeated term \textit{muqāṣṣira} is a negative nickname for deficient Shīʿī believers.\textsuperscript{121} The main sins attributed to them are \textit{taqsīr} (limitation of the Imāms’ powers) and the rejection of the \textit{tafwīd} (delegation of divine powers to the Imāms), an important tenet in Nuṣayrī theology (though different from that of the Mufawwīda).\textsuperscript{122} An important element in the self-identification of the Nuṣayrīs as mystics (or Ghulāt) is the fact that they are a small group who want to be saved from the material world, as opposed to the “mass” of the Shīʿīs (‘āmmat al-Shī’a) and Sunnīs (simply al-‘āmma). Both groups are in a state of \textit{jāhiliyya} (ignorance as opposed to Islam), since they do not understand the true nature of the Imāms and the meaning of their message.\textsuperscript{123} According to a tradition transmitted by Mufaddal, the Imām Jaʿfar claimed that of the 20,000 (or 50,000 according to another version) Shīʿīs of Kufa, only 25 are monotheistic mystics (\textit{muwaḥḥidūn}) who know the \textit{bātin} and keep their knowledge secret; the rest know only the \textit{ẓāhir}.\textsuperscript{124} This conception of minority is part of the sect’s identity. It is a mentality of \textit{taqiyya}, that of an oppressed sect who should keep its principles secret.

The attitude towards the Sunnīs is more hostile than to the Imāmī Shīʿīs. For the Nuṣayrīs the \textit{nāṣiba}\textsuperscript{125} and the \textit{murjī’a} are the worst of God’s creation, even “worse than the Jews and the Christians”.\textsuperscript{126} Al-Khaṣībī repeats in his \textit{Diwān} his plea to God to curse the \textit{ahl al-Shām} (inhabitants of Syria), Sunnīs who are proud of their Umayyad history.\textsuperscript{127} As opposed to this, he asks God to bless Kufa, which he calls “our Kufā” (\textit{Kūfatunā}) which is the refuge of the Shīʿīs who seek shelter

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., fol. 21b.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., 20b.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., fol. 8a, 49b.
\textsuperscript{121} See, for example, ibid., fol. 8b, 10b, 11b, 19a, 24a, 45a, 71b, 96b, 100b.
\textsuperscript{122} See in the \textit{Diwān} ibid., fol. 34a, 96a, b, 98a, 100b, 115b.
\textsuperscript{123} \textit{HAD}, p. 133.
\textsuperscript{124} \textit{MS}, pp. 221–222; \textit{HAD}, pp. 106–107.
\textsuperscript{125} \textit{HAD}, p. 163.
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., p. 124.
\textsuperscript{127} \textit{DKH}, fol. 46a, 47b–48a.
(Shī‘at al-i‘tīsām).128 Other sites that are inhabited or visited by the Shi‘is are blessed in the Dīwān, such as Karbalā’ (tomb of Husayn, still destroyed in the time of al-Khaṣībī), Samarra (tombs of ‘Alī ʿl-Hādī and Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī), Najaf (tomb of ʿAlī) and Mecca.129 The geographical aspect contributes to the creation of the Nuṣayrī identity and their mentality of taqiyya. They are aware of the fact that they are strangers, Shi‘is who have migrated to the heart of the Sunnī world. This situation seems to deepen the concept of an exalted minority originating from light, which is surrounded or imprisoned in the material evil world. The longings of al-Khaṣībī for Iraq represent the yearnings of the Nuṣayrīs for their original state, which is the world of light.

A Nuṣayrī tradition demonstrates the position of the sect between the two main streams of Islam. According to this tradition, the Imām al-Bāqir said to one of his disciples who asked him whom he could trust in religious matters:

Seek for a man who would be accused by the ʿāmma (Sunnīs) of heresy and whom the muqasīma (Imāmī Shi‘is) would excommunicate and whom the mufawwida would overlook—from such person you should learn your religion.130

3.4  Nuṣayrīs

The fundamental self-definition of the sect is that which is based on its eponyms and founders. The small mystical circle of Ibn Nuṣayr was called Namīriyya or Numayriyya until the ninth century, as is confirmed by Nawbakhti’s Firaq al-Shī‘a.131 According to the reliable part of the Dīwān of al-Khaṣībī, the sect was already called Nuṣayriyya in his time.132 The earliest mention of this name in external sources is in the eleventh-century Druze epistle written by Ḥamza ibn ʿAlī against what he called the “Nuṣayrī heretic”.133 But ʿAbd al-Qāhir

---

128 Ibid., fol. 49b.
129 Ibid., fol. 24a, 33b, 49a, b, 76b, 93a.
130 HAD, p. 164.
131 Al-Nawbakhti, Firaq al-Shī‘a, pp. 93–94.
132 DKH, fol. 49b. According to this part of the qaṣīda, the Nuṣayriyya is defined as the sect following the doctrines of the Furāṭīyya (group of ʿUmar Ibn al-Furāt), who in turn follow the Juḥayy (group of al-Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar al-Juḥi).
133 The name Nuṣayrī is repeated several times after the title of Ḥamza ibn ʿAlī’s al-Risāla al-dāmīgha liṭ-l-fāsiq: al-radd ʿalā ʿl-Nuṣayrī. This source was discussed earlier in historical and theological contexts.
al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1037), the first Sunnī to mention the name of the sect, still used the name Namīriyya/Numayriyya in the same century. Even if the Nuṣayrīs preferred to call themselves muwḥīdūn or aḥl al-tawḥīd (monotheists), al-Ṭabarānī (eleventh century) also calls them Khaṣḥīyya and Jīlīyya, after their great leaders in the tenth century, al-Khaṣḥībī and al-Jīlī. It is interesting to note the different definitions of the sect, which according to al-Ṭabarānī was the sect (firqa) of al-Khaṣḥībī and was followed by the order (ṭariqa) or in another version the sect (tāʾīfa) of al-Jīlī. Several explanations can be proposed for these terms. In the case of firqa and ṭariqa it seems that there is no difference between them. Both can be defined as the “saved sect”: al-firqa al-nājiya or al-ṭāʾīfa al-manṣūra. But the term ṭariqa, if it was originally used by al-Ṭabarānī, is a typical Ṣūfī term. The Bākūra al-Sulaymāniyya gives an indication that the name Khaṣḥīyya was still in use, alongside the name Nuṣayriyya, in the nineteenth century. In al-Shahrastānī’s al-Milal wa-l-nihal (twelfth century) only the name Nuṣayriyya is used. In the twentieth century, the leaders of the sect changed the name from Nuṣayriyya, which symbolizes a thousand years of persecution and isolation, to ʿAlawiyya (partisans of ʿAlī, a synonym for the Shīʿa), a name that symbolizes their wish to re-establish their ties with the Shīʿī world.

The first change of the sect’s name, from Namīriyya/Numayriyya to Nuṣayriyya also demands an explanation. It seems to reflect the enlargement of the sect’s community. While the name Namīriyya/Numayriyya, based on the nisba of the Namīr/Numayr clan, represents a narrow tribal affiliation, the name Nuṣayriyya reflects a larger and more diverse group of people who embrace Ibn Nuṣayr’s doctrine. The name Khaṣḥīyya, from the other eponym, also represents what maybe called the “orthodox Nuṣayrīsm”.

The self-identification of the Nuṣayrīs has been clarified by analysing the definition of their sect in relation to other religious groups. This

134 Al-Baghdādī, al-Farq bayna l-firaq, p. 239.
135 MA, pp. 19, 69–70.
136 BS, p. 53.
138 This initiative of changing the name of the sect to ʿAlawiyya and its goals are demonstrated in al-Ṭawīl’s book Taʾrīkh al-ʿAlawiyyīn (see Appendix 1, item 60). As to the possible French involvement, see D. Pipes, “The Alawi capture of power in Syria”, MES 25 (1989), pp. 429–450; see also al-Nadhīr (newspaper of the Muslim Brothers), 22 October 1980, p. 35.
identification is based on religious, geographic and historical aspects. The ethnic aspect is dealt with in Chapter 1. It has been assumed that their leaders were of Arab origin and that their community was a mixture of Arabs and Persians. It has also been assumed that several members of the sect were Christian Arabs who preferred to convert to Nuṣayrī Islam, which contained some terms and symbols that were familiar to them. However, the available sources cannot provide a clear picture of the ethnic structure of the sect in most of Nuṣayrī history. The next aspect of the sect’s identity is their unique way of initiation into their secret religion.

4. Initiation

Initiation is a process involving great effort and trust from both the initiate and his master. Once a person passes all the stages of initiation, he is identified as a Nuṣayrī and one of the muwahḥidūn. This is the beginning of the journey of the mystic back to the world of light. Only after proving his ability and loyalty will he be introduced to the mystical knowledge.

The issue of initiation into the Nuṣayrī religion and its cults were studied in Dussaud’s monograph and more recently by Halm in his Islamische Gnosis. These two studies were based on the anonymous document entitled Sharh al-Imām wa-mā yūjabu ʿalayhi wa-mā yulzimuhū (an explanation of the duty of the Imām and his responsibility), in Ms. Paris 1540 (fol. 155a–167a) and the Bākūra of Sulaymān al-Adhānī. While the first document, copied in 1211/1796 by a certain Ḥasan Maṣnūr Khalīl is impossible to date, the second, the Bākūra, reflects merely the process of initiation in one region in the nineteenth century of an initiate who is hostile to his Imām and his initiators. Another description of the initiation is available in the book of Lyde, based on the Kitāb al-mashyakha, also an apparently modern document, also concerning the duty of the Imām. However, the Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī contains the only available original document concerning the process of initiation in the medieval period, an original collection of questions and answers, defined as fatwās, compiled by al-Ṭabarānī. This book, called Kitāb al-ḥāwī fi ʿilm al-fatāwā (book of collections concerning the science of fatwās, see Appendix 1), sheds new light on the process of initiation, the sessions of the mystics and other related topics in the medieval period. In the following section,
this last document is analyzed and the information it provides is combined with the materials of Lyde, Dussaud and Halm.

Halm recent study of initiation in medieval Ismāʿīlīsm, based mainly on the Kitāb al-ʿālim wa-ʾl-ghulām, a book of the dāʿī (propagandist) Ibn Ḥawshab Manṣūr al-Yaman (d. 322/934), reveals a similarity between the Ismāʿīlī process of initiation and that of the Nuṣayrīs. This similarity could be explained by the geographical proximity of the two sects, the influences of each sect on the other, and the mutual sources of inspiration, which are medieval secret societies (such as the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ), mystical Ṣūfī orders and Persian and Neoplatonic groups within the world of Islam. Halm describes the Ismāʿīlī initiation as a personal process between a pupil, who is a young man (ghulām), called mustajib (initiate) and a dāʿī, an instructor who is sent by his shaykh. After the young man is persuaded that he wants to be initiated, he takes an oath of secrecy (ʿahd or mīthāq). The dāʿī presents him with some subjects of study and leaves him to consider them for a while. Then the young man is called to meet the shaykh who explains to him that the esoteric knowledge will set him free and give him new life, and that he will be given a new name after seven days. At the following meetings he is entrusted with the amāna (deposit), which is the zāhir and the bātin concerning God, the Prophet, the Imām, the creation and other religious matters. At the end of the sessions (majālīs, sing. majlis), which take place in the shaykh’s house in the presence of the dāʿī, the new initiate returns to his village, turns into a dāʿī himself, and travels and tries to initiate other people. His initiation includes three stages. The first is compared with a suckling infant, the second with a growing child, and the third with developing maturity. The instructor is responsible for adjusting his teaching to the level and ability of the initiate. The sessions include several initiates if the dāʿī is a prominent shaykh. As opposed to the Nuṣayrī sessions, women are also included. The bātin never takes place in a mosque or other public place. Even in the Fāṭimid Empire, where the majālīs al-ḥikma (sessions of wisdom) were legitimized, took place in closed rooms in the caliph’s palace.139

---

4.1 *Initiation in medieval Nuṣayrīsm*

Al-Ṭabarānī’s *Kitāb al-ḥāwī fi ʿilm al-fatāwā* provides details of the process of initiation in the period of the founders of the Nuṣayrī sect. He collected 120 questions and answers and wrote a compilation to serve the ʿāmmat ahl-al-tawḥīd, a term which can be translated as the members of the sect who are still in the process of initiation (not yet khāṣṣa). His book is the sum of the decisions of the leaders of the sect from Ibn Nuṣayr to al-Jillī on the issue of initiation. As such, it reflects the development of the initiation in the Nuṣayrī sect between the ninth and the tenth centuries. The process of initiation is not only compared to life, from gestation to maturity. The meeting of instructor and the initiate is also compared to the soul entering a woman’s womb. The Nuṣayrī instructor takes an oath (ʿahd) of secrecy from the initiate. The first stage is a meeting which includes the teaching of the ẓāḥir, such as the love for ʿAlī’s family and the barāʾa for their enemies, an introduction of a few secrets of the sect, and the sharb al-saʾr (drinking of what is left) a term altered in later sources to sharb al-sīr (drinking of the secret).140 Al-Ṭabarānī, in his *Kitāb al-ḥāwī*, explains in an important paragraph that the term saʾr is a synonym for suʾr (literally, drinking what is left in the glass). He explains also that the sharb al-saʾr signifies istiʿrāf wa-taʾnīs (seeking knowledge and becoming a [new] educated man).141 The drinking of the wine left in the master’s glass is an important ceremony in the initiation. The custom in Islam not to drink all in the glass corresponds to the well-known Ḥadīth, “idḥā sharibtum fa-asʾirū” (when you drink always leave a small portion). The Shiʿī tradition in particular recommends suʾr al-muʾminin (drinking what is left from the believers) because it can transmit a

---

140 See in *HIF*, pp. 49, 53, 55, 73, 75. The expression “drinking of the secret” is given in later sources, for example by Lyde; see *KMA*, pp. 253–255; al-Adhani, *BS*, p. 49, gives “drinking of the secret of ʿayn-mim-sin”. As to the translation of the words saʾr and suʾr, see Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Azhari, *Tahdhib al-lugha* (Beirut: Dār Ḩiyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 2001), vol. 13, pp. 34–35; Muhammad Murtadāʾ l-Husaynī al-ʿl-Zubaydī, *Tāj al-ʿarūs fī jawharat al-qāmūs* (Kuwait: Maṭbaʿat Ḥukūmat al-Kuwayt, 1972), vol. 16, pp. 483–484. In the same book, al-Ṭabarānī gives an additional explanation for the term, which derives from the root s.r.r., as sār, a synonym of surriyya, pl. sarārī (slave) since the initiate passes from slavery in the material world to freedom in the world of light; see *HIF*, p. 49.

141 *HIF*, pp. 53, 75.
person’s blessing to his Muslim brothers until the end of time and even cure a believer from seventy illnesses. Indeed, al-Ṭabarānī says: “the saʿr is [synonym for] the suʿr, and the suʿr of the believers is [provides] good health.” In this light, we should understand the initiate’s drinking of the saʿr of his master in Nuṣayrism as a transmission of knowledge, which gives him an eternal blessing and brings good health to his soul.

The second part of the first stage involves another ritual called khutba (engagement before marriage, also speech) conducted by the naqīb (instructor), in which the initiate is called, after being judged appropriate, to continue his initiation, and must prove his submission to his teacher by putting a shoe on his head. Then he drinks with the other participants the ‘abd al-nūr, a glass of wine that represents divine light and mystic knowledge and that is permitted only on this occasion. Al-Ṭabarānī explains that if there is no wine, it is permitted to drink water with some raisins or dates. Since the ritual of khutba, called by non-Nuṣayrīs khitāb (speech), involved the drinking of wine, which is severely prohibited in orthodox Islam, it was forbidden by Ibn Taymiyya and the Sunnī Mamlūk authorities, who were aware of its performance by the Nuṣayrīs.

The second stage is compared with marriage (nikāh) and is called taʿlīq (attachment) in which the initiate receives the “deposit” (wadīʿa in Nuṣayrī terminology) of the secret knowledge. As in marriage, it demands the presence of witnesses. A taʿlīq can take place in the daytime or during the night. A taʿlīq without witnesses is permitted but not recommended, and is compared to mutʿa (marriage for a

---

143 HIF, p. 75.
144 Ibid., p. 54; compare with the similar description in BS, pp. 2–3. The ritual of putting the shoe on the head is rare in Islam. The Indian Sūfī poet Amīr Khusrāw (d. 726/1325), is said to have had the shoes of his Sufi master on his head to show his devotion to him; see M. Hafiz Syed, “Hadrat Nizamuddin Aulia”, in M. Taheer (ed.), Encyclopedic Survey of Islamic Culture (New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 2003), vol. 13, Sufi Saints, p. 185.
145 Ibid., p. 74.
146 Concerning the prohibition of the khitāb in order to stop initiation into Nuṣayrism, see the fatwā of Ibn Taymiyya (Appendix 8).
147 This term is also used in Ismāʿīlism; see B. Lewis, The Origins of Ismāʿīlism (Cambridge: W. Heffer, 1940), pp. 50–54.
148 Ibid., p. 55.
limited period in Shi‘ism). At a later stage, an initiate who betrays his master or does not obey him is expelled, an act which is compared to divorce (talāq). The second stage is also compared with pregnancy (haml), and as such it should take between seven and nine months. If the initiate reaches maturity (balagha 'l-ḥukm) having studied a basic knowledge of bāṭin, he turns to the third level, called samā‘ (listening) in which he is compared to a newborn infant, and he is authorized to listen and also to speak in the sessions of the mystics for the first time. The beginning of his participation and his gradual study (istikdrāj) and religious education (tafaqquh) of the bāṭin, which are compared to breast-feeding (ridā’a) and may take from one to two years, depends on the initiate’s ability. Already at this stage he is considered to have najwā (salvation), since he is saved from eternal transmigrations and is at the beginning of his journey to the world of light. For the calculation of time, the naqīb must write the exact date of the beginning of the initiate’s samā‘. In extraordinary cases, a talented initiate would pass the “breast-feeding” stage in less than one year and would be permitted to teach. An example of this is the short period of initiation of ‘Alī ibn ‘Īsā al-Jisrī.

The process of initiation may be summed up as follows:

a. khutba (engagement)—a few meetings: ‘ahd > learning of the zāhir > first presence in a mystic’s session for the drinking of sār/sa’r—the ‘abd al-nūr.

b. zawāj/nikāh (marriage) and haml (pregnancy)—between 7 and 9 months: ta’līq (attachment) > learning of the wadī’a (deposit, mainly the Dustūr).

c. samā‘ (listening) and ridā’a (breast-feeding)—one or (more commonly) two years: istikdrāj (gradual study) and tafaqquh (mystical religious studies of the bāṭin).

Unlike the Ismā‘īlī example, the age of the initiate is not limited, and may be from fifteen to sixty. Unlike in Ismā‘ilism, women were never permitted to be initiates or to participate in sessions. Slaves,
however, were allowed to be initiated, since according to Nuṣayrī tradition Joseph and Salmān were initiated after being freed from slavery. Because both of them were ashhās, personifications of the divinity, their acts serve as an example for the believers. The instructor should choose his disciple as carefully as he would choose his wife. The disciple may leave his teacher, an act called hijra (emigration), if his teacher seems inappropriate.

The relationship between the instructor and the initiate is that of father and son. The initiation always includes a ceremony of akhdh al-ubuwwa (acceptance of spiritual paternity). But this fatherhood is only spiritual and the initiate does not change his name or nasab. An initiate is permitted, for example, to marry his instructor’s daughter, and if the instructor dies, it is his initiate, not his biological son, who inherits his mystical books. This spiritual fatherhood also exists in Ismāʿīli texts such as that of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ.

Apart from the direct instructor, the ‘ālim (learned man) and the walad (child, the initiate), the sessions would always include a jamāʿa (group of initiates), which includes the ikhwān (brothers); a leader of ceremonies, called imām, who is the highest religious authority, and who must memorize the Qurʾān, the quddāsāt and the rest of the prayers; and an instructor, called naqīb, who should be the link between the mystics and the new initiate. For this reason the naqīb, as well as the ‘ālim, must be gentle to the initiate and use persuasion rather than force. The naqīb must have a basic education, which enables him to date every stage the initiate has achieved, while the imām is obliged to possess the highest knowledge of his community. The sessions cannot be held without the presence of the imām who leads the ceremonies. None of the participants in the sessions can be a non-Muslim, a member or follower of the Umayyad or ‘Abbāsid families (considered addād), or someone working with impure materials, such as a seller of leather, or a grave digger. People with disabilities may participate, though not as imāms, since al-Khaṣibī and Muḥammad ibn Sinān before him were blind when they were old and were able to teach

---

154 HIF, p. 50.
155 Ibid., pp. 57–59.
156 Ibid.
157 See more details in Lewis, The Origins of Ismāʿīlism, pp. 44–49.
158 Ibid., pp. 70–73. Compare with BS, pp. 36–37. According to al-Adhani, there is also a najīb, who serves the naqīb.
mysticism. All prayers can be performed while sitting except in the
times of drinking of ʿabd al-nūr and the “spiritual paternity”, which
demand standing because of their special significance. The initiates
must maintain a pure way of life, and stay away from material tempta-
tions that may prevent their salvation. They must not be late to the
sessions when the imām summons them. Al-Ṭabarānī permitted the
initiation of Jews or Christians who had converted to Islam, but such
persons could not serve as imāms. He also authorized the initiation
of converts who did not reveal their conversion to their own families.
However, he emphasized that only a true Muslim and a true convert
can be exalted to the world of light. An instructor may teach a group
of initiates together. Since a man may marry four women in the zāhir
a shaykh can instruct nine initiates in the bātin sense of “marriage”.
The sessions can take place in the house of the imām, the naqīb, or
any other mystic of the sect, as long as the place is secret. The jamāʿa
should sit in a circle and pass the wine and the salt clockwise and
counter-clockwise during ceremonies of quddās (mass).

4.2 Two versions of the Dustūr: al-Ṭabarānī and al-Adhanī

During the sessions a document called Dustūr (code of laws) is read.
This document contains the main prayer taught by the instructor and
must be memorized by the initiate to ensure his salvation. If an initi-
ate forgets it, he is not permitted to study it again, since this would be
like a child returning to breast-feeding. Al-Ṭabarānī cites only one
line from the mysterious Dustūr, and mentions chapters from it by
their title. This is where he authorizes initiates with a weak memory
to abbreviate some parts of the Dustūr, except for one line of the Sūrat
al-Shahāda, which must not be omitted. This line is two verses from
the Qurʾān stating that there is no other God but Allāh and that Islam
is the only religion for God (citing from Qurʾān, Āl ʿImrān [3]: 18–19).

---
159 HIF, pp. 61, 66–71.
160 Ibid., p. 75.
161 Ibid., pp. 75–79. The worst acts are lying, committing adultery, drinking wine
that is not ʿabd al-nūr, and card playing.
162 Ibid., p. 79.
163 Ibid., pp. 89–90.
164 Ibid., p. 48.
165 Ibid., pp. 110–111.
166 Ibid., p. 66.
He adds also that the *Fātiḥa* can be abbreviated only if its meaning is understood, and the initiate can memorize the chain of “parents”, i.e. shaykhs, without their complete names.\(^\text{167}\) In another place in his book, al-Ṭabarānī notes that the *Shahāda* contains the ‘*ayn-mīm-sīn* formula, which is studied while the *Dustūr* is read.\(^\text{168}\) This is the only occurrence of this formula in the available Nuṣayrī documents. This mention of the *Dustūr* in the eleventh century seems to confirm the authenticity of al-Adhanī’s document, also called *Dustūr*, to which he gives the title *Kitāb al-majmūʿ* (see Appendix 1 and Appendix 7).\(^\text{169}\) This name signifies that it is the *majmūʿ* (sum), a collection of the main theological issues and prayers for the initiate, preparing him for the study of the other and more detailed secret books when he complete his initiation.

The similarity between the *Dustūr* of the eleventh century and that of the nineteenth, the *Majmūʿ*, is striking. Al-Ṭabarānī’s citation from the Sūrat al-Shahāda is identical to al-Adhanī’s citation from *Kitāb al-majmūʿ* (Sūra 11), which contains both the same Qur’ānic verse and the Nuṣayrī triad.\(^\text{170}\) The *Fātiḥa* (not to be confused with the first chapter of the Qurʾān) is also a chapter that exists in the *Kitāb al-majmūʿ* (Sūra 5).\(^\text{171}\) The chain of transmission of the secret going back through a long list of shaykhs to the founder of the sect to the Imām Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, which al-Ṭabarānī demands be memorized, also appears in the *Kitāb al-majmūʿ* (Sūra al-nisba [4]).\(^\text{172}\) It may be concluded that the *Dustūr* of Sulaymān al-Adhanī from the nineteenth century contains several original parts that existed in the time of al-Jīlī and al-Ṭabarānī. Although these few resemblances may confirm this conclusion, it is still not possible to determine the identity of the original compiler of this book. In the *Majmūʿ*, all the founders of the sect are sanctified, which may indicate that some parts of the available Dustūr were written after the eleventh century. In addition, there is no explanation for the fact that some of the masses mentioned by al-Ṭabarānī, such as *quddās al-milḥ* (salt) and *quddās al-ṭaʿām* (meal),\(^\text{173}\) do not appear in modern Nuṣayrī sources. We can only conclude that the

\(^{167}\) Ibid., p. 106.

\(^{168}\) Ibid., p. 50; compare with BS, pp. 3, 14.

\(^{169}\) This can be concluded from BS, pp. 88, 92.

\(^{170}\) BS, pp. 26–27.

\(^{171}\) Ibid., pp. 18–19.

\(^{172}\) Ibid., pp. 14–15.

\(^{173}\) HIF, p. 111.
actual *Dustūr* (see summary, Appendix 7) is similar but not identical to that which existed in the period of al-Ṭabarānī.

Al-Ṭabarānī’s *Ḥāwī fi ʿilm al-fatāwā* provides no answers to other interesting questions. For example, on what occasions should sessions take place besides new initiations and holidays? Can a session begin without a *naqīb*? What is the fate of an initiate who reveals the secrets? Since the book leaves many questions open, there is reason to believe that there were more books of initiation that have been lost or are unavailable. Al-Ṭabarānī explains that his book as well as the *Dustūr* were based not only on his master’s *fatāwā*, but also on two books written by Ibn Nuṣayr, which seem to be the fundamental guides in the issue of initiation: *Kitāb al-kāfī li-ʿl-dīd al-munāfī* and *Kitāb al-mawārid*.174

4.3 **Terminology of initiation as a characteristic of secret societies**

Although the details of the initiation seem to characterize the Nuṣayrī sect exclusively, its terminology seems to typify secret societies in the Muslim world. Bernard Lewis’s study of the guilds of craftsmen and merchants in the Middle East is most significant here. Terminology similar to that found in Nuṣayrī mystical sessions was used in these socio-economic organizations. Lewis bases his study on information concerning the structure of the Muslim guilds from the tenth century onwards. He finds a link between the creation of the guild and the formation of sects, both representing the creation of a group with an autonomous law code and that defends its members against the authorities. The Qarmaṭians are a good example of a group that combined religious sectarianism with social protest. Lewis explains that in many cases, the guild was run as a religious brotherhood that embraced a Qarmaṭian process of initiation and Șūfī ideology. The code of rules, customs, and ceremonials in every guild was called *Dustūr*, a Persian word meaning code of law. The guild was headed by a shaykh, who had a deputy called a *naqīb*. Some of the guilds had ceremonies of initiation and even a catechism. These guilds existed until the twentieth century in Anatolia and Syria, in the same regions inhabited by the Nuṣayris. The apprentices had to swear an oath of secrecy, to pass a series of stages, until finally they achieved mastery of the craft.

---

174 *HIF*, pp. 53, 105, 112.
and became part of the guild, and were then given a higher salary.\footnote{B. Lewis, “The Islamic guilds”, in B. S. Turner (ed.), \textit{Readings in Orientalism} (London/New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 500–519.}

Lewis’s research is mostly relevant for the explanation of Nuṣayrī terminology and the structure of the secret sessions of the mystics and their initiates.

### 4.4 Initiation in modern sources

The sources concerning initiation into Nuṣayrīsm that were used by Lyde, Dussaud and Halm confirm the continuation of the same principles of initiation until the nineteenth century. However, their sources contain some elements which are absent in al-Ṭabarānī’s \textit{Hāwī fī īlm al-fatāwā} and may reflect later developments. The document \textit{Sharḥ al-imām} seems to contain Ismāʿīlī influence, since some of the Nuṣayrī terms are also called by their Ismāʿīlī equivalents, such as the addition of \textit{dāʾī} (instructor) alongside \textit{wālid} and \textit{sayyid}, ‘\textit{ahd} (commitment to secrecy) as well as \textit{mithāq}, and \textit{amāna} (deposit) as well as \textit{wadiʿa}.\footnote{Ms. Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale), fonds arabe 1540, fol. 156a–157a, 159a, 166a, b.} Also, the use of the term \textit{Umm al-kitāb} for God’s sacred book may be an allusion to Jābir’s book, an important early Ismāʿīlī document.\footnote{Ibid., fol. 159b.}

The \textit{Sharḥ al-imām} provides some important aspects of the role of the \textit{imām}, which are missing in al-Ṭabarānī’s book. The \textit{imām} must possess the quality of a ruler who sets an example to his followers, to be “complete in earthly as well as spiritual matters” (\textit{kāmil al-dīn wa-ʿl-dunyā}), compassionate and patient with his disciples and initiates, righteous, honest, and conducting a pious life.\footnote{Ibid., fol. 157a–158a.} In this text the two terms \textit{saʾr} and \textit{sirr} appear together, complementing each other. At the end of the \textit{taʿlīq}, if the initiate is willing to continue to the second stage of the initiation, he drinks what is left in the glass of the \textit{imām}, of the instructor and of the “brothers” and declares: “This is what is left from your religion and your belief, I am your slave and under your instructions”, and then kisses the hands and legs of all those present. Then the participants drink another glass called \textit{sirr al-qabūl} (secret of the acceptance) and hand what is left in their glass to the initiate, declaring: “Here is your \textit{saʾr} which is your \textit{sirr al-qabūl}!”\footnote{Ibid., fol. 159b–160a.} According
to this document, the drinking of the *saʿr* symbolizes the completion of the education of the initiate by studying the secret. What is left in the glass represents the *bātin*, which is the education that the initiate has to complete in order to be a *muwaḥhid*. The intimate act of drinking from the same glass signifies that the knowledge of his master is transmitted to the initiate who will carry on his role in the future. It is important to note that in order to ensure the success of the initiation, the Nuṣayrīs always give a choice as to whether to continue or not with the initiation, according to the Muslim principle of *lā ikrāh fi ʾl-dīn* (there is no compulsion in religion, Qurʾān, al-Baqara [2]: 256). However, after the “marriage” (the second stage) an initiate who leaves his instructor is regarded as an unfaithful wife, cursed in heaven and excommunicated on earth. Yet, if he regrets doing so, he is forgiven and may continue his initiation, because *muʿā* is authorized in Shiʿism. The ceremonies of *quddās* are also mentioned in Lyde’s *Kitāb al-mashyakha*, whose contents differ from other sources, mainly concerning the divine nature of ʿAlī and world of light, since the book is a general guide for the shaykh and not only for the rites of initiation. The *Kitāb al-mashyakha* mentions al-Ṭabarānī’s book of *fatāwa* as its main source for initiation. The most important part of this document is Lyde’s translation of the contents of the *ʿahd*, the contract between the initiate and the instructor. In this contract, the initiate swears to be loyal to his instructor, to share his knowledge with his “brothers”, and not to reveal the secret to non-initiates. The *imām* warns the initiate that revealing the secret religion will cause him to be cursed by eternal transmigrations. The initiate swears to meet his instructor once a year, to fast during Ramadān, and to pay alms. Since the text of the *ʿahd* which precedes the “drinking of the secret” is almost identical to that appearing in *Sharh al-imām*, it can be assumed that the shaykhs used a written text in the initiation, and that its reading before the *majlis* is the speech called *khiṭāb*.

A similar process of initiation is described by al-Adhanī in his *Bākūra*, but from another point of view. This time it is an account of

---

180 Ibid., fol. 160a.
181 Ibid., fol. 160b, 165a, b.
183 Ibid., p. 269.
184 Ibid., pp. 256–264.
185 Ms. Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale), fonds arabe 1540, fol. 163b–166b.
the initiate, not the description of the imām. Al-Adhanī’s description of the initiation is very problematic in some parts, because it is a hostile report containing negative elements, which are probably untrue since they do not appear in any other source of the sect. Al-Adhanī was not asked at any stage if he wanted to continue, his instructors were constantly changed,186 he was warned that he would be killed and would not be buried in the ground if he disclosed the secrets of the sect, mainly the Dustūr,187 and finally accused the members of the sect of adultery.188 At the end of his book he calls Nuṣayrīsm “a pagan religion” (dīn wathānī),189 a view that he tried to prove in his book, and that would eventually be used as the thesis of Dussaud. If the warning of the imām to al-Adhanī is taken as true evidence, then the reason for the worsening of the punishment of the unfaithful initiate from excommunication to death was due to the Christian missionaries and their threat against the sect in that period.

4.5 The Nuṣayrī brotherhood

The ceremony of akhdh al-ubwma (acceptance of fatherhood) is a ceremony in initiation in which the teacher becomes the spiritual father of the initiate, who is his spiritual child. This part of the initiation is one of the most important components of the Nuṣayrī religious identity. The sect is a spiritual family from the time of its creation, because the bond between its members is the deep mystical connection of a group that considers itself as one unit of light imprisoned in the material world. This is why all the books of initiation repeat the obligation of the initiates to treat their coreligionists as brothers. The idea of a religious brotherhood is the application of the Qur’ānic verse: “The believers are brothers” (Qur’ān, al-Ḥujurat [49]: 10). This brotherhood is a characteristic of Şūfi groups. Julian Baldick translates the term describing the Şūfi order, the ṭariqa, as a “brotherhood”.190 In Nuṣayrīsm, the concept of a religious family is developed to the extent that a teacher of the initiate’s teacher is considered a grandfather (jadd), and other disciples who are on the same level as himself are

186 BS, p. 3.
187 Ibid., pp. 5–6.
188 Ibid., pp. 93–94.
189 Ibid., p. 110.
his brothers (*ikhwān*). For example, Ibn Nuṣayr is called al-Khaṣībī’s
grandfather because he is the master of his initiator al-Jannān. The
latter is seen as the father (*wālid*) of al-Khaṣībī. 191 Al-Khaṣībī’s disci-
ple are considered the brothers192 and children (*awlād*, sing. *walad*)
of their master.193 Al-Khaṣībī’s *Rāstbāsh* epistle is dedicated to his
“children”, the mystics.194 Al-Jillī explains in several books that his
knowledge derives from his “father” and master al-Khaṣībī.195 The poet
al-Muntajab al-ʿĀnī calls the Banū Numayr/Namīr “brothers” and the
anonymous Hālit he calls “the cousin” of al-Khaṣībī,196 since Hālit is
the “brother” of Jannān, and both are “sons” of their mutual master
Ibn Jundab.197 To sum up, spiritual fatherhood, which is an impor-
tant component of initiation, gives the Nuṣayrī sect the character of
a spiritual family. As such, their obligation of mutual respect, that of
*bIRR al-ikhwān*, was not only important for maintaining the initiations
and the mystic sessions, but was also one of the crucial conditions for
the survival of the Nuṣayrī sect until the present.

191 RIA, p. 297.
192 BS, p. 17, 47; KBS, p. 271; WJAS, p. 41.
193 Ibid., p. 29.
194 RR, pp. 16–17. The main “son” was the Buwayhid Bakhtiyār. Brockelmann
wrongly believed him to be a biological son of al-Khaṣībī; see C. Brockelmann,
195 See, for example, KBS, p. 271; ARM, p. 14.
196 DMA, fol. 148b.
197 Ibid., fol. 124b, 155b, 247b.
CONCLUSION

The most interesting phenomenon in the history of the Nuṣayrīs is their ability to survive more than a thousand years in a region of permanent wars, as a small minority lacking arms for most of that time and considered heretical by those surrounding them. It is certain that their first means of survival was their gradual migration from Iraq to Syria, and inside Syria from urban centers to rural and mountainous territories. The fact that during most of the medieval period they found patrons and defenders prompts second thoughts about the wellaccepted hypothesis that they were viewed as heretics from the time of their emergence. The survival of the Nuṣayrīs may indicate a certain amount of toleration of religious minorities. Persecutions of the sect by the Muslim authorities intensified only in the Mamlūk period. the general process of Muslim radicalization in the late medieval period could be studied by examining the Muslim attitude towards the Nuṣayrī sect. However, this explanation is not enough to answer the difficult question of how they survived, since many other sects found in medieval heresiographical literature did not survive. The strength of the Nuṣayrī sect stems from the special legacy of the founders of the sect and the power of their esoteric belief, which unified the Nuṣayrīs in difficult times. In other words, it is not weapons and military leaders that gave them their strength but rather their identity and their historical legacy, as well as their belief that they belong to a group of exalted believers who are closer to God than others.

1. The question of external influences

The question of the sources of inspiration for the Nuṣayrī religion is an example of one of the most complicated problems in the study of religions in general, that of the bases of a religion’s components. It is reasonable to conclude, with Massignon and Halm, that the main theological resource was “internal”, not “external”; that is, the sect was created from within Shīʿī Islam developed in the mystical atmosphere of medieval Kufa. However, it is clear in the Nuṣayrī texts that their mysticism is of a universal nature, corresponding to its message that
all religions represent a different ḵāhir but have a common bāṭin. In other words, God appeared to every culture with the same mystical message, but in the form of different persons (ashkhās): God appeared to humanity beginning with Adam through the Jews, the Greeks, the Christians, the Persians and finally the Arabs. It is this multicultural nature of Nuṣayrī theology that gives the researcher the impression that he is dealing with a typical syncretist phenomenon. The actual research enables an understanding of how Muslims came into contact with their surrounding religions.

1.1 Greek philosophy and Judaism

Iraq was the main scene of the development of both Judaism and Shi’ism in the medieval Islamic world. Islam inherited Hellenistic culture and the Christian religion in the west (Syria and Egypt) and Persian culture and the Zoroastrian religion in the east (Iraq and Persia). In the seaport of Basra, Muslims also came into contact with merchants from India and were introduced to Hinduism and other Indian beliefs. In the north of Syria (Ḫarrān), Muslims were introduced to ideas from antiquity preserved in Hellenistic culture, mainly Greek philosophy and Neoplatonism. In this region, as in the famous Baghdadian Bayt al-Ḥikma, the Muslims encountered Greek philosophy not through merchants but thanks to the long process of translating Greek writings into Arabic.1 Another significant source of inspiration for medieval Nuṣayrīsm was Persian culture and religions that became known to Muslims mainly by translations of important Pahlavi texts by officials and administrators in the caliphal court and by the mass conversions of Persian mawālī to Islam.2

Jewish components are rarely found in Nuṣayrī literature. Jewish mysticism is sometimes alluded to but is not explicit in Nuṣayrīsm. Jewish influence seems to be indirect, a general influence on Shi’ism, not specifically on Nuṣayrīsm (admiration for the descendants of King David may have inspired the veneration of the ahl al-bayt, for example). Moreover, in many cases, similar components in Nuṣayrīsm

1 Concerning the translation of Greek writings into Arabic in the medieval Muslim world and in Ḫarrān specifically, see D. Gutas, Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early ʿAbbāsid Society (2nd–4th / 8th–10th centuries) (Routledge, 1998), pp. 23–27.
and Judaism do not necessarily reflect influence, but rather a mutual source of inspiration, which is usually Greek philosophy. Neoplatonic terminology appears in several places in Nuṣayrī literature. The sect shared a Neoplatonic view of the cosmos with other mystical Muslims such as Ṣāfi thinkers (Ibn ʿArabī, Suhrawardī) and Ḥīṣābi groups (Fāṭimids, Druzes). For example, the maʿnā and the ism appear in Nuṣayrī texts as al-ʿaql al-kullī (universal mind) and al-nafs al-kulliyya (universal spirit). The great Greek philosophers are considered divine personifications: the maʿnā and the ism and the bāb appeared to the Greeks in the form of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. It is interesting to note that it was the Nuṣayris in Ḥarrān, an important center of Greek translation into Arabic, who were the ones most inspired by Greek philosophy. Muḥammad ibn Shuʿba al-Ḥarrānī, in his Risālat ikhtilāf al-ʿālamayn presents other personalities from ancient Greece who are the personifications of the aytām. In many cases, Nuṣayris use Greek logic to back their doctrines. For example, ʿAlī ibn Ḥamza al-Ḥarrānī cites Aristotle’s hypothesis that every burning fire must be connected to an object, in order to explain that every existing soul must be connected to a living body. ʿAlī al-Ḥarrānī explains the world of light by the ideal “world of the mind” (ʿālam al-ʿaql) of Plato.

1.2 Christian inspiration

While the question of Jewish influence on Nuṣayrism has been almost overlooked, the question of Christian influence on the sect raised many polemical debates among scholars. The association of Christian components with Nuṣayrism may invite the risk of superficial methods of research. The similarity between Nuṣayrism and Christianity is deceptive: the name Nuṣayriyya in Arabic is similar to the Arabic word Naṣārā (Christians); the Nuṣayrī triad is reminiscent of the Christian Trinity; and the Nuṣayrīs’ admiration of Jesus and the apostles can easily be considered a Christian tendency. The Nuṣayris even celebrate Christian holidays. However, all these similarities are external. A careful

3 See, for example, FRR, p. 125; MHIS, p. 190.
4 JK, p. 36; RIA, p. 291.
5 RIA, pp. 291–292.
6 HAIH, p. 268.
7 Ibid., p. 279.
study of the Nuṣayrī religion leads to the conclusion that these components are Christian only in appearance.

To begin with, the name Nuṣayriyya derives from Ibn Nuṣayr and cannot be a derivation of Naṣārā according to Arabic grammar. The Nuṣayrī triad was created by emanations and its hierarchical structure is different from the equal nature of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Other fundamental ideas in Christianity, such as the incarnation of the divinity in the human Christ and Jesus’ crucifixion are totally rejected in Nuṣayrism. Nuṣayrism contains “Islamized Christianity”, an admiration for the Qur’ānic Jesus who was not crucified. Although the Nuṣayrīs elevate the human Jesus to the level of the divine ism, according to the principle of Docetism his appearance is through illusion and not incarnation. As opposed to Christian belief, Jesus’ blood was not spilt and his goal was not to pardon humanity by his suffering, but rather to call the believers to accept the ma’na’s divinity. The Shi‘ī–Gnostic content of the Christian holidays that are celebrated by the Nuṣayrīs is another indication that Christianity may have been a source of inspiration only for Nuṣayrī terminology and symbols, but did not have any significant influence on its theological tenets.

Al-Jillī’s Risāla al-Masīḥiyya (epistle of the masīḥ [Jesus], not to be translated as “the Christian Epistle”) may serve as one of the main indications for the rejection of the hypothesis of Christian influence on Nuṣayrism. In this epistle, al-Jillī tries to create an artificial mystical bond between Nuṣayrism and Christianity. For example, when discussing the symbol of the cross, he explains that its four edges represent the four letters of the Arabic word ṣalīb (cross), the four letters of the Arabic names of the prophets Musā (Moses), ‘Īsā (Jesus) and Muhammad as well as the four parts of the basmala lā ilāha illā ‘Llāh (1.There is no 2. other God 3. but 4. Allāh):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{\begin{tabular}{c|c|c|c} \\
| & | & | & \\
\end{tabular}} \\
\text{lā} \\
lāḥa & \hline & illā \\
\text{Allāh}
\end{align*}
\]

\footnotesize{8 This fact was noted by Dussaud, Histoire et religion des Nosairīs, pp. 9–10.}  
\footnotesize{9 Ibid., p. 67.}  
\footnotesize{10 RM, pp. 290–291.}
Al-Jillī also explains that the life of Jesus contains mystical messages. For example, his baptism symbolizes initiation into esoteric knowledge, his twelve apostles represent the twelve *nuqabāʾ* in the world of light, and the illusion of his crucifixion (Docetism) is meant to test the believers as did the illusion of the martyrdom of al-Ḥusayn.\(^{11}\) It was not Jesus who was crucified, but Judas—a docetic view that is also found in other Muslim sources.\(^{12}\)

The quotations or quasi-quotations from the Gospels in Arabic in the Nuṣayrī sources do not represent a Christian influence either. Bar-Asher and Kofsky, who tried to prove Christian influence on Nuṣayrī theology, could not locate quotations from the canonical Gospels in medieval writings of the sect and admitted that the citations of Jesus are based merely on apocryphal Gospels.\(^{13}\) More quotations of this kind are found in other Nuṣayrī sources, mainly al-Jillī’s *Risāla al-Masīḥ iyya* and the sermons of Jesus at the end of Ḥasan ibn Shu’ba’s *Tuhaf al-ʿuqūl*.\(^{14}\) In some cases the citations are reminiscent of the style of the canonc Gospels but they are not identical, for example the sermon of Jesus at the end of *Tuhaf al-ʿUqūl*, which recalls the Sermon on the Mount.\(^{15}\) It may be assumed that the Nuṣayrī authors cited an old original Christian Gospel from the tenth century, which is different from the one used today. Yet it seems more likely that the Nuṣayrī citations from what they call *al-injīl* (from the Greek world *euangelion*, good message, the Gospels) are based on what Tarif Khalidi called the “Muslim Gospels”. Khalidi explains in his book *The Muslim Jesus* that medieval Muslim sources contain a large amount of scattered fragments from Gospels that are not found in Christian literature. These are sayings and stories of Jesus reflecting his personality as pictured in Islam, not Christianity. Khalidi tries to trace the roots of these Gospels in Hellenistic civilization within the Islamic world, and outside, in the surrounding Christian communities. He considers them apocryphal.

---

\(^{11}\) *RM*, pp. 288, 300.


\(^{14}\) See, for example, the quasi-citation from Matthew and Luke, in *RM*, pp. 290–291; *TU* (God’s words to Jesus), pp. 304–37, (Jesus’ sermon to the believers), pp. 307–316.

\(^{15}\) Compare the Arabic speech of Jesus in *TU*, pp. 307–316 with the much shorter and vaguely similar Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:3 to 7:27. I wish to thank Dr. David Cook for calling my attention to this interesting similarity.
and in some cases Muslim compositions echoing canonical Gospels.\(^{16}\) It is worth noting Khalidi’s assumption that the Muslim Gospels were written in the Shi‘i milieu of ninth-century Kufa.\(^{17}\) Included in this literature are al-Jillî’s bizarre citations of Nestorius concerning the ghayba of Jesus\(^{18}\) and Nestorius’s statement that everyone who knows Jesus is saved (in Shi‘ism an attribute of the Imām).\(^{19}\)

It is easy to suspect, from a historical point of view, that the goal of citing the “Muslim Jesus” or the “Shi‘i Nestorius” was to ease the conversion of Christians and specifically Nestorian Christians (spread throughout Syria, Iraq and Iran) to Nuṣayryism rather than to add a Christian aspect to Nuṣayrī theology.

In this context, the essay by Bar-Asher concerning what he calls the “Christian elements in the Nuṣayrī–‘Alawī religion” is helpful. A previous attempt to prove the Christian nature of Nuṣayryism was initiated by the Jesuit orientalist Henri Lammens in the nineteenth century.\(^{20}\) Probably motivated by missionary purposes, he considered the Nuṣayrīs “lost Christians”. His methods of research were very problematic, involving field research for Christian remnants in territories inhabited by the sect. No less problematic was his extensive use of sources from his period, which reflect the situation in the nineteenth century when the Nuṣayrīs were the object of Christian missionary influence. It is in this light that the appearance of a Nuṣayrī and Druze catechism in the nineteenth century must be explained. It should also be kept in mind that al-Adhanî wrote his Bākūra after he had converted to Christianity. Bar-Asher’s methods, based on textual research, are also problematic. His assumption that Docetism is an indication of a Christian component is unacceptable, since it already appears in the Qur‘ān.\(^{21}\) Bar-Asher does not provide enough evidence for his exaggerated statement that: “Beginning from the fourth/tenth century we find in the Nuṣayrī writings almost all the doctrines which are influenced by Christianity such as in the Majmū‘ al-a’yād of al-Ṭabarānī”. But


\(^{17}\) Ibid., p. 39.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., pp. 294–295.

\(^{19}\) Ibid., p. 296.


he continues by explaining that in this last source the only Christian component is the celebration of Christmas, and that most of the other Christian components he discusses appear in the nineteenth-century Bākūra of al-Adhanī and the catechism mentioned earlier. Bar-Asher mentions the Christian term quddās as another Christian component in Nusayrism, based again only on these modern sources. But on this last point his assumption proved to be true, since the term quddās appears in the recently available medieval source, al-Ṭabarānī’s Hāwī ʿfi ʿilm al-fatāwā. Here the Nuṣayrī initiates are obligated to know by heart three quddāsāt (pl. of quddās, mass): the quddās al-bākhūr (mass of the incense), which is also found in the modern Bākūra, the quddās al-zād (mass of the provisions) and the quddās al-milh (mass of the salt), whose contents are unknown. Nevertheless, the drinking of wine, used in the Nuṣayrī majlis of the shaykhs and in initiation does not represent the blood of Jesus, as in Christianity.

Bar-Asher mentions the heresiographer al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153) in his article, although in his discussion of the Nuṣayrī sect al-Shahrastānī does not attribute to them any Christian component, but rather a kind of dualistic divinity of the light of ʿAlī and Muhammad. Based on the great quantity of old and new sources used in this book, Bar-Asher’s assumption concerning the existence of a Nuṣayrī concept of incarnation, a term totally rejected by al-Khaṣībī and his followers, is unacceptable. On sound ground, however, is his hypothesis of Christian influence with regard to the holiness of Fāṭima and al-Ḥusayn, which

---

22 Ibid., pp. 189–190. Bar-Asher admits that the use of the Christian term thālūth (trinity) is extremely rare in medieval writings of the Nuṣayrīs and appears only in the twelfth-century Munāzara (MN, fol. 89b, 92a). He also admits that citations from the canonical Gospels, which can be found in the nineteenth-century catechism, do not appear in any of the medieval writings of the sect. See ibid., p. 191 note 14.


24 HIF, p. 72.

25 Al-Makzūn al-Sinjārī is the only Nuṣayrī mystic who uses the expression “drinking the blood of Jesus”. It occurs in one of his poems in the context of his prayers towards Mecca, as a symbol of a mystical experience; see Nwyia, “Makzūn al-Sinjārī, poète mystique alaouite”, p. 111. The only Nuṣayrī source mentioning the blood of Jesus in the context of the meaning of the quddās (mass) is in the late Nuṣayrī Catechism, influenced by the nineteenth-century Christian missionaries in Syria; see TDN, pp. 216–217.


27 Bar-Asher, ibid., p. 205.
is inspired by the Christian holiness of Mary and Jesus. Nevertheless, this similarity reflects Christian influence on Shi‘ism in general, not on Nuṣayrīsm specifically.

Christian components in Nuṣayrīsm are limited to terminology of certain rituals and do not include fundamental Christian doctrines. On the contrary, Nuṣayrī leaders made an effort to deny any connection with Christianity. For example, al-Jīlī explains in his *Risāla al-nu‘māniyya* the difference between the hierarchical nature of the divine triad and the equal nature of the Christian Trinity:

> The status of the *ism* with regard to the *ma’nā* is such as that of the look with regard to the watching, and that of the speech with regard to the speaker and movement with regard to passivity. He [God] is neither the entire look nor all the speech. Because if we were to say “all of him” we would diminish him and consider him incapable of speaking through anything but himself [and he can speak through his *ism* or his *bāb*]. If we were to claim so [that God can speak only through his essence] we would certainly mix the *ism* with the *ma’nā* and the *ma’nā* with the *ism*. In such a case we would be obliged to mix them also with the *sin* [Salmān, the *bāb*] as well. If we were to believe in this [mixing the three aspects of God as if they were equal] we would be like those who believe in a trinity and become Christians and be excluded from monotheism [*fa-nakānu min ašhāb al-thālūth wa-nasā’rū ka’l-naṣā’rā wa-nakhruju min ḥadd al-tawḥīd*]. God preserve us!

In one of his poems, al-Makzūn al-Sinjārī attacks a Christian monk, saying: “Your triple monotheism is a contradiction of monotheism” (*tawḥiduka fi ’l-tathlīth li-’l-tawḥīd *didd*). The combination of the negative attitude towards Christianity and the admiration of the Muslim Jesus leads to the conclusion that the only possible Christian inspiration on Nuṣayrīsm derives from the influence of Christianity on Islam in general and on Shi‘ism in particular. In addition, there is no indication of any direct contacts between Christian and Nuṣayrī scholars or any converted Christians influencing Nuṣayrī theology.

### 1.3 Zoroastrian influence

The study of the Persian influence on Nuṣayrīsm leads to different conclusions. There are indications that some leaders of the sect (al-Jannān

---

29 *DMS*, p. 86.
is the most important example) were of Persian origin. Al-Ṭabarānī admits that he had received “Persian epistles” which seem to have been the source for the Persian terms, words and names combined in some prayers he composed. Bar-Asher’s important article on the Persian components of Nuṣayrī religion merits strong endorsement. Bar-Asher notes that the source of the cult of wine (ʿabd al-nūr), derives from the Persian cult of light, as opposed to the idea expressed in his earlier article that its source is in the Christian mass. He correctly concludes that the Persian components in Nuṣayrīsm are the result of the general renaissance of Persian culture in the Muslim world in the ninth and tenth centuries, a thesis also advanced by other important scholars such as Amir-Moezzi and Yarshater.

The most important connection of the Nuṣayrīs with Persians, which characterizes Shiʿism in general, is related to the personality of Salmān, sayyid al-furs (master of the Persians), the first Persian converted to Islam and the most loyal follower of ʿAlī. Nevertheless, this Persian characteristic of Nuṣayrī theology represents a deviation from the fundamental obligation of Islam concerning the sanctity of the Arabic language and the obligation to pray only in Arabic. According to Nuṣayrī tradition, in the world of light Salmān ordered the aytām to communicate with the ahl al-marātib in seven languages, first in Persian and then in Arabic. Al-Ṭabarānī’s addition of Persian words to the prayer may represent his attempt to sanctify the Persian language, an effort that did not last after his death. In this context, it should be borne in mind that the available version of Umm al-kitāb was written in Persian and that the sanctification of the Persian language was an Ismāʿīlī characteristic. Another typical Zoroastrian symbol in Nuṣayrīsm is

---

30 MA, p. 209.
32 Ibid., p. 221.
33 Ibid., pp. 222–223.
35 *AAN*, p. 112.
37 H. Corbin, “Nāṣir-i Khusrau and Iranian Ismāʿīlism”, in R. N. Frye (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), vol. 4, p. 531. In Imāmī literature, the Iranian language represents the Sassanian royal language. The Imām ʿAlī is said to combine command of both the language of sanctity and the
fire as a sacred purifying element. The meaning of fire is linked to the doctrine of *nidāʿ*, the docetic sacrifice of the *bāb*. According to Nuṣayrī tradition, ʿAlī gave the order to burn ‘Abdallāh ibn Sabaʾ together with his ten followers in holes dug in the desert, after the Ibn Sabaʾ declared ‘Alī’s divinity. This terrible event, appearing also in Imāmī sources, receives a mystical interpretation in Nuṣayrī theology based on the sanctity of fire in Zoroastrianism. The Imām did not intend to punish Ibn Sabaʾ but to prove his sanctity and purity. After burning him ‘Alī repeated five *takbīrāt* (sing. *takbīr*, declaration of the words *Allāhu akbar*, God is greater), which caused Ibn Sabaʾ and his followers to come back to life. The same holy fire is explained by al-Khaṣibī as that from which the *ism* talked to Moses when he was first revealed to him and later to the Persians in the *qubba al-Fārisiyya*.

Although the presence of Iranian components (Persian equinox holidays, Persian saints and words mentioned in prayers, dualism in several aspects of theology and sanctification of fire) seems more noticeable than that of unorthodox Christian components (an Islamized Christmas, admiration of a non-crucified Jesus, Docetism and apocryphal Gospels), it does not mean that the Nuṣayris embraced Zoroastrian or Manicheaen doctrines. The major principles of Zoroastrianism are absent from Nuṣayrī theology, such as dualism at the level of the divinity, the struggle between Ahura Mazda and Ahrimān (or Angra Mainyu) and the participation of human beings in this struggle through their choice between good and evil. Neither Ahura Mazda nor even Zarathustra himself ever appears in the sect’s writings. Although Nuṣayrism does contain a partition of the cosmos into good and evil, the cosmos is not based on the balance between good and evil spirits. In Nuṣayrī theology there is no active struggle between the two powers, since the good, which is Allāh, is the one and only ruler of the world. Evil rules only in the material world where

---


39 *RR*, pp. 34–37; *FRR*, p. 108.

40 *FRR*, pp. 91–92; *MS*, pp. 213–215, 226.

the believers were thrown in order to be punished and tested by God. At the end of time the material world will be eliminated and the role of evil will be over. However, leaders of the sect were aware of the strong Iranian presence in their religious texts and of the danger of a misunderstanding of their theology. They totally rejected the idea of dualism in the divinity. Both al-Khaṣībī and al-Jīlī stressed the principle of a one and only God and refuted dualism by explaining that there is no separation between the two main aspects of the divinity, the maʿnā and the īsm, which are as reason and result, or “as the sun and its beams” in Neoplatonic terms. 42 ‘Alī ibn Shu’ba focused on the impossibility of the coexistence of two Gods:

If you were say that there are two [Gods], we would answer you [questioning]: are they passive or active [ʿājīzānī am qādirānī]? If you were to say passive, we would answer that the creator is not characterized as passive. If you were to claim that both are active, we would reply to you: [if so,] can one of them prevent the action of the other? And if this is the case, each of them remains passive as result of the other’s activity. If you were to claim that one of them is active and the other is passive, so the active is the ruler and the passive is the ruled one. If you were to say that they participated in the actions [for example:] one gives life and the other takes them, [we would reply that] the participation and the conciliation come only after the struggle, and in such a case [of participation] both would be passive in some matters, since neither of them would be capable of performing the entire action. One who is incapable cannot be the eternal. If you believe in a group of Gods [polytheism], you would meet the same difficulties as in proving God’s duality. So here you were given the proof that there must be only one God. 43

2. Identity

Nuṣayrism can be defined as a religion based on taʾwīl (allegorical interpretation) of God’s sayings in the Qurʾān. The other holy books of the sect are the bāṭin (mysticism), the esoteric explanations of God’s words in the Qurʾān. These explanations are attributed to the Imāms, according to the general Shīʿī belief that only they possess the gnosti, the inner knowledge that is the true interpretation of Muḥammad’s

42 RN, p. 304.
43 HAIH, pp. 244–245.
message. The presence of Neoplatonic, Iranian, Christian and Jewish components in Nuşayrism is not the result of the direct influence of these cultures and religions on members of the Nuşayrīs sect, but rather of a long process over a period of three centuries, of the infiltration of ideas into Islam and into mystical Shi‘ism in Iraq in particular. Their influence is already prominent in the writings of Shi‘i scholars such as Jābir ibn Ḥayyān, secret associations such as the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā‘ and above all the Ghulāt of Kufa and Basra (Mufaddal ibn ʿUmar in particular). Nevertheless, these components have different levels of infiltration into Nuşayrī theology. While philosophical thought such as Neoplatonism and Gnosticism (Christian or Manichaean?) shaped the core of Nuşayrī theology, religions such as Zoroastrianism, Christianity and Judaism remained at the margins. They were used as “decorative” elements; they were reshaped or altered completely in order to support original Nuşayrī doctrines.

The most fundamental idea of Nuşayrī religion is that ʿAlī appeared in the world to save humanity; he is the spiritual Noah’s Ark.44 The ghulūw (exaggeration/extremism) regarding Imāmī Shi‘ism lies in the Nuşayrī view of ʿAlī not as a human being but as a form through whom the divinity appeared. The Nuşayrīs can be defined accordingly as the “party of ʿAlī”, the Shi‘a. The sect was a continuation of the Ghulāt phenomenon, which lay at the center of Shi‘i activity and development. In this light, it is not difficult to understand the self-definition of the Nuşayrīs not only as Muslims but also as the “true Shi‘a”, since historically the sect was created from the group that was among the most intimate disciples of the last Imāms. The followers of these mystics, the Nuşayrīs, are the only surviving group who has kept the traditions of the inner circle of the Imāms to this day. The imputation of heresy to the Nuşayrī sect in most modern research is inappropriate, since it reflects only the view of Hanbalī Sunnism and conservative Shi‘ism and not the view of all religious streams in Islam. While most Muslim scholars did not explicitly exclude the Nuşayrīs from Islam, some Shi‘i scholars contented themselves with only mild criticism.

44 The Imāms’ safīnat al-najāt (saving boat, or ark of salvation) compared with the Ark of Noah is a well-known Shi‘i term. See, for example, in Nuşayrī writings ARM, p. 25.
2.1 Modern trends

The modern period has witnessed tremendous changes in the definition of the 'Alawīs and the attitude towards them in the Muslim world. These new trends do not reflect a change in Muslim theology, which is based on the medieval literature, but changes in Middle Eastern politics and reaction against Western threats. Still, the link between the 'Alawīs and Islam contributed to the sect’s integration in modern national and religious movements in the Middle East. In order to end their long isolation, the name of the sect was changed in the 1920s from Nuṣayriyya to 'Alawīyya, “followers of 'Ali”, a synonym for Shi‘ism. By taking this step, leaders of the sect expressed not only their link to Shi‘ism, but to Islam in general. This change of identity was expressed in Muhammad Amīn Ghālib al-Ṭawīl’s new version of Ta’rikh al-'Alawīyyīn (history of the 'Alawīs), which combines their history with that of Īmāmī Shi‘ism. The following step in the creation of a new image was a gradual denial of the previous Nuṣayri identity. In his book, al-Ṭawīl attacked Sulaymān al-Adḥānī, claiming that he was a drunkard and an immoral person who betrayed his sect, and after converting to Christianity had spread lies that the Nuṣayris were worshippers of idols.45 This process of denial of the old identity intensified in the writings of the 'Alawī shaykh 'Abd al-Ḥādī al-Khayyīr (d. 1986). He denied any connection of his sect with the name Nuṣayriyya, which according to him was a pejorative name used by the enemies of the sect, equivalent to the use of rāfīda for Shi‘īs and nāsība for Sunnīs.46 Al-Khayyīr was followed in Syria by several shaykhs, who were pursuing Shi‘ī religious studies to the complete neglect of their Nuṣayri identity. Shaykh Mahmūd al-Ṣāliḥ (d. 1998) is one example. He published his book al-Nabāʾ al-'aqīn 'an al-'Alawīyyīn, where he claims that the terms 'Alawī, Shi‘ī, Ja‘fārī and Īmāmī are synonymous.47

46 TA, pp. 11, 57–59. His criticism of the Ta’rikh of al-Ṭawīl was published separately in 'Abd al-Ḥādī al-Khayyīr, Naqād wa-taqrīz kitāb ta’rikh al-'Alawīyyīn (Damascus: Matba‘at al-Insha‘, 1992). For his interesting meeting with Strothmann and his debate with him, see ibid., p. 65. As to al-Khayyīr’s claim that there is no difference between 'Alawism and Īmāmism, see also his Yaqzat al-Muslimīna ‘l-'Alawīyyīna fi ma‘ṣla' al-qarn al-‘ashrīn (Damascus: Matba‘at al-Kātib al-‘Arabī, 1996), pp. 11–24. For his objection to the division of khāṣṣa and āmma, which he considers one reason for religious ignorance among the majority of the sect, see ibid., p. 36.
It is in the light of the ‘Alawī embracing of the Imāmī identity that the reason for the publication of al-Khasībī’s Imāmī book *al-Hidāya al-kubrā* in the 1980s in Lebanon should be understood. For the first time, it includes an apologetic introduction in which ‘Alawī shaykhs declare their Islamic identity. The manner in which this book serves *taqiyya* in the present as it did in the Middle Ages is striking.

While the ‘Alawī literature in Syria is apologetic,⁴⁸ that in Lebanon is also characterized by an active attack against the Sunnī *takfīr*⁴⁹ and against Western research of the sect.⁵⁰ The ‘Alawī community of Tripoli does not seem to join the Syrian movement of total denial of the old identity. In 1973 the members of the sect protested against the subordination of the ‘Alawīs under the Supreme Shi‘ī Assembly and against what seemed to be their imposed assimilation with the other Shi‘īs of Lebanon.⁵¹ The ‘Alawī literature in Lebanon is characterized by a tendency to present the sect as a Şūfi branch of Shi‘ism rather than to deny their previous identity as Nuṣayris.⁵²

Since the political interests of the ‘Alawīs of Syria and Lebanon are different, the development of two different genres of apologetic literature in the future is to be expected. The change of identity of the sect may indicate a real Imāmization of the ‘Alawīs but it could also reflect a modern *taqiyya*, which serves to receive the support of Shi‘ī state, as it did in the period of the founders of the sect.

The *fatwā* of Ibn Taymiyya is still influential nowadays, as reflected in neo-Ḥanbali writings published in Saudi Arabia as well as in the writing of the Muslim Brothers who are inspired by Ibn Taymiyya’s fundamentalism.⁵³ The attacks of the Muslim Brothers against the ‘Alawīs

---

⁵⁰ See, for example, Ḥāshim ʿUthmān, *al-ʿAlawiyyūna bayna l-ḥaqīqa wa-l-ustūra* (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Alā, 1985); *Hal al-ʿAlawiyyūna Shi‘a?* (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-ʿAlami lil-Maṭbuʿāt, 1994).
intensified after the latter seized power in Syria and even more after the brutal oppression of the rebellion of Ḥamāt. However, this negative view of the ‘Alawīs as heretics and illegitimate rulers in Syria does not seem to be shared by all Sunnī Muslims. In modern history, the Sunnīs have tried to acknowledge the Muslim identity of the ‘Alawīs in order to encourage them to join the Arab national movement on two occasions. The first time was in 1936, when Syrian nationalists urged the Muftī Ḥâjj Amīn al-Ḥusaynī, following a public declaration of belief by ‘Alawī shaykhs in Syria, to issue a fatwā confirming that the ‘Alawīs are Muslims.\(^{54}\) The second effort to assimilate the ‘Alawīs was during the years of the creation of the United Arab Republic uniting Egypt and Syria (1958–1961). It is in this period that the Shaykh al-Azhar issued his famous fatwā acknowledging Shī‘īsm as the fifth school of Islam. In this atmosphere of taqrīb (advancement of the relationship between Muslim groups) Muṣṭafā Shak’ā wrote his book Islam bilā madhāhib (Islam without schools) in which he calls upon all Muslims, Sunnīs and Shī‘īs, including the ‘Alawīs, to overlook the differences between them and unite in order reinforce Islam and fight takfīr (accusation of heresy) and fitna (war between Muslims).\(^{55}\) As for the Shī‘ī attitude, there is no doubt that from the twentieth century the orthodox Shī‘ī authorities in Lebanon, Iraq and Iran made a consistent and successful effort to assimilate the ‘Alawīs in Shī‘īsm.\(^{56}\) Nevertheless, this “return home” of the ‘Alawīs to their Ja‘farī source

---


is always conditioned by the disconnection from their Nuṣayrī identity and from ghulūw. More and more ʿAlawī shaykhs receive their qualification in Imāmī institutes and are not initiated by mystic shaykhs as before. The question of whether the new trend is taking the place of the old initiation, and how the ʿAlawī religious identity will change as a result in the future, demands further study. 57

57 For an interesting article concerning the change of the ʿAlawī identity in the twentieth century, see K. Firro, “The ʿAlawis in modern Syria: From Nuṣayriya to Islam via ʿAlawiyah”, Der Islam 82/1 (2005), pp. 1–31. Firro demonstrates the sect’s effort to adjust itself to orthodox Shiʿism and deny external influences on the theology of the sect.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX 1

PRIMARY NUṢAYRĪ SOURCES

a. Pre-Nuṣayrī sources transmitted from the Ghulāt

Jābir ibn ʿAbdallāh al-Anṣārī

1. Ṣumm al-kitāb (UK)

This book is attributed to Jābir ibn ʿAbdallāh al-Anṣārī (eighth century) who is said to have received mystical guidance from the Shīʿī leader of his time, the fifth Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 117/735). Although this source is neither cited nor appears in any Nuṣayrī source, and was found among the Ismāʿīlīs, it seems rather like a proto-Nuṣayrī document.¹ For this reason it is included here because it contains terminology, doctrines and traditions that were adopted by the Nuṣayris. The term Ṣumm al-kitāb appears only three times in the Nuṣayrī literature, once as a nickname of Fāṭima and twice as a synonym to the Qurʾān. The first source is an early Nuṣayrī text from the tenth century, explaining that it is the mystical name of Fāṭima (in masculine form, Fāṭir), daughter of the Prophet Muḥammad and wife of the first Imām ʿAli. In Nuṣayrī literature Fāṭir is seen as the “Mother of the Book” and the mystical meaning of the Book is her sons ʿHasan and ʿHusayn (second and third Imāms), keepers of the esoteric knowledge.² The second source is in the Diwān of al-Makzūn al-Sinjārī, which explains that the Ṣumm al-kitāb guides the believer through the seven obstacles (ʿaqabāt) of the material world in the path to heaven.³ The third source is an undated manuscript from the Ms. Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale), fonds arabe 1540 collection.

¹ See Halm’s explanation concerning a possible transmission of this book from the Nuṣayris to the Ismāʿīlīs in Syria in al-Ghunūsiyya fi ʾl-Islām, p. 90.
² al-Jili, Kitāb bāṭin al-salāt (KBS), p. 241. The usual Muslim use of the term Ṣumm al-kitāb is for the first chapter of the Qurʾān, the Fāṭihā; see V. Ivanov, “Notes sur l’Umm al-Kitab des Ismaéliens de l’Asie centrale”, REI 4 (1932), p. 421. Ivanov prefers to translate the term as essence des livres.
³ DMS, p. 220.
(fol. 159b) in which the initiate is instructed by his instructor to follow the *Umm al-kitāb*.

The author of the *Umm al-kitāb*, Jābir, is considered a Nūṣayrī saint and it is cited as transmitting mystical traditions in the Nūṣayrī sources. The *Umm al-kitāb*, a rare manuscript in the Persian language, was studied by Ivanov in the 1930s, by Halm who also translated it into German and Arabic (which seems to be its original form), and by Filippani-Ronconi who translated it into Italian. Halm considered it to be a text of the *mukhammisa*, a sect led by Jābir. Its content is designated for the intimate circle of the Imām only, called *muwahhidūn* (monotheists), a term used later by the Nūṣayrīs for self-definition. It contains much of the terminology and Gnosticism adopted subsequently by the Nūṣayrīs; for example the manifestation of the deity in 'Ali, its concealment by the veil (*ḥijāb*), the myth of the *habta*, the fall from the ideal world, the mystical path of the believer (*širāt*), the transmigration of souls, and the ideal existence of the shades (*āzila*) before the creation of the earthly world and the apocalyptic return of the last Imām. The text presents a clear Persian dualism of good and evil as well as an ideal existence in opposition to a material world. The author uses characters from the Zoroastrian religion. Halm explains that the book contains three layers that were connected by a later compiler: the first part is an explanation by the Imām al-Bāqir (still a child) to 'Abdallāh ibn Saba' about the meaning of the letters; the second and main part is an explanation by al-Bāqir to Jābir about the creation of the cosmos; and the third is later additions by the members of the sect of Abū 'l-Khaṭṭāb. According to Halm, this document reflects ancient mythology in Shī'ī garb.

---

Al-Mufaḍḍal ibn ʿUmar al-Juʿfī

2. Kitāb al-haft wa-ʿl-azīlla (HA)

In contrast with the previous source, this book is cited in Nuṣayrī medieval literature. It lacks the Iranian influence typical of Umm al-kitāb. The Haft is attributed to al-Mufaḍḍal ibn ʿUmar al-Juʿfī, another Nuṣayrī saint, and an important transmitter of Ghulāt traditions from the ninth century.10 Al-Mufaḍḍal lived a generation after Jābir and is said to have received mystical guidance from the sixth Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765). There are citations from the Haft in almost every Nuṣayrī source since the emergence of the sect, beginning with the writings of the eponymous Ibn Nuṣayr.11 This indicates that it is one of the first books embraced as a canonical12 source by the Nuṣayrī sect.

The Haft contains gnostic elements similar to those in the Umm al-kitāb, which were developed later in the Nuṣayrī religion. The main issues are: the creation of the cosmic order; the myth of the azīlla and the first seven created persons (al-sabʿa al-ādamiyyūn); the creation of heavenly creatures (the hierarchic ahl al-marātib) and the corresponding evil beings; the habta resulting in the transmigration of souls (tanāsukh); and the manifestation of the deity in the Imāms. The Haft also treats other subjects that do not appear in Umm al-kitāb, such as the mystical meaning of the pillars of Islam, the Docetism of Jesus and al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī, and the importance of the concealment (kitmān) of the secret knowledge. Another characteristic of the Haft is the repeated criticism of the non-mystical Shīʿīs of Kufa, called by the Imām Jaʿfar simply ahl al-Kūfa.13 These people are accused of being deficient Shīʿīs (al-Shīʿa al-muqaṣṣira).14 In one place the Imām agrees with an explanation of Jābir concerning the cyclical manifestation of the deity, and this could be a reference to Jābir ibn ʿAbdallāh al-Anṣārī.15 Two

---

10 On al-Mufaḍḍal, who is considered a bāb by the Nuṣayris, see Halm, Der Islam 55 (1978), pp. 219–266; Der Islam 58 (1981), pp. 15–86.
12 The Christian terms canon and canonization are used for the adoption of Ghulāt books by the Nuṣayris and their addition to their sacred literature. Being canonized, these books serve as references in explanations of Nuṣayrī doctrines as well as material for study and prayer.
13 HA, pp. 40, 46, 55, 80.
14 Ibid., pp. 34–35, 45.
15 Ibid., p. 81.
versions of this source were obtained. The printed edition of the *Haft* by Aref Tamer\(^\text{16}\) is used here, rather than the less exact version of *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī* VI, pp. 290–423.

3. *Kitāb al-ṣīrāṭ* (KS)

This source is also attributed to al-Mufaḍḍal ibn ʿUmar al-Juʿfī. It appears in manuscript form in Ms. Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale), fonds arabe 1449 fol. 80a–182a, as well as in *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī* VI (pp. 95–162). This manuscript was studied by Bar-Asher and Kofsky.\(^\text{17}\)

It is difficult to be precise about the period of its compilation. It seems that the ʿṢirāṭ was a Ghulāt book canonized by al-Khaṣībī in the tenth century.\(^\text{18}\) According to the ʿṢirāṭ, it was transmitted by Abū ʾl-Ḥasan Muhammad al-Hadrī (from al-Hadr in north Iraq). This last shaykh was a disciple of al-Khaṣībī’s successor in Syria, Muḥammad al-Jīlī (tenth century) and could have been a contemporary of al-Ṭabarānī (eleventh century).

The *isnād* of *Kitāb al-ṣīrāṭ* begins with al-Hadrī< al-Jīlī< al-Khaṣībī and goes through well-known Ghulāt as far back as al-Mufaḍḍal ibn ʿUmar who interrogates the Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq. But this *isnād* is most likely a late fabrication, because most of the early Nuṣayrī sources admit that it is Ishāq al-Aḥmar who transmitted the ʿṢirāṭ.\(^\text{19}\) This is also the opinion of the tenth-century Shiʿī historian al-Masʿūdī.\(^\text{20}\) Halm sees the theology of the book as being too developed to be attributed to al-Mufaḍḍal.\(^\text{21}\) Nevertheless, Halm’s hypothesis should be reviewed in the light of the *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī* sources. As will be seen, newly available sources show clearly that Ghulāt doctrines were already considerably developed prior to the creation of the Nuṣayrī sect. Leonardo Capezzzone, who published a critical edition of the ʿṢirāṭ with valuable


\(^{18}\) Al-Jīlī is the first leader of the sect to cite from *Kitāb al-ṣīrāṭ*, but he probably would not have had it canonized without the permission of his master al-Khaṣībī. See al-Jīlī, *Kitāb hāwi al-asrār* (HA), pp. 163, 197.

\(^{19}\) See KHA, p. 163; *HAD*, pp. 23, 40, 42, 53, 133, 138, 141, 168, 170, 172; *HAIH*, p. 257.


The main subject of the book, as indicated by its title, is the Širāt, a Qur'ānic term interpreted by the Nuṣayrīs as the spiritual path of the believers to God. The manuscript version of this book is used here. The copyist is Shaykh Yūsuf ibn Shaykh ʿArīb of the village of Raʿs Baʿliyya (region of Ṣafītā in the governorate of Ṭartūs) in 1206/1791.

4. Kitāb al-usūs (KU)
This manuscript, like the Širāt, is part of the Ms. Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale), fonds arabe 1449 (fol. 1a–79b). It was copied by the same copyist in the same year and place as the Kitāb al-širāt. The date of its compilation is unknown. Dussaud as well as Massignon attributed it to al-Mufad al. The Usūs is mentioned in the sect’s sources from the second half of the ninth century onwards. This may indicate that this anonymous Ghulāt text was added to the sect’s canon, as in the case of the Širāt, during the period of al-Khašībī. Kitāb al-usūs has two other titles: Kitāb taʿlīf abniyat al-kalām and Kitāb maʿrifat hikmat Sulaymān ibn Dāwūd, but despite its attribution to King Solomon, it has nothing to do with Judaism. On the contrary, this text contains some Christian motifs. The Usūs is presented as a transmission of Solomon’s wisdom to the eighth Imām of the Shiʿa, ʿAlī al-Riḍā. According to the text, this Imām kept the text secret and refused to deliver it to the Caliph al-Maʿmūn (d. 218/833). The manuscript of the Usūs was studied by Bar-Asher and Kofsky. It was printed in a corrupted version by Jaʿfar

---

24 US, fol. 79a,b.
26 Al-Jillī is the first to cite from Kitāb al-usūs; see Kitāb hāwī al-asrār (HA), pp. 158–163 (compare with the almost identical text in KU, fol. 8a, 8b–9a, 11b, 12a, 15a, 22b, 24a, 34b, 35a, 35b), then pp. 172, 158–161, 214; see other citations from the Usūs in al-Jillī, Risālat al-fatq wa-ʾl-ratq (FR), p. 318 and Risālat al-undiya (RA), p. 328 (compare the two last citations with KU, fol. 8b). Next to cite the Kitāb al-usūs is al-Jillī’s disciple, al-Ṭabarānī, in al-Baḥth wa-ʾl-dalāla (BD), p. 38. The last citation of the Usūs is found in al-Nashshābī, Munāzara (MN), fol. Fol 104a.
al-Kinj al-Dandashī, and includes unorganized Nuṣayrī theological issues such as the nature of the divinity and its appearances, the habṭa, the saving gnosis and transmigration.

5. Al-Risāla al-Mufaddaliyya (RMUF)

This short epistle, in Silsīlat al-turāṭh al-ʿAlawī VI (pp. 9–18), was transmitted by members of the Nuṣayrī sect, Abū Muḥammad Ṣār ibn Muḥammad > al-Jilli > al-Khaṣibī > through Ghulāt mystics going back to al-Mufaddal who, in turn, interrogates Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq. This isnād, like that of the Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ beginning with one of al-Jilli’s disciples, may indicate that the Mufaddaliyya was canonized by al-Khaṣibī. The main issues are the relations between the maʿnā and the ism based on a mystical interpretation of the Āyat al-nūr (verse of light) in the Qurʿān, and the number of the ahl al-marāṭib.

Muḥammad ibn Sinān al-Zāhirī

6–7. Kitāb al-ḥujub wa-ʾl-anwār (HUA, Silsīlat al-turāṭh al-ʿAlawī VI, pp. 19–64) and Kitāb al-anwār wa-ʾl-ḥujub (AUH, Silsīlat al-turāṭh al-ʿAlawī VI, pp. 65–94) are both attributed to Muḥammad ibn Sinān al-Ḥakīm (“the sage”), disciple of al-Mufaddal ibn ʿUmar who claimed he was guided by the Imām of his time, ʿAlī al-Riḍā (d. 203/818). Like al-Mufaddal, he is also considered a Nuṣayrī saint. They deal with the appearance of the ḥujub, the veils that were created as a result of the sins of the heavenly creatures. There are some major differences between these two collections of mystical traditions. The Ḥujub wa-ʾl-anwār contains two layers. The older one seems to be an original text by Muḥammad ibn Sinān, who transmits a tradition that al-Mufaddal ibn ʿUmar received from the well-known ghālī Abū ʾl-Khaṭṭāb Muḥammad ibn Abī Zaynab al-Kāhilī, as well as from the Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq. A later layer is the addition of an anonymous Nuṣayrī writer (perhaps al-Jannān al-Junbulānī) who adds to the traditions some explanations of

---

the yatīm al-akbar (a title attributed to al-Jannān’s master Muḥammad ibn Jundab) and of the bāb (the eponymous Ibn Nuṣayr).30

The book has neither order nor a clear focus. Apart from the issue of the Ḥuǧub, it deals with a variety of subjects, such as the cycles of history, the mystical meaning of the prayers and of the ḥajj, as well as traditions by Jābir ibn ‘Abdallāh al-Anšārī.

The Anwār wa-ʾl-ḥuǧub is easier to deal with. In its introduction, Muhammad ibn Sinān writes explicitly that his book is a collection of traditions that he assembled in order to better grasp the wisdom of the Lord. Unlike the previous book, this one focuses on one subject: the creation of the cosmos, beginning with the anwār wa-ʾl-ḥuǧub (lights and veils). The tradition of the creation is similar to that which appears in Umm al-kitāb and al-Haft wa-ʾl-aẓīla. Nevertheless, a careful reading reveals a second layer of the text, as in the case of the Ḥuǧub wa-ʾl-anwār. The text seems to have been amended by a Twelver Shīʿī, probably a Nuṣayrī šaykh, who tried throughout the text to emphasize the mystical meaning of the number 12 and to diminish the importance of number 7. This attempt cannot reflect the debate of the time of Ibn Sinān (eighth century), but a later (ninth century onwards) Imāmī polemic against the Ismāʿīlī Shīʿī group. This hypothesis becomes more confirmed when the author mentions the eleventh Imām al-ʿAskarī, who lived a century after the author’s time. Moreover, the author refers to the “error” of the wāqifiyya as-ḥāb Ismāʾīl (those who stop [the lineage of the Imāms at the seventh Imam] supporters of the seventh Imām Ismāʾīl).31

b. Nuṣayrī sources

Muḥammad ibn Nuṣayr

8. Kitāb al-akwār wa-ʾl-adwār al-nūrāniyya (AAN)

This source was not available until lately, when it was published in Lebanon in the new Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī (pp. 33–205).32 The five pages at the beginning showing the original manuscript seem to be

---

30 HUA, p. 30. The author also mentions Ibn Nuṣayr’s book al-Akwār wa-ʾl-adwār (see below, item 8).
32 Abū Mūsā and Shaykh Mūsā, Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī (1) Rasāʾil al-ḥikma
modern. They do not call to mind any other Nuṣayrī manuscript; for example, they include punctuation and the pages lack the word at the bottom of each folio for the first word on the next folio. Nevertheless, its style and content seem to fit the time of the author, though the credibility of the text can be determined only by comparing it with citations in other sources. The only paragraph available in another source is from the eleventh-century Majmūʿ al-aʿyād (see below, item 32), which is almost identical (i.e. with minor spelling differences) to the paragraph in the present version of the Akwār.

The book consists of two parts: the first is an account of a mystical revelation of the third Imām ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn to his intimate believers. Although the Akwār is attributed to the eponym of the Nuṣayrī sect, Muḥammad ibn Nuṣayr, it is not clear if he is the author of its first part or merely its transmitter. The second part, in which Ibn Nuṣayr nominates his disciple Ibn Jundab as his successor, contains many elements from the Umm al-kitāb and the Haft. It treats a variety of subjects, mainly the transcendence of God, the account of the ahl al-marātīb, the cycles of history (akwār, adwār), the mystical meaning of the Persian equinox celebrations of Nawrūz and Mihrijān, and the relationship between the two elevated aspects of the divinity, the maʿnā and the ism.

9. Kitāb al-mithāl wa-ʿl-ṣūra (MS)

This book, which is also included in the modern Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī I (pp. 207–234), contains an almost identical paragraph to one that is cited in Kitāb al-usayfir (see below, item 50). As in the case of the previous compilation, it is attributed to Muḥammad ibn Nuṣayr. Its content is similar to that of the Haft, dealing with the pre-existent “shades”, the al-sabʿa al-Ādamiyyūn, the ahl al-marātīb and their opposites, the devils. It also contains strong condemnations of the Shīʿī muqaṣṣira and an account of the akwār.


34 The beginning of the isnād presents a bizarre chain of transmission going back from Jābir ibn ʿAbdallāh al-Anṣārī through numbers of Ghulāt to Ibn Nuṣayr’s rival, Iṣḥāq ibn Muhammad (al-Ahmar) who transmits it to Muḥammad ibn Jundab. Oddly enough, this last mystic returns to his teacher Ibn Nuṣayr in order to ask him for an explanation of the book. Later in the book Ibn Nuṣayr explains to Ibn Jundab that Iṣḥāq transmitted it without the Imām’s permission. See AAN, pp. 33–34, 58.

35 Compare MS, pp. 222–224 with Usayfir (US), fol. 3a, b. The material in Usayfir is abbreviated and some paragraphs from the Mithāl are omitted.
Ishāq ibn Muḥammad al-Nakhaʿī

10. Ādāb ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib (AAM)
This book is attributed to Jaʿfar ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Mufaḍḍal ibn ʿUmar by the editors of the Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī VI (pp. 261–287). Nevertheless, the book is not mentioned in any other Nuṣayrī source. A careful reading of this text reveals the real author’s identity. The introduction consists of a typical Nuṣayrī isnād: al-Ṭabarānī < al-Jilī < al-Khaṣībī followed by three lines from one poem that could not be located in the Diwān al-Khaṣībī (see below, item 13). The next paragraph is of rare historical importance: Ishāq ibn Muḥammad al-Nakhaʿī “al-Aḥmar” in the presence of his majlis, reads his testament, which includes a demand to follow the doctrines of his sect, the Ishāqiyya (not mentioned by name). These are mainly the mystery of the divinity, the allegorical explanations of Islamic obligations, special prayers recommended by Ishāq on different occasions, and the obligation of the concealment (kitmān) of esoteric knowledge. In one source of the sect the book appears as Kitāb ādāb al-dīn and is attributed to Abū ʿl-Muṭṭalib Jaʿfar ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Mufaḍḍal.36

This book, in fact, is the only complete document written by Ishāq that has survived to this day. The reason for its inclusion in the Nuṣayrī canon is probably that before splitting from the sect, Ishāq was one of Ibn Nuṣayr’s most prominent disciples. Ishāq’s writings are cited in other Nuṣayrī sources, mainly those of the Banū Shuʿba.37
The canonization of the Ādāb ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, as well as citations of Ishāq in Nuṣayrī sources, may indicate that the beginning of the rivalry between the Nuṣayriyya and the Ishāqiyya was about leadership rather than doctrinal issues.38

36 HAD, p. 37. The fragment is identical to the source.
37 Ishāq’s lost writings are mentioned in several Nuṣayrī sources. He is the real transmitter of the Kitāb al-ṣirāṭ (see above, item 3); and the author of the following sources:
Kitāb al-tanbih (in MS, p. 210; HAD, p. 45)—the citations deal with the titles of God and the beginning of his creation; Kitāb al-shawāhid (in HAD, p. 34)—the citations deal with God’s appearances in history; and Kitāb al-taklīf, also called Bāṭin al-taklīf (in HAD, p. 36, 49, 108, 112, 174)—the citations deal with the beginning of God’s creation, using his mashīʿa (divine will).
38 This hypothesis concerns only the period of the founders of the Nuṣayrī sect (ninth–eleventh centuries). The account of the theological differences between Nuṣayriyya and Ishāqiyya seem to reflect a later period, that of the the heresiographer al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153). See Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, al-Mīlal wa-ʾl-nihāl (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1992), pp. 192–193. The popular
ʿAbdallāh al-Jannān al-Junbulānī

11. Kitāb īdāh al-miṣbāḥ (IM)

Its complete name is Kitāb īdāh al-miṣbāḥ al-dālāl ʿalā sabīl al-najāh. This book is the last and most problematic in the Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī I (pp. 236–299). Although it is referred to by its title in the lists of Nuṣayrī sources of Josef Catafago (1876) and of Louis Massignon (1938), there is no trace of this source either in the available texts of the sect or in Imāmī literature. Its content is no less problematic. The author is ʿAbdallāh al-Jannān al-Junbulānī, called “the Persian” in the sect’s sources and the teacher of its main founder, al-Khasilī. Nevertheless, there is no trace of Persian influence in this book. Its mystical content does not always fit in with the writings of al-Junbulānī’s followers, mainly his allegorical explanations of the Muslim holidays, which do not recall those of al-Ṭabarānī’s Majmūʿ al-aʿyād (see below, item 32). Other parts of the book, which are not typical of Nuṣayrī documents, clearly show an effort to conform to Imāmī Shiʿīsm, mainly in its orthodox explanations of the pillars of Islam lacking any mystical interpretation. Considering the irregularities in this book, it is impossible to evaluate its credibility.

Al-Ḥusayn ibn Ḥamdān al-Khasilī

12. Kitāb al-hidāya al-kubrā (HK)

This document is a rare source for studying the activity of its author, al-Ḥusayn ibn Ḥamdān al-Khasilī, the main founder of the Nuṣayrī sect. It was published in the 1980s by the Muʿassasat al-Balāgh in Beirut. It is probably the only work of al-Khasilī that has been pre-

---

39 It should be noted that the titles of two of the three books available in the Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī, I, appear in J. Catafago, “Nouvelles mélanges”, Journal Asiatique 4 (1876), pp. 523–525 items 10 (al-Akwār wa-l-adwār al-nūrāniyya) and 18 (al-Īdāh); Catafago served in the 1840s as chancellor and dragoman of the Prussian consulate in Syria. Some of the items mentioned in his list cannot be located today.

served in its totality. The available book contains around 400 pages of traditions concerning the Prophet Muhammad, his daughter Fāṭima, and the twelve Imāms. According to its anonymous editor, it was printed using one main manuscript completed by other editors, but no details are given. Because of its purpose, it is written in accordance with the taqīyya code in a quasi-orthodox style, avoiding non-Imāmī mysticism. Al-Khaṣībī attacks the Ghulāt in one place, labeling them heretics. Contrary to Shi‘ī orthodox opinion, the author refers to the sect’s eponym Ibn Nuṣayr as the bāb of the eleventh Imām, Ḥasan al-‘Askarī. Moreover, towards the end of his book, al-Khaṣībī briefly mentions other ideas that are considered heretical in Imāmī Shi‘ism, such as the tradition of the azīlla and the transmission of divine powers to the Imāms (tafwīd). The credibility of this book is high, considering the fact that three almost identical paragraphs of it are cited in other sources, one in the Imāmī Bihār al-anwār, and two more in other Nuṣayrī sources. The book is of special historical importance, since it contains some rare autobiographical details.

13. Diwān al-Khaṣībī (DKH)
The poetic corpus of al-Khaṣībī has a double importance, for the research of his sect’s doctrines and for the study of the Nuṣayrī poetic literature. Here the Manchester manuscript is used as the other main version in Damascus is inaccessible. The Damascus version

---

42 Ibid., p. 444.
43 Ibid., pp. 431–432.
44 Ibid., p. 323.
47 Compare al-Ṭabarānī, Majmūʿ al-aʿyād (MA, see below item 32), p. 97–100 with HK, pp. 82–85. Compare also Munāzarat al-Shaykh al-Nashābī (MN, see below item 52), fol. 105b with HK, p. 126.
49 However, a printed version of the Diwān al-Khaṣībī was obtained, which combines the version used here with that of Damascus; see S. Habib, Diwān al-Khuṣaybī [sic] maʿā sharḥ lil-rumūz al-bātīmiyya al-wārida fihi: dirāsa wa tahqīq wa-sharḥ (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Almāʾ līl-Maṭbūʿāt, 2001). Unfortunately, this book lacks references to the author’s important explanations. A commentary to the Diwān was printed
was copied in 1242/1826 and the Manchester version was kept until 1239/1823 in the Khāsīki family in the region of Lādhiqīyya belonging to the Khayyāṭīn faction. However, the Manchester version was copied from an older version of a certain Shaykh Sazir (or Shazr/Shizr since there are no diacritical marks) ibn al-Shaykh Ḥasan ibn al-Shaykh Muhammad (“ibn” could mean “disciple of”) in 1123/1711. A critical study of the two versions has yet to be undertaken.

The Manchester version of the Dīwān contains two major parts: one titled Dīwān al-Khasībī (fol. 3b–84a, 57 poems), and Dīwān al-gharib (fol. 84b–121b, 42 poems). The poems are arranged by length from long to short, with some exceptions. According to the anonymous introduction, the Dīwān al-gharib was part of a certain Dīwān al-Shāmī (Syrian corpus), which was probably lost. This manuscript is of tremendous importance for the study of the Nuṣayrīs. Not only does it contain all the doctrines of the sect, but it constitutes a cultural treasure as a typical pseudo-epigraphic compilation in which shaykhs from several periods added poems and attributed them to al-Khasībī. This explains the several styles and different levels of Arabic. In one place, the anonymous copyist noted that one poem was written by a ninth-century ghālī. I would suggest that the Dīwān contains three levels of credibility: high credibility (poems cited in the texts of the founders of the sect, in the tenth and eleventh centuries and containing a high level of literary Arabic); medium credibility (poems cited in the twelfth-century Munāzarat al-Shaykh al-Nashshābī (see below, item 52) containing different levels of Arabic); and low credibility (poems cited in the nineteenth-century al-Bākūra al-Sulaymāniyya (see below, recently in Lebanon: Ibrāhīm ‘Abd al-Laṭīf Ibrāhīm Murhaj, Sharḥ Dīwān al-Khuṣaybī [sic] Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Husaybī [sic] (Beirut: Dār al-Mīzān, 2005).

50 S. Ḥabīb, Dīwān al-Khaṣībī, p. 206.
51 Ibid., fol. 1a–2b. The Dīwān passed among the shaykhs of the family, each one noting that he had read it, corrected it and added his blessings to another member of the family in its marginal opening papers. The latest correction was made by a member of this family in the village of Zghārū or Dhghārū (in the region of Lādhiqīyya) in 1239/1823. This last shaykh noted that his family was of Tunisian origin and belonged to the Khayyāṭīn faction. See ibid., fol 2b. Concerning the Nuṣayrī factions, see Chapter 1, note 221.
52 DKH, fol. 214a.
53 Ibid., fol. 121b.
54 DKH, fol. A72–b74; the copyist attributes one poem to a certain Šāliḥ ibn ‘Abd al-Qaddūs, appearing in an isntād in Ibn Nuṣayr’s AAN, p. 34.
item 58) or that do not appear in any source. Their language is Middle Arabic or even the local Syrian dialect).\textsuperscript{55}

The Manchester manuscript also contains the \textit{Dīwān} of a contemporary of al-Khāṣībī, al-Muntajab al-ʿĀnī (fol.122b–214b, see item 53) and an \textit{Urjūza} (poem in \textit{rajaz} tempo) of a certain ‘Alā‘ al-Dīn ibn Manṣūr al-Ṣuwayrī (fol. 217b–249b, see below, item 55), which was written in a later period. The \textit{Dīwān al-Khāṣībī} has not been studied before the present research, and was only referred to briefly in some of the studies of Massignon. Concerning the contents of the \textit{Dīwān}, see below Appendix 6.

14–16. \textit{al-Risāla al-rāstbāshiyya (RR)}

This precious document, unavailable until now, was printed in the second volume of \textit{Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī}\textsuperscript{56} (pp. 16–82). The name \textit{Rāstbāshiyya} derives from the Persian words \textit{rāst bāsh}, which means “be righteous!”\textsuperscript{57} The historical context of this book is vague but there is some evidence that it was dedicated to the Buyid ruler ʿIzz al-Dawla Bakhtiyār. This hypothesis helps in explaining why the author, al-Khāṣībī, used a Persian title for his book written in Arabic. According to its opening, it was dedicated to his “children”, i.e. his disciples. The book is more organized than most of the Nuṣayrī documents. It is arranged by subject and contains subtitles before every discussion.

This book has a supplement, called \textit{Fiqh al-risāla al-rāstbāshiyya (FRR)}, in \textit{Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī} (chap. 2, pp. 83–156), which includes explanations and additions to the first book. Although it is called \textit{fiqh}, it has nothing to do with jurisprudence, and the title should be translated as “comprehending the epistle of \textit{Rāstbāsh}”. Al-Khāṣībī explains in the introduction that it was meant to answer the question of one of his disciples, but should serve as an explanation to the whole community. This may imply that it was dedicated to the Buyid ruler, but copies of the text were made for the \textit{muwaḥḥidūn}. The two books, the \textit{Risāla} and the \textit{Fiqh}, deal with the following subjects: the nature of the divinity; the appearance of the \textit{maʿnā}, the \textit{ism} and

\textsuperscript{55} See details in Appendix 6.


\textsuperscript{57} This translation is also suggested by Muḥammad Ḥanīb al-Ṭawīl, \textit{Taʾrikh al-ʿAlawiyyīn} (Lādhiqiyya: Dār al-Andalus, 1966), p. 260; al-Ṭawīl translates it into Arabic as \textit{kun mustaqīman}!
the bāb in the ideal world of light and in human form in the material world throughout history; the five levels of transmigration; and explanations of gharāʾib (sing. gharib), i.e. difficult terms in the epistle. Throughout the two books, the chapters conclude with commentaries on the contents of al-Ṭabarānī’s book al-Baḥth wa-ʾl-dalāla (BD, see below item 40) that are not found elsewhere. It should be added that the two books of the epistle of Rāstbāsh include long citations from a lost book of al-Khaṣibī, called Risāla fī ʾl-siyāqa (RS) dealing with the personifications of the three aspects of the divinity in history and their transition (siyāqa) from one historical figure to another. The reliability of the Rāstbāshiyya is very solid, because it served as raw material for al-Ṭabarānī one century later. Al-Ṭabarānī cited parts from it in his Majmūʿ al-ʿayād (see below, item 32 ).

Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Jilli

17. Kitāb ḥāwī ʾl-asrār (KHA)
This book is part of the Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī II (pp. 157–217). It was written by al-Khaṣibī’s most prominent disciple and successor, Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Jillī, whose study circle was in Aleppo. The book focuses on the nature of the divinity and its appearance in the worlds of light and material. It is of special bibliographical importance because of the nature of the text. Al-Jillī combines citations from Ghulāt literature that is lost today. In other cases, citations confirm the liability of available ancient sources and gives an idea of when they were canonized by the Nuṣayrīs.

18–22. Letters of al-Jillī to other šayḵhs
Five of the available books and epistles by al-Jillī are letters he wrote to anonymous šayḵhs. In this context, the title Kitāb could be translated both as “book” and “letter”. There are some indications that some of these letters were destined for the Banū Shuʿba (or Shaʿba) family in Ḥarrān, but this is not certain.

58 See al-Ṭabarānī, Majmūʿ al-ʿayād (MA), p. 13 (compare with RR, p. 77); p. 154 (RR, 81); p.12–15 (RR, 79–81); p. 108 (FRR, 53, 85); p. 109 (FRR, 86–87); pp. 188–189 (RR, 49–53).
18. *Kitāb bāṭin al-ṣalāt* (KBS)
In this source, given in the *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawi* II (pp. 219–272), al-Jillī answers a letter he received from an anonymous shaykh of the *muwahḥidūn* who asked about the mystical (*bāṭin*) meaning of the Muslim prayers. In the introduction, al-Jillī praises his “brother” (colleague) for their knowledge of the truths (*maʿrifat al-ḥaqāʾiq*), perhaps referring to Shaykh Ḥamza Ibn Shuʿba al-Ḥarrānī’s *Kitāb al-ḥaqāʾiq*. Al-Jillī presents the Shīʿī version of every prayer and its esoteric explanation.

19. *Risālat al-bayān* (RB)
The full title of this epistle is *Risālat al-bayān li-ahl al-ʿaql wa-ʾl-adḥān* (*Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawi* II, pp. 273–285). It is al-Jillī’s answer to a shaykh concerning the appearance of the *maʿnā*, the *ism* and the *bāb* and the rest of the *ahl al-marātib*. It is possible that this letter was also sent to Shaykh Ḥamza Ibn Shuʿba al-Ḥarrānī. The entire epistle appears in the Ms. Paris fonds arabe 1540 (fol. 53a–64a) following a chapter from *Hujjat al-ʿārif* (*HAIH*, see below, item 49), a book written by Ḥamza ibn ʿAlī ibn Shuʿba (fol. 51b–53a). Contrary to the usual separation between the documents in the Ms. Paris (for example, “this is the end of the book/epistle”, “Praise the Lord” or the list of copyists), between the chapter from *Hujjat al-ʿārif* and the *Risālat al-bayān* is the following: “Here ends the chapter, praise the Lord alone, and it is followed by the epistle of the *Bayān*…”. The anonymous editor of these manuscripts clearly indicates that there is a connection between the two documents. Moreover, Ḥamza ibn ʿAlī was nicknamed “the greatest master” (*al-sayyid al-ajall*, fol. 51b) and al-Jillī sent his letter to “the great master” (*al-sayyid al-jalīl*, fol. 53b). Both documents deal with the divine nature of the Imāms Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. Most of the *Bayān* contains answers to the shaykh’s questions concerning the *ahl al-marātib* and the rising of the gnostic to higher degrees of spirituality.

20–21. The following two epistles are of special importance, because they represent Nuṣayrī opinion concerning Christian doctrines. They

reflect a Nuṣayrī interpretation of Christian holidays and use of Christian terminology in an explicit way that had never been seen before in Ghulat circles.

20. *al-Risâla al-Masîhiyya* (RM)
This short epistle (in *Silsilat al-turâth al-ʿAlawi* II, pp. 287–302), entitled “the epistle of the masîh/Jesus” (not to be translated as “the Christian Epistle”), explains in 18 chapters the mystical meaning of Christian symbols, saints and holidays. In fact, Christian doctrines are replaced by Nuṣayrī mystical interpretations, backed by Qurʾanic references. The most outstanding element in this document is the citation of Nestorius, Archbishop of Constantinople in the fifth century and the originator of the unorthodox Nestorian church. The significance of this citation is discussed in Chapter 2. At the beginning of the epistle al-Jillî writes that he has been asking about the truth of Jesus in the world of light and in material existence, but he does not refer to any specific person.

This epistle (*Silsilat al-turâth al-ʿAlawi* II, pp. 303–308) is a very short letter that al-Jillî sent to an anonymous shaykh, perhaps al-Nuʿmân, who is the Baghdadian theologian Shaykh al-Mufid. He first sends regards to Shaykh Muhammad and to his son, Shaykh Hibat Allâh. The purpose of the epistle is to present the Nuṣayrī divinity as pure monotheism and to prevent belief in a trinity. At the end, al-Jillî briefly mentions the Christian holidays that appeared in his *al-Risâla al-Masîhiyya*, together with their mystical meaning.

22. *Risâlat al-andiya* (RA)
The epistle (*Silsilat al-turâth al-ʿAlawi* II, pp. 331–321) explains the phenomenon of nidâʾ (pl. andiya), the public declaration of the Imâm’s divinity. This document, which explains the logic of Ghulat behavior and their self-exposure to severe danger, is discussed in Chapter 2. This seems to be one of the earliest letters of al-Jillî, because in its introduction he explains to an anonymous shaykh that he permits himself to send him the letter of his master (probably al-Khašîbî), because he has died and is not able to send it himself.

23–25. The following three documents are epistles written by al-Jillî to his disciples. They do not appear as letters, but as short explanations of particular matters.
23. *Risālat al-fatq wa-l-ratq* (RFR, *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī* II, pp. 309–319). This epistle presents Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq’s explanation of the relations between the most abstract divinity, the *maʿnā* and its first emanation, the *ism*. The typical Neoplatonic terminology of this epistle can be found in other Nuṣayrī sources of this period.


25. *Wašiyyat al-Jīlī li-Abī Saʿīd* (WJAS, in *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī* III, pp. 41–44). This document, entitled “the testimony of al-Jīlī to Abū Saʿīd [al-Ṭabarānī]” is of theological as well as historical importance. It deals with the religious obligations that al-Ṭabarānī should observe in order to deserve to succeed his master.

Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan al-Muntajab al-ʿĀnī


This poetic corpus was written by Abū ʿl-Fadl Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan al-Muntajab al-ʿĀnī, a member of the Nuṣayrīs who was a contemporary of al-Khasibī.60 His Dīwān contains praise for al-Khaṣibī and his community, as well as rare allusions to his activity. Al-ʿĀnī’s corpus follows the Dīwān al-Khaṣibī in Ms. Manchester, Arab c–d 452, fol. 122b–214b.61 It was copied by ʿAbdallāh, son of Shaykh Ḥasan in 1122/1710 (no location is specified). The Dīwān al-Muntajab was studied by Asʿad A. ʿAli, a Syrian scholar specializing in Arabic poetry, who based his study on several versions of this Dīwān.62

27–29. The following three sources are records of al-Khaṣibī’s teachings compiled by his disciples in Iraq.

---

60 There is good reason to believe that the dating of this text by Massignon in 595/1198, based on one modern source, is wrong; see Massignon, “Esquisse”, p. 645. It is more likely that al-Muntajab was a contemporary of al-Khaṣibī.


The three texts are parts of the Ms. Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale), fonds arabe 1450 and are connected. They all treat the same subject of the nature of the Nuṣayrī divinity and the relations between its three main aspects, the maʾnā, the ism and the bāb.

Abū Muḥammad ʿAlī ibn ʿIṣā al-Jisrī

27. Rislat al-tawḥīd (RT, fol. 42a–48a) is transmitted as follows: This is an anonymous disciple’s transmission (naql) of the epistle that was reported by (rawā) Abū Muḥammad ʿAlī ibn ʿIṣā al-Jisrī after interrogating (he writes: saʾaltu) al-Khasībī. This last shaykh is answering the question of al-Jisrī whom he calls Abuʾl-Ḥasan (this kunya repeated in SJ could refer to a disciple of al-Jisrī named Ḥasan):

ʿAbdallāh ibn Ḥārūn al-Ṣāʾigh

28. Masāʾil ʿAbdallāh ibn Ḥārūn al-Ṣāʾigh (MAHS, fol. 48b–51b; also appears in Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī IV, pp. 191–194 as Masāʾil Ibn Ḥārūn ilāʾl-Shaykh al-Khaṣībī) is written (tuktabu) by an anonymous writer concerning Abū Ṭabdallāh ibn Ḥārūn al-Ṣāʾigh’s interrogations (masāʾil) of al-Khaṣībī in his place (no details) while he summoned his session (majlis):

Anonymous writer < al-Ṣāʾigh< al-Khaṣībī.

The questions concern “the epistle which is read to those present”, 63 which is probably the Risālat al-tawḥīd, because it deals with the same issues.

In the texts of Risālat al-tawḥīd and the Masāʾil the handwriting changes every couple of pages. They were copied by several shaykhs from the village of Qlayʿāt (south of Aleppo). 64

29. The third source (SJ, Ṣāʾigh-Jisrī, fol. 176b–179a) is the untitled account of al-Ṣāʾigh concerning his visit to al-Jisrī (no details about the

---

63 MAHS, fol. 48b–49a.
64 The anonymous Nuṣayrī copyist of the Masāʾil used the text of a certain ʿImran Ḥamd, called “the philosopher of his time” and wrote: “we have found in it many deviations from the balance of the unification of God”; see MAHS, fol. 51b. This copyist appears in the colophon of Kitāb al-sīrāt as ʿImran ibn Ḥamד; see KS, fol. 182. The copyist’s list (in brief, fol. 48b), is detailed later in the manuscript, including the place; see Ms. Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale), fonds arabe 1450, fol. 64a.
place) during the month of Ramadān of the year 340/951, while al-Jisrī “was organizing the questions and compiling them, then copying from them the saying [of al-Khaṣībī to al-Ṣāʾigh] up to his words: one who worships the ism truly worships the maʿnā”.65 This rare colophon informs us that the earliest known version of this text is that of a certain Shaykh Salmān al-Lūdāqiyya in the year 636/1238 (twenty years before the Mongol invasion of Iraq). The last copyist is another Shaykh Salmān from the village of Srayjis (near Ṭartūs) in 1212/1797.

The three manuscripts were studied separately by Bar-Asher and Kofsky without discussing the connection between them.66 A critical edition of Risālat al-tawḥīd was recently written by Tariq Rajab.67

---

65 MAHS, fol. 48b–49a: wa qad rattaba ’l-masāʾil wa-allafaha wa-thannāhā al-qawl minhā lā qawlihi man ’abada ’l-ism bi’l-haqīqa fa-qad ’abada ’l- maʿnā. This sentence is almost identical to the words of al-Khaṣībī to al-Ṣāʾigh in MAHS, fol. 50a: “Whoever worships the maʿnā through the truth of the ism, unifies God.”


68 Al-Ḥusayn ibn Hārūn claimed to have received a tradition from al-Khaṣībī; see BI, p. 452. He is probably the same author as Abū Abdallāh al-Ḥusayn ibn Ḥamdān ibn Hārūn al-Baghdādi, the disciple of al-Khaṣībī, mentioned in MA, p. 203.

69 Ibid., p. 432.
Ahmad ibn Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-ʿAbdī al-Numayrī/Namīrī

31. al-Risāla al-Harrāniyya (RHA)
This epistle (included in Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī IV, pp. 305–316) is the only available document written by Shaykh Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-ʿAbdī al-Numayrī/Namīrī. We have no details about the author, but his nisba may indicate a kinship to the eponym Ibn Nuṣayr, himself an ʿAbdī Numayrī/Namīrī. The author, who seems to be a disciple of al-Jillī living in Harrān, writes in the introduction that after the death of his master (al-Jillī) he was left with one of his books (which he does not specify) that demanded an explanation. The major subject of the epistle is the creation of the positive and negative marātib. In all likelihood Aḥmad’s book was written before al-Ṭabarānī became a known shaykh, because his name and writings are not mentioned anywhere in this source.

Maymūn ibn al-Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī

32. Kitāb majmūʿ al-aʿyād (MA)
This book’s title is also Sabīl rāhat al-arwāh wa-dalīl al-surūr wa-ʿl-afrāḥ ilā fāliq al-asbāḥ. In this book, Maymūn ibn al-Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī (from Tiberias in northern present-day Israel) sums up the major doctrines of his predecessors. Unlike other Nuṣayrī writings, which are in most cases unorganized questions and answers, this book is arranged according to Nuṣayrī holidays, and each chapter contains the relevant traditions. As noted, the Majmūʿ al-aʿyād contains citations from Dīwān al-Khasībī (DKH). A very useful critical edition of it (containing 229 pages) was published by Strothmann.70 This text is based on two manuscripts, one copied by Ḥasan, “son” (disciple) of Shaykh Ḥaydar al-Aʿrajī in 1183/1769 and another copied by Muḥammad Sulaymān Muḥrīz in 1329/1911.71 I have obtained a third version of this book from the Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī III, pp. 208–412. This last version, which is almost identical to the previous two, includes one valuable part that clarifies lines in Strothmann’s version that were unreadable. These lines, which deal with Persian manifestations of the

71 MA, p. 228.
deity, are important for the study of Zoroastrian influences on the Nuṣayrī religion. The Strothmann version includes a collection of traditions transmitted by Jābir ibn Yazīd from the Imām al-Sādiq. This collection, entitled Kitāb sharḥ al-sabʿīn (KSS, Book/letter of explanation concerning the seventy [persons]) does not appear as a separate book, but rather as chapter (pp. 28–49 in MA). In the version of the Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī III (pp. 210–228) it appears as a separate source, not included in the Majmūʿ al-aʿyād. The opening isnād indicates that this source was preserved far from its original place. It was delivered from the Imām in Kufa, then transmitted in Mecca, and then in the Iranian cities of Ṭāluqān in 240/854 (Khurasān, present-day north Afghanistan) and Shirāz in 327/938. The identity of the last transmitter, a certain Abū ʿAlī al-Basrī is unknown, but the year of the last transmission indicates that the book could not have reached the Nuṣayrī community prior to the time of al-Khaṣībī. This short book deals with the mystical meaning of ḫīd al-adḥā (the holiday of sacrifice) and warns believers against the seventy personifications of the devil.

The Majmūʿ al-aʿyād contains rare historical details concerning al-Khaṣibī, who lived only one century before its compilation. It is undoubtably one of the most valuable sources for the study of the Nuṣayrī religion in its medieval version. Bar-Asher and Kofsky dedicated a chapter in their recent book concerning the Muslim holidays to the Majmūʿ al-aʿyād.73

33. Kitāb al-ḥāwī fī ʾīlm al-fatāwā (HIF).
This book (Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī III, pp. 45–116) is of special importance because of its practical purpose. According to the introduction, al-Ṭabarānī was asked by the members of the sect to compile the judicial decisions of his master al-Jillī. Most of them deal with the rules of the taʾliq, the attachment of a disciple to his shaykh in order to initiate him into the secret esoteric knowledge. The Ḫāwī contains 120 questions and answers on this subject. The decisions of al-Jillī are based mainly on the teaching of his master al-Khaṣibī and on two books attributed to Ibn Nuṣayr which are unavailable: Kitāb al-kāfī

72 Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī, III, pp. 390–391 is the part that completes the missing lines in MA, pp. 209–210. The Silsila version of Majmūʿ al-aʿyād is used only for this part.
Li-’l-ḍidd al-munāfī and Kitāb al-mawārid. All the rituals and prayers are based on allegorical interpretation of the Qur’ān, and Muslim marriage regulations and terms serve as symbols for the attachment of the master to his disciple.

34–35. Letters by al-Ṭabarānī
Like his master, al-Jilli, al-Ṭabarānī sent letters to the members of the sect, answering their questions on theological matters. Two of these letters appear in Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī III.

34. al-Risāla al-murshida (RMU, pp. 157–180) is an explanation of certain matters, mainly the siyāqa, which appeared in al-Baḥth wa-ʾl-dalāla (BD, item).

35. al-Risāla al-munsīfa fī ḥaqīqat al-maʿrifa (RMHM, pp. 181–194) deals with the nature of the maʿnā and its relation with the ism. In this letter al-Ṭabarānī cites poems from the Dīwān al-Khasībī to back his explanations. Neither letter mentions or hints at its addressee.

36–37. Catechism of al-Ṭabarānī with his master al-Jilli
From the question-answer type of discussion between al-Ṭabarānī and his master al-Jilli, two short documents are available in Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī III.

al-Masāʾil al-khāṣṣa (MKH, pp. 195–202) and Masāʾil Bayrūt (MB, pp. 203–205), both dealing with the subject of the divine revelation (tajallī). The second document is of value for the research of the history of the sect, because it contains the date and the place of the catechism.

38–42. Other books by Maymūn ibn al-Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī

38. Risālat al-zuhūr wa-ʾl-buṭūn (RZB, Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī III, pp. 15–18). This epistle is a catechism in the form of a dialogue held between al-Ṭabarānī and his master al-Jilli concerning the appearance of the three aspects of the deity and the possibility that one of them would appear in the form of another.

40. al-Baḥth wa-ʾl-dalāla (BD), al-Ṭabarānī’s commentary to the Rāst-bāshiyya is discussed above (see item 14).

Two other books are available in Ms. Hamburg 304:
41–42. Kitāb al-maʿārif (KM, fol. 1a–126b) and Kitāb al-dalāʾil fī maʿrifat al-masāʾil (DMM, fol. 141a–207b), which is also in the Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī III (pp. 117–156, the version used here). The Dalāʾil deals with the gnosis or the inner knowledge (maʿrifat) of the believer concerning several subjects such as the manifestation of the deity in historical figures and the role of Ibn Nuṣayr as bāb.

The Dalāʾil is an unsystematic series of questions and answers on a variety of religious topics. For the study of the Maʿārif, the recent research of Bar-Asher and Kofsky is used.74

43. Akhbār wa-riwāyāt ʿan mawālinā ahl al-bayt minhum al-salām (ARM).

This source, which is part of Ms Hamburg 303, was published in a critical edition by Strothmann.75 This scholar attributed it to Shaykh Mahmūd Baʿamra, who is merely its copyist. The text of Baʿamra was recopied in 1274/1857.76 The date of this anonymous source is unknown, but several traditions are transmitted from al-Khaṣibī’s successor in Syria, Muḥammad al-Jillī, or his disciples (including al-Ṭabarānī in one place). This, together with its content and style of literary Arabic, may indicate that these traditions were compiled at the end of the tenth century or in the eleventh century by one of al-Jillī’s disciples. In one place, the author notes that a tradition was transmitted by al-Jillī in the year 384/994 in Aleppo, but does not specify if it

76 See colophon in the Arabic text of ARM, p. 26.
was he who received it. One tradition in this document is also found in al-Ṭabarānī’s Majmūʿ al-aʿybād. The contents include unorganized Ghulāt traditions transmitted by known members of the Nuṣayrī sect on a variety of subjects such as the habṭa, Docetism, transmigration, and attacks against the Muqāṣṣīra.

44–51. The following sources were written by the Banū Shuʿba, members of a prominent Nuṣayrī family active in Ḥarrān during the tenth/eleventh centuries.

Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan ibn Shuʿba al-Ḥarrānī

44–45. Haqāʾiq asrār al-dīn (HAD)
This book (Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī IV, pp. 11–179) is probably the most important work of the Banū Shuʿba. It was written by Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan ibn Shuʿba al-Ḥarrānī, disciple of al-Khaṣṣībī and al-Jillī. According to its introduction, the author sums up his rich library of 150 books of mysticism of the muwāḥhidūn, to which he adds what he has found suitable from another group of 250 books from other mystical Shīʿī groups, especially those of the mukhammīsa, to whom he shows respect. Al-Ḥasan, who was probably old when he wrote the book, expresses his personal anxiety at dying as a muqāṣṣir (with insufficient mystical education) as well as his general fear of the lack of guidance in the ghayba period. Both fears led him to write this book, which is rich in citations from Ghulāt and Nuṣayrī literature. Other citations include books written or transmitted by the rival Ishāq al-Ahamar, which cannot be found in other sources of the sect. Most of the books mentioned in this document are unavailable today. Thus, this source has a special bibliographical value.

The major issues dealt with in the book are the nature of the ahl al-maḥātib and the levels of transmigrations. The most outstanding part is the detailed table of the ahl al-maḥātib, which al-Ḥasan probably copied from the lost Kitāb al-maḥātib wa-l-daraj of ʿAbdallā ibn Muʿāwiya (see table in Appendix 4). He seems to have been influenced by Greek philosophy and cites Plato and Aristotle to back his

77 ARM, p. 6.
79 See ADM, pp. 88–89. The table was copied later by ʿAli ibn Ḥamza al-Ḥarrānī (see below, item 49) in Ḥujjat al-ʿārif (=HAIH), pp. 275–276.
doctrines. Generally, Greek influence is typical of the literature of the Banū Shu’ba.

The Ḥaqā‘iq is followed by an epistle appended to it, which is entitled Risāla mūdihat ḥaqā‘iq al-asrār (MHAD, Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī IV, pp. 181–185). In this epistle, al-Ḥasan adds an explanation of the book based on al-Khaṣībī’s al-Risāla al-rāstbāshiyya (see above, item 14).

46. Masā’il Abū [sic] Muhammad al-Ḥasan ibn Shu’ba al-Ḥarrānī (MHIS, Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī IV, pp. 187–190) is a short catechism of 13 questions and answers between al-Ḥasan ibn Shu’ba al-Ḥarrānī and his master al-Khaṣībī concerning the relationship between the ma’nā and the ism. For reasons unknown, al-Khaṣībī is very brief in his answers and sometimes even unwilling to answer. This might indicate that al-Ḥasan was still at an early stage of initiation when he asked these questions.

47. Kitāb tuḥfat al-ʿuqūl ʿan āl al-Rasūl (TU)
This book, included in Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī V (pp. 7–318), is a completely orthodox Shi‘ī book containing no trace of mystical or Nuṣayrī doctrine, and probably served the sect for general studies of Shi‘ism for non-initiated members. The book is a collection of quasi-historical letters and succession testaments of the Prophet Muḥammad and his descendants, the eleven Imāms (the twelfth and last Imām was hidden after his birth according to Shi‘ī tradition). The last part includes an odd addition of what the author considers God’s orders to Moses and to Jesus, and a short chapter of an apocryphal sermon of Jesus from the New Testament. The book concludes with an apologetic testament of al-Mufaadḍal ibn ʿUmar concerning the backing given to him by the Imām against his rivals in Kufa. This part, like the rest of the book, lacks mystical doctrines and terminology. The Tuhfat al-ʿuqūl could also have been a product of taqiyya, like al-Khaṣībī’s al-Hidāya al-kubrā. Unfortunately, information concerning the author, al-Ḥasan ibn Shu’ba al-Ḥarrānī, is too limited to draw any conclusion concerning the purpose of this book. Since this is an Imāmī work, it became part of the canonical Shi‘ī literature.81

80 See, for example, MHBS, p. 190, question 9; al-Khaṣībī feels uncomfortable answering a question.
81 The title appears in the plural Tuhfat al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn Shu’ba
48. *Kitāb al-tamhīs (KT)*
This short book (*Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī* V, pp. 319–348), like the previous one, is not of a mystical nature. Its purpose is to explain to the believers that their suffering in life wipes out their sins. Al-Ḥasan ibn Shuʿba al-Ḥarrānī uses Imāmī traditions to support his explanations and demands that believers lead an ascetic and patient way of life. This source may indicate the impoverished situation of the sect in the author’s period.

ʿAlī ibn Ḥamza ibn ʿAlī ibn Shuʿba al-Ḥarrānī

49. *Ḥujjat al-ʿārif fī ithbāt al-ḥaqq ʿalā l-mubāyin wa-ʾl-muḥālif (HAIH)*
For this book, the complete version in *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī* IV (pp. 240–285) is used. One chapter from this source (identical to ibid., pp. 256–257) is cited in Ms. Paris 1450, fol. 51b–53a. A possible reason for its citation here was discussed earlier. According to its anonymous introduction, a copy of it was dedicated to a certain amīr (commander) Abū ʾl-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Jaʿfar in 408/1017. The purpose of *Ḥujjat al-ʿārif* (the proof of the mystic) is defined in its title: to show the believers the right path in a time of confusion and disagreement between the leaders of the sect. The main issues in this book are the proof of God’s unity, Docetism, and the transmigration of souls. On this last subject the author cites Plato and Aristotle to back his claims, a typical device practiced by the Banū Shuʿba.

Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad ibn Shuʿba ʾl-Ḥarrānī

50. *Kitāb al-uṣayfir (US)*
This document is the first manuscript of the Ms. Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale), fonds arabe 1450 (fol. 2a–40a) and also appears in *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī* IV (pp. 195–238). Its author, Shaykh Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad ibn Shuʿba (or Shaʿba) ʾl-Ḥarrānī, may have been the son of the previous shaykh, Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan ibn Shuʿba al-Ḥarrānī. The book is cited in a twelfth-century source, the

---


82 *HAIH*, p. 240.

Munāẓarat Shaykh al-Nashshābī (see below, item 52). The word uṣayfir (small and yellow) is rare in Arabic and appears in Muslim tradition as the color of the sunbeams in heaven. The Uṣayfir has not yet been the subject of a specific study. It deals with a variety of Nuṣayrī doctrines in no particular order, for example the Trinity and its human manifestations, the marātib, the širāṭ and mystical explanations of Qurʾānic verses. It contains Neoplatonic terms that are absent in other sources, which combined with the fact that the Uṣayfir is not cited in any of the sect’s sources before the thirteenth century, may imply that this text is one of the latest of the Banū Shuʿba documents. The manuscript, copied in 1208/1793, is the only Nuṣayrī manuscript that contains additions of the Sunni authorities to its colophon.

51. Risālat ikhtilāf al-ʿālamayn (RIA)
This short epistle, included in Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawī IV (pp. 287–303), is of tremendous value for research of the Nuṣayrī sect. It treats the sanctification of al-Khaṣibī as part of the ahl al-marātib. The beginning focuses on a general explication of the two parts of the marātib, the earthly and the illuminated. The author views Plato and Aristotle as personifications of the deity for the first time in the sect’s writings. His citations from al-Ṭabarānī support the hypothesis that Muḥammad is the last of the Banū Shuʿba. The document contains valuable biographical accounts from al-Khaṣibī’s childhood and his attachment to al-Jannān; despite some legendary aspects that should be excluded, the historical value of these is unquestionable.

---

84 The citation is very short, one rhymed line against the personification of God in Munāẓarat Shaykh al-Nashshābī (MN, see below, item 52), fol. 103b. Compare with the identical line in US, fol. 3a–4b: “A deep understanding of God through figures is the worship of the devil” (maʾrifat Allāh fi ʾl-abdān ibādat al-shayṭān).
85 The anonymous French writer at the beginning of the manuscript suggests that Uṣayfir should be translated as “livre d’or”, and admits that there may be other significations; see US, introduction before fol. 1, p. 1. Concerning the color uṣayfir in heaven, which is followed by another color, ukhaydīr (green?), see Yahyā ibn Sharaf al-Nawawī, Šahīh Muslim bi-sharḥ al-nawawī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1990), vol. 3, Kitāb al-Īmān, p. 32.
86 Parts of it were studied and compared to other sources in Bar-Asher and Kofsky, “L’ascension céleste du gnosticque nusayrite”, pp. 133–148.
87 US, fol. 37b–40a.
Yūsuf ibn al-ʿAjūz al-Nashshābī al-Halabī

52. Munāzarat Shaykh al-Nashshābī (MN)
This manuscript appears in Ms. Paris 1450, fol. 67b–155a. It was copied by Shaykh Ḥasan al-Khaṭīb ibn Shaykh Mansūr in 1211/1796. According to the colophon, its completion that year was the occasion of a celebration by two villages in north-western Syria, Ṣāfītā and ‘Akkār. The treatise has tremendous importance for the study of the Nuṣayrī sect. It represents an internal theological dispute (munāzara) concerning the nature of the divine trinity led by Shaykh Yūsuf ibn al-ʿAjūz al-Nashshābī al-Halabī, as told by his anonymous disciple. Although it was assumed that this text dates from the thirteenth century, details in the contents prove that it is belongs to the beginning of the twelfth century. The text gives a rare glimpse into the life of the Nuṣayrīs in this period. Moreover, the Munāzara mentions historical leaders of the Nuṣayrīs from the eleventh century who are unknown from other sources. The theological aspects of this manuscript were studied by Bar-Asher and Kofsky.

Ḥasan ibn Yūsuf al-Makzūn al-Sinjārī

53–54. Two sources composed by al-Makzūn al-Sinjārī (the military and spiritual leader of the sect in the thirteenth century) are available and were studied by the Syrian Asʿad ‘Ali, mentioned earlier in connection with the Dīwān al-muntajab (DMA, see above, item 26). He published a monograph on al-Makzūn al-Sinjārī, containing his two most important compositions: Dīwān al-Makzūn al-Sinjārī (DMS) and Risāla tazkiyat al-nafs fī maʿrifat bawāṭin al-ʿibādāt al-khams

---

88 MN, fol. 155.
89 See the discussion concerning the dating of this document in Chapter 1.
‘Alī chose to omit chapters 3–6 from the Tazkiyat al-nafs, which deal with the mystical meaning of the first four pillars of Islam. In his introduction to the Dīwān, he admits that he had excluded 77 of the 458 qaṣīdas, which “did not fit with the spirit of Makzūn”. Unfortunately, the original manuscripts of al-Makzūn are inaccessible. However, a study of an original manuscript of the Dīwān by Paul Nwyia fills the gaps in the work of ‘Alī.

‘Alā’ al-Dīn ibn Maṣūr al-Suwayrī

55. Shaykh al-Suwayrī’s Urjūza (SUR) is a poem in the tempo of rajaz (MS. Manchester 254, fol. 217b–249b). It was written in memory of Ra’s Bāsh (instead of the Persian: Rāst Bāsh) al-Daylamī (‘Īzz al-Dawla) in 708/1308 and is the only available document of the sect from the fourteenth century. Unfortunately, it does not reveal any historical event of its time or preceding periods. A certain Tawbān al-Fatā, mentioned once, may be a reference to the Nuṣayrī leader Shaykh Ḥātim al-Ṭawbānī. The poem’s main issues are the abstract nature of God, the ahl al-maṭātib and God’s appearance in history.

Relevant sources from the nineteenth century

The following sources could be considered modern, but they contain older materials most relevant to the medieval period.

56–58. The catechism style, or the question-answer form of dialogue between the Nuṣayrī shaykhs and their disciples, is known from the accounts of al-Khaṣībī’s majlis (items 28, 29). It constitutes a continuance of the sā’il–‘ālim/mas’ala–jawāb (questioner–instructor or question–answer) form, which describes dialogues between imāms and their bāb in previous periods (for example Kitāb al-usūs, see above, item 4). Dussaud suggests that the modern Nuṣayrī Catechism, as known from several texts from the nineteenth century, seems to

---

93 Ibid., vol. 2, p. 15.
94 P. Nwyia, “Makzūn al-Sinjārī, poète mystique alaouite”, Studia Islamica, 40 (1974), pp. 87–113. At the beginning of the article Nwyia criticizes the way As‘ad ʿAlī omits all the poems dealing with the Nuṣayrī doctrines; see ibid., p. 92.
reflect a Christian influence,\textsuperscript{95} which is a very logical assumption in view of the Christian missionary initiative in Syria in that period. A Druze Catechism written in the same period is a good example of such an influence. Moreover, the modern Nuṣayrī Catechism contains Christian elements that are not found in medieval texts.\textsuperscript{96} The available catechism texts are:

56. A catechism following quotations from ʿAlī’s speeches (khutba, pl. khuṭab) in Kufa, in which he declares his divinity (the abbreviation KHC stands for khutba and catechism). This manuscript is available in two versions: Ms. Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale), fonds arabe 5188 and Ms. Kiel 19. The second version, published by Strothmann with a useful index, is used here.\textsuperscript{97} Although it is impossible to determine its date, the contents of this text may indicate it is older than the modern catechism texts. It includes citations from a variety of medieval sources of the sect and it lacks the Christian terminology that is typical of the modern Nuṣayrī Catechism. Instead, there are characteristics of medieval texts, such as Persian influence and attacks on the rival Ishāqiyya sect. The manuscript seems incomplete. It lacks a colophon and there are no details about its copyist. It could be argued that this text is a modern collection of old texts to be learned by an initiate in one of the more advanced stages of his initiation (compare with the next item, Taʿlīm diyānat al-Nuṣayriyya, which seems to be a primary text for initiates).

57. Kitāb taʿlīm diyānat al-Nuṣayriyya (TDN)
The printed Arabic text is used here, published with important notes and English translation by Bar Asher and Kofsky, based on Ms. Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale), fonds arabe 6182 (fol. 1a–39a).\textsuperscript{98} The main part of this source is a text prepared for the sect’s religious shaykhs,

\textsuperscript{95} Dussaud, Histoire et religion des Nosairis, p. xxii.
\textsuperscript{96} M. M. Bar-Asher and A. Kofsky, The Nusayrī-ʿAlawi Religion: An Enquiry into its Theology and Liturgy (Leiden: Brill, 2002), p.166. As to the claim that the TDN was fabricated, see K. Firro, ”The ʿAlawīs in modern Syria: From Nusayriyya to Islam via ʿAlawiyya”, Der Islam 82/1 (2005), pp. 7–8.
\textsuperscript{97} R. Strothmann, “Morgenländische Geheimsekten in abendländischer Forschung und die Handschrift Kiel 19”, in Abhandlungen der Deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin 5 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1952), Arabic manuscript fol. 1b–27a, explanations and German translation pp. 2–42.
\textsuperscript{98} M. M. Bar-Asher and A. Kofsky, The Nusayrī-ʿAlawi Religion, pp. 200–221. For details and English translation of this text, see ibid., pp. 163–199.
the *khāṣṣa*. This part, as well as the others, deals with a variety of topics that an initiate must know by heart: for example, the nature of the Nuṣayrī divinity, the luminous and the earthly worlds and Nuṣayrī holidays and their meanings.

58. *Kitāb al-mashyakha* (KMA)

The “Manual of the Shaykhs”, is the most problematic catechism source, since the manuscript is lost and only Lyde’s extracts in English are available.

It contains an explanation of the Nuṣayrī religion, but unlike other catechism texts, this one is not designated for initiates, but for shaykhs, in order to facilitate their teaching, as well as the prayers and ceremonies they organize. It seems also that this source was not a catechism, but was meant to help in composition of one. The last part is of particular interest, because it is the only available evidence of a contract between shaykhs and their initiates.

Sulaymān al-Adhanī

59. *Kitāb al-bākūra al-Sulaymaniyya* (BS)

The complete title is *Kitāb al-bākūra al-Sulaymaniyya fī kashf asrār al-diyāna al-Nuṣayriyya*. It was written by Sulaymān al-Adhanī (from Adana, southern Turkey), who became notorious for his exposure of the esoteric knowledge of the Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs. The publication of the book in 1864 was known to orientalists through an article published

---

99 S. Lyde, *Asian Mystery Illustrated in the History, Religion, and Present State of the Ansaireeh or Nusairis of Syria* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1860), pp. 233–269. According to Lyde, the original manuscript contained 188 pages, copied by Shaykh Muḥammad of the village of Bishrago (this village could not be identified, but it might be the present-day village of Beshgharhi in the region of Latakiya) at the consecration of his nephew ʿAlī, son of Shaykh ʿĪd in 1239/1824.

100 Ibid., pp. 256–269.

in that same year by the American Oriental Society. According to his own book, which contains biographical sections, Sulaymān was a member of the privileged shaykhs (khāṣṣa) of his village, but the more he was initiated into the secrets of the Nuṣayrī religion the more he felt doubtful about its truth. He left the faith and converted in turn to Judaism, Islam and finally to Christianity. He decided to publish the secret of his sect in order to “expose their lies”. After publishing his book at his own expense in Beirut, he was seduced by his village to return to Adhana, where he was murdered. The important part of his book is the anonymous Kitāb al-majmūʿ (pp. 7–34), also called Dustūr, which is a prayer book containing sixteen chapters of which the date of composition is unknown (see further explanations in the discussion of initiation). There are certain Qurʾānic elements in the Majmūʿ as well as quotations from the Qurʾān itself. Al-Adhanī added commentary to each chapter, which is useful at times and at others deceptive. Other parts of the Bākūra contain details about the Nuṣayrī holidays, citations from different poems of well-known shaykhs and explanations of typical Nuṣayrī doctrines, such as transmigration and the habţa. Although this source is of tremendous importance to the

---


103 BS, p. 84.

104 I cannot accept Dr. Stéphane Valter’s remark during my thesis defense on 27 February 2006, that the Kitāb al-bākūra al-Sulaymaniyya is a fake and unreliable source. Even if we accept that al-Adhanī’s account is exceptional, one cannot deny the fact that his book contains a vast number of reliable terms, doctrines, traditions and other references to available medieval sources of the sect. As such, it cannot be excluded from the biography of any research in the field of the Nuṣayrī-Alawi sect. See the same claim raised by the ‘Alawi writer Hāshim ‘Uthmān, in K. Firro, “The Alawis in modern Syria: From Nusayriya to Islam via Alawiya”, Der Islam 82/1 (2005), pp. 5–9.

105 Some French scholars attributed the Kitāb al-majmūʿ to al-Khaṣṣī; see Colonel Nieger, “Choix de documents sur le territoire des Alawites (pays des Noseiris)”, RMM, 49 (1922), p. 57; Massignon, “Esquisse”, p. 643, item 24. However, this hypothesis is baseless and illogical considering the fact that in this text al-Khaṣṣī and his grave (maqām) are already sanctified; see BS, p. 9. It seems that this mistake stems from a misunderstanding of Dussaud’s bibliographical note concerning this book: “Nous ne possédons aucun renseignement sur sa composition, ni sur l’époque à laquelle il a été rédigé. L’auteur du Kitāb al-Bakourah attribue à Al-Khoṣṣī la forme définitive de la doctrine et des prières nosairis”. See R. Dussaud, Histoire et eligion des Nosairis (Paris: Librairie Emile Bouillon, 1900), introduction p. xiv.
research of the Nuşayrî religion, al-Adhani’s superficial explanations of the prayers he cites indicate that he was still at an early stage of initiation. As such, it seems he was unable to go into as much depth as a Nuşayrî shaykh. It is unclear whether his citations are based on his memory, or on the books he possessed, but the authenticity of the parts found in other sources can be verified. The Bākūra served as the main source for Dussaud in his *Histoire et religion des Nosairis*, where he added his translation of the *Kitāb al-majmūʿ* into French.106

*Muḥammad Amin Ghālib al-Ṭawīl*

60. *Taʾrīkh al-ʿAlawiyyīn* (TA)

The *Taʾrīkh al-ʿAlawiyyīn* (History of the ʿAlawīs) is a collection of quasi-historical Nuşayrî traditions collected orally from educated members of the sect by Muḥammad Amin Ghālib al-Ṭawīl, the Ottoman Governor of Ṭartūs, at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It was published in Turkey in 1919, and the present version was then published in Lādhiqiyya, Syria in 1924 (478 pages).107 The book had two aims: the first was the need to preserve the sect’s legacy for the new generation of educated ʿAlawīs, who were exposed to modernization. Al-Ṭawīl’s motivation stemmed from his fear that his sect, living in poor conditions, would lose its unique identity. The second aim was the need to minimize the damage to their religion, incurred by its divulgation, by re-associating it with its Shīʿī source.

Al-Ṭawīl attempts to link Nuşayrî history to that of the Shīʿīs and called them by the same name: ʿAlawīs. This bias and the lack of sacred tradition in the book are evidence that this source is not particularly reliable, historically speaking. Authentic historical facts are often hinted at, or referred to imprecisely. However, this source provides a general impression of the sect’s situation in totally unknown periods in Nuşayrî history.


Summary

Kufan Ghulāt

8th century
Jābir ibn ʿAbdallāh al-Anṣārī (attributed)
1. Umm al-kitāb (UK)

Al-Mufaḍḍal ibn ʿUmar al-Juʿfī (attributed)
2. Kitāb al-haft wa-ʾl-azīlla (HA)
3. Kitāb al-ṣīrāt (KS)
4. Kitāb al-usūs (KU)
5. al-Risāla al-Mufaḍḍaliyya (RMUF)

Muḥammad ibn Sinān al-Zāhirī
6. Kitāb al-hujub wa-ʾl-anwār (HUA)
7. Kitāb al-anwār wa-ʾl-ḥujub (AUH)

Nuṣayrīs

9th century
Muḥammad ibn Nuṣayr
8. Kitāb al-akwār wa-ʾl-adwār al-Nūrāniyya (AAN)
9. Kitāb al-mithāl wa-ʾl-ṣūra (MS)

Ishāq ibn Muḥammad al-Nakhaʿī
10. Ādāb ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib (AAM)

ʿAbdallāh al-Jannān al-Junbulānī:
11. Kitāb ʾidāḥ al-miṣbāḥ (IM)

10th century
Al-Ḥusayn ibn Ḥamdān al-Khaṣībī
12. Kitāb al-hidāya al-kubrā (HK)
13. Dīwān al-Khaṣībī (DKH)
14. al-Risāla al-rāstbāšiyya (RR)
15. Fiqh al-risāla al-rāstbāšiyya (FRR)
16. Risāla fi ʾl-siyāqa (RS)

Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Jillī
17. Kitāb hāwī ʾl-ʾasrār (KHA)
18. Kitāb bāṭin al-šalāt (BS)
19. Risālat al-bayān (RB)
20. al-Risāla al-Masīhiyya (RM)
21. *al-Risāla al-Nu’māniyya* (RN)
22. *Risālat al-andiyya* (RA)
23. *Risālat al-fatq wa-ʾl-ratq* (RFR)

Muḥammad ibn ʿAbdAllāh ibn Hārūn ibn ʿAlī ibn Ṭabarānī

Abū Muḥammad ʿAlī ibn ʾIsā al-Jisrī

27. *Risālat al-tawḥīd* (RT, fol. 42a–48a)

ʿAbdallāh ibn Hārūn al-Sāʾigh

Masāʾil ʿAbdAllāh ibn Hārūn al-Sāʾigh (MAHS)

Abū Muhḥammad al-Ḥasan ibn Shuʿba al-Harrānī/Namīrī

31. *al-iRisāla al-Ḥarrāniyya* (RHA)

11th century

Maymūn ibn al-Qāsim ibn-Ṭabarānī

Abū Muhḥammad al-Ḥasan ibn Shuʿba al-Ḥarrānī

32. *Kitāb majmūʿ al-ʿaʾyād* (MA)
33. *Kitāb al-ḥāwī fi ʾilm al-fatāwā* (HIF)
34. *al-Risāla al-murušida* (RMU, pp. 157–180)
35. *al-Risāla al-munsifa fi ḥaqīqat al-maʿrifā* (RMHM)
38. *Risālat al-ẓuhūr wa-ʾl-buṭūn* (RZB)
40. *al-Baḥth wa-ʾl-dalāla* (BD)
41. *Kitāb al-maʿārif* (KM)
42. *Kitāb al-dalāʾil fi maʿrifat al-masāʾil* (DMM)

Anonymous collected traditions:

43. *Akhbār wa-riwāyāt ʾan mawālinā ahl al-bayt minhum al-salām* (ARM)

Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan ibn Shuʿba al-Ḥarrānī

44. *Haqāʾiq asrār al-dīn* (HAD)
46. *Masāʾil Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan ibn Shuʿba al-Ḥarrānī* (MHIS)
47. *Kitāb tuḥfat al-ʿuqūl ʾan al-Ḥusayn* (TU)
48. *Kitāb al-tamhīṣ* (KT)

ʿAlī ibn Ḥamza ibn ʿAlī ibn Shuʿba al-Ḥarrānī

49. *Hujiya al-ʿārif fi ithbāt al-ḥaq ʾalāʾ l-mubāyin wa-ʾl-muḥālif* (HAIH)
Abū ‘Abdallāh Muhammad ibn Shu’ba ‘l-Ḥarrānī
50. Kitāb al-Uṣayfīr (US)
51. Risālat ikhtilāf al-ʿālamayn (RIA)

12th century
Yūsuf ibn al-ʿAjūz al-Nashshābī al-Ḥalabī
52. Munāẓarat Shaykh al-Nashshābī (MN)

13th century
Ḥasan ibn Yūsuf al-Makzūn al-Sinjārī
53. Dīwān al-Makzūn al-Sinjārī (DMS)
54. Risālat tazkiyat al-nafs fī maʿrifat bawāṭin al-ʿibādāt al-khams (RTN)

14th century
55. Shaykh al-Ṣuwayrī’s Urjūza (SAR)

19th century
56. Khutba and Catechism (KHC)
57. Kitāb ta’līm diyānat al-Nuṣayriyya (TDN)
58. Kitāb al-mashyakha (KMA)

Sulaymān al-Adhanī
59. Kitāb al-bākūra al-Sulaymaniyya (BS)

20th century
Muhammad Amin Ghālib al-Ṭawil
60. Taʿrīkh al-ʿAlawiyyīn (TA)
APPENDIX 2

TITLES AND CONTENTS OF UNAVAILABLE SOURCES

The following items are Shi‘ī-Ghulāt and early Nuṣayrī sources, mostly from the eighth and ninth century, which are not available for research but are mentioned in the Nuṣayrī literature. Fragments of these sources point to their contents. They are arranged alphabetically by title, with their subject, place of appearance and other references, if available.


Kitāb al-azīlla wa-l-ashbāḥ—An anonymous book, which is not Mufaḍḍal’s Haft wa-l-azīlla (the fragments are not found in HA) and deals with the nature of the divine light, the relations between the ma‘nā and the ism and the role of the bāb. See: KMS, p. 210; KHA, p. 209; HAD, p. 53. It may be identical to Kitāb ashbāḥ wa-l- azīlla. See: MN, fol. 114a–115a. Cat: Massignon, item 4, attributed to Mufaḍḍal.

Kitāb al-dustūr—A mysterious and anonymous book, which is not the Qur‘ān but must be remembered by heart by initiates to the Nuṣayrī sect. See: HIF, pp. 50, 53, 65; HAD, p. 55. It is wrongly identified of with al-Adhani’s Kitāb al-majmū‘.1

Kitāb al-fahṣ wa-l-baḥth / Abū Duhayba—Contains an “unorthodox” Nuṣayrī doctrine that all the Imāms were incarnations of the ma‘nā. Deals with God’s appearance to and disappearance from mankind. See: MN, fol. 118a, 123a. Cat: Massignon, item 40.

Kitāb al-ibtidā’ / Abū Muhammad (al-Ḥasan ibn Shu‘ba ?)—This book deals with the creation of the world of light and its creatures, the ahl al-marātīb. See: HAIH, p. 269.

---

Kitāb al-kāfī li-ʾl-didd al-munāfī / Muḥammad ibn Ṣuṭūr—A book focusing on the subject of initiation, including the requirement that the Dustūr be remembered by heart (see item above). See: HIF, pp. 53, 105, 110, 112.

Kitāb al-mawārid / Muḥammad ibn Ṣuṭūr—Deals with initiation into the Ṣuṭūrī sect. See: HIF, pp. 49, 53.


Kitāb maʿrifat al-bāriʾ / ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad al-ʿAqīqī—The available fragment of this books deals with the mystical meaning of the rūḥ al-qudus (holy spirit). See: HAD, p. 29.

Risālat rayḥānāt al-rūḥ / The āmīr Jaysh ibn Nāṣīh al-Dawla—According to Muḥammad ibn Shuʾba, this book was written by his “grandfather and master” (apparently his teacher’s master) and was dedicated to a certain Shaykh Abū ʾl-Waqqār al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAmmār. The title of the author, which was typical of the local leaders of castles in Syria and Iraq, may indicate that he was both a patron and an initiated member of the sect. The only available fragment is a citation from al-Jilli’s explanation of the existence of two worlds, ʿalawī and suflī, the “upper” spiritual luminous world and the “lower” material world. See: RIA, p. 296.

Kitāb manhaj al-ʿilm wa-ʾl-bayān (also called al-ʿIṣmīyya) / ʿIṣmat al-Dawla—Containing a rejection or attack against “unorthodox” groups in the Ṣuṭūrī sect. See: MN, fol. 142a.

Kitāb al-mutarjam bi-kitāb al-kursī wa-ʾl-qalb wa-ʾl-qidad wa-ʾl-qudra / Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad ibn Yaʿqūb al-Madāʾinī (?)—The book

---

2 Concerning the meaning of the word mutarjam, see note 3.
deals with the creation of the world (which is different from the common Nuṣayrī tradition). See: HAD, pp. 80–82.

Kitāb al-mutarjam bi-Kitāb al-shawāhid / Ishāq ibn Muḥammad al-Nakha’ī al-Aḥmar—The available fragment deals with God’s appearance in a docetic form. See: HAD, p. 34.

Kitāb al-mutarjam3 li-l-maḥmūdīn wa-l-madhmūmīn / Muḥammad ibn ‘Abdallāh ibn Miḥrān (?)—The book deals with the dual nature of the world, its partition into praised and condemned creatures. See: KHA, p. 198; HAD, p. 118.

Kitāb al-radd ‘alā l-murtadd / Maymūn ibn al-Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī—Contains a list of personifications of the ma’nā. See: KMA, p. 236. It is an answer to a murtadd (apostate). Cat: Massignon, item 44, assumed that the murtadd is Ibn Khallād.

Kitāb al-sab’īn / Abū ‘Alī al-Baṣrī—This book, which should not be confused with Maymūn al-Ṭabarānī’s Sharḥ al-sab’īn, treats the subject of the seventy transmigrations of the soul. See: HIF, p. 65; HAIH, p. 280.

Kitāb al-tajrīd / ?—Appears in a prayer connected with wine. See: KMA, p. 252. Cat: Catafago, item 6; Massignon, item 83, attributed in both to Shaykh Hātim al-Ṭawbānī.


3 The meaning of the words mutarjam li- are unclear. It could be understood simply as “translated”, i.e. the source of the book was not in Arabic originally, probably translated from Persian. In HAD, p. 118, the book is cited as Kitāb al-marātib al-mutarjam bi-l-maḥmūdīn wa-l-madhmūmīn, a title that may indicate that the meaning of mutarjam bi- is “commented”. In that case, the book was written as a commentary to Abū ‘l-Ḥasan ‘Abdallāh ibn Mu’āwiya’s Kitāb al-marātib wa-l-daraj.
Kitāb al-tanbīh / Ishāq ibn Muḥammad al-Aḥmar—Deals with the role of the divine power (qudra) and its part in the creation. See: KHA, p. 209; KMS, p. 210; HAD, p. 45.

Kitāb al-tawḥīd / Muḥammad ibn Sinān al-Zāhirī—An important source including explanations attributed to the Ḥanafī Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, concerning several issues including the creation of the world with letters and with the divine will (mashīʿa), and the world of light and the creation of the creatures of light. See: MS, pp. 210, 225; KHA, pp. 164 (transmitted by al-Khaṣībī), 167, 175, 203; HAD, pp. 22, 25–29; US, fol. 4a. Not to be confused with Muḥammad’s Kitāb al-tawḥīd, which is an Ḥanafī book. Cat: Heinz Halm, “Das Buch der Schatten. Die Mufaḍḍal-Tradition der Ghulāt und die Ursprünge des Nuṣairiertums”, Der Islam 55 (1978), pp. 222, 240; Der Islam 58 (1981), p. 83; Catafago, item 7.

Kitāb al-zuhūrāt / Mufaḍḍal ibn ʿUmar—Deals with the appearances of the divinity in human history. See: RR, p. 39.

Kitāb al-yūnān / ?—Containing the personifications of the bāb. Cat: Catafago, item 21, as Kitāb al-Yūnān li-Ahl al-Shimāl.

al-Risāla al-Miṣriyya / Attributed to al-Khaṣībī—Contains a list of the names of ʿAlī. See: KMA, p. 236. Cat: Catafago, item 17; Massignon, item 66, attributed to Muḥammad ibn Muqātil Qīṭṭī."
APPENDIX 3

CIPHERS IN THE WRITINGS OF AL-ṬABARĀNĪ

In some of his writings al-Ṭabarānī uses ciphers and secret letters in order to conceal names or phrases, a means of concealment not found in other Nuṣayrī sources. The disciples of al-Ṭabarānī copied them and probably transmitted their secret meaning by rote. The phenomenon is found in six places in al-Ṭabarānī’s sources.

Mystical letters

Strange letters appear in MA, p. 117; Strothmann used two manuscripts of this text. Version N (copied in 1329/1911):

Version C (copied in 1138/1725) is shorter and the letters are similar but not identical:

These forms appear in the context of an appearance of al-Ḥusayn before the angels and prophets in Karbalāʾ: “…until God the mighty and glorified. [The ciphered line follows:] Oh Muḥaḍhdal! This is, in the name of God, the end which has nothing above it…” In the case of ciphers, in order to present to the reader a more understandable form, no transliteration is used:

The use of Arabic without diacritic points in the ciphered line is typical of mystical purposes, for example in talismans.1 Different ciphers in the form of mystical signs and numbers appear in the tenth-century

---

1 See, for example, the Shi‘i amulets in A. Fodor, “Amulets from the Islamic world”, Budapest Studies in Arabic 2 (1988), pp. 130, 134–136.
282

appendix 3

treatises of the Ismāʿīlī dāʿīs (propagandists) Abū ʿĪsā al-Murshid2 and
Jaʿfar ibn Manṣūr al-Yaman.3 Ciphers similar to those of al-Ṭ abarānī
are found in the thirteenth-century book of magic of Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī
al-Būnī.4 Canaan gives some similar examples, but his list does not
include most of the forms mentioned so far. Some of the mystical
forms used by al-Ṭ abarānī are similar to the Jewish Kabalistic “angelic
letters” or “the Alphabet of Metatron”.5
In HIF (p. 79) there is another kind of cipher in the context of prohibition to a believer who is not initiated into the secrets of the sect:
“It is prohibited to a believer to [cipher combining letters and one
numeral] until he knows the personifications [shakhṣ] of this day and
of its night”:

‫ ﺣﱴ ﯾﻌﲅ ﴯﺺ ذكل‬7 ‫ﻻ ﳚﻮز ﳌﺆﻣﻦ ان ﱊ ﻃﻲ م ﻣﺢ دم ﳼ ام ﳼ ﻣﺎ ﺳﺺ ي‬
‫اﻟﻴﻮم وﻟﻴﻠﺘﻪ‬
This combination defies deciphering or interpretation.

Initials
In DMM (p. 122) in the context of the knowledge transmitted from
the “fathers” (teachers) to their initiated “sons” (disciples), “the pure
knowledge is [ciphered letters]”:
.‫ح‬

‫ اﻟﺒﺎﻃﻦ اﶈﺾ ع ع ع ع م م م م ح ح ح‬. . .

These are probably the initials of the Imāms and other associated saints
(ʿayn for the four Imāms called ʿAlī, mīm for the three Muḥammads
and maybe Mūsā al-Kāẓim and ḥ āʾ for the ḥ āʾāt: Ḥ asan, Ḥ usayn and

2
S. M. Stern, Studies in Early Ismāʿīlism (Jerusalem: Magnes Press/Leiden: Brill,
1983), p. 13; see the Arabic text, fol. 142, lines 2,6,8,9.
3
See Jaʿfar ibn Manṣūr al-Yaman, Kitāb al-kashf, ed. R. Strothmann (London/New
York/Bombay: Oxford University Press/Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, 1952), Strothmann’s
introduction with the decipherment of the signs and the pages where they appear in
the text.
4
Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī al-Būnī, Shams al-maʿārif al-kubrā (Cairo: Maktabat al-Jumhūriyya
5
I. Weinstock, “The Alphabet of Metatron and its commentary” (in Hebrew), Temirin
2 (1981), pp. 53–54 (list of letters), 56, 58 (used by the twelfth-century Spanish Rabbi
Abraham ibn Ezra), 61, 62–76.


Muḥsin as well as the eleventh Imām Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī). This explanation can be deduced from DKH, fol. 70a, 101b. (See the list of the Imāms in Appendix 5.)

**Gemetic values**

The two following examples are gemetic numbers (value of letters according to the Hebrew alphabetic order). DMM (p. 148) has the missing cipher: “He is God whom there is no other but him [ciphered numbers]”:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{هو الله الذي لا إله إلا هو} \\
683418111
\end{array}
\]

The same numbers appear complete again (p. 150), with the addition of three numbers, after the name of God:

\[
\text{ربيع} = 161683418111
\]

These numbers can be deciphered by dividing them into three groups as follows:

\[
\begin{array}{r}
1616 \div 8341 \div 8111 \\
\text{(10)1} 6 \text{ (100)1} 6 = \text{وقوي} / \text{8} (=30)3 (40=) 4 1 = \text{املم} (\text{80})8 1 1 (100) 1 = \text{قهاف}
\end{array}
\]

Meaning: “The One who knows from signs [referring to the jafr, the science of divination by signs and ciphers] the most beautiful and the powerful”.

---

*Jafr/Gemetic values of Arabic letters:

| ج | د | ح | د | ج | ُ | خ | س | ف | ق | ر | ش | ت | ث | ث |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| ن | ل | م | م | ل | ك | ه | ز | ح | ي | ت | ي | ط | ل |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

When a point appears on a number it means multiplied by ten (for example 2=20) and when it appears to the left it means multiplied by hundred (for example .2 = 200). Unfortunately, the publishers of the *Silsilat al-turāth al-ʿAlawi* copied the numbers but ignored these points completely and they had to be reconstructed.
The last example is the easiest to decipher because of its simple gematric values and its appearance without the use of ciphers in other versions of the same text. It appears in MA (p. 99) in the context of 'Id al-firāsh, the tradition of 'Alī’s sacrifice to save the Prophet’s life. The latter slept in Muḥammad’s bed instead of the Prophet when the infidels of Quraysh came at night to kill him. When they found 'Ali in his place, Muḥammad and his companion Abū Bakr (who is most hated by the Shiʿis) were hiding in a cave. According to this text Muḥammad was worried about his cousin while “[ciphered name of Abū Bakr] did not feel sorry for him”:

\[\text{خبرن لمو} (=\text{ابو بكر}) = 222 \quad \text{..} \]

The purpose of the secret forms and numbers was to conceal the most sacred description or names of the divinity or, on the contrary, to conceal the name of a cursed personality who was venerated by the Sunnis, as an act of taqiyya (caution). It is possible that these mystical forms and numbers are still used by the ‘Alawī shaykhs today. Research conducted during the French Mandate period in the 1920s reveals similar mystical forms in use in an amulet of the sect.7

---

APPENDIX 4

THE TABLE OF RANKS BASED ON ABDALLĀH IBN MUʿĀWIYA’S *KITĀB AL-MARĀTIB WA-ʾL-DARAJ*

The following is the table of the ranks of *ahl al-marātib* in the “great world of lights”, their symbols (all of them are words from the Qur’ān) and their numbers, followed by the table of “the small material world”.

| الرتبة العلوية لعالم الكبر، المراتب، الدرج | الأسماء | الألقاب | الشمس | الأوار | الآيات | الأهداف | المصاطب | الجبال | المعصرات | البحر | الأنهار | الرياح | الصواعق | المطلقون | الإلحاد | البيع | الماء | الدرب | الريحان | الزبائن | الزيتون | النباتات | المصادر | تمويل | البين | المصادر | مصادر |
|-------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|----------|--------|----------|-------|--------|--------|---------|----------|----------|-------|-------|-------|---------|---------|---------|----------|--------|-------|--------|---------|
| 300                                 | -      | -      | 75     | 75     | 70     | 70     | 70       | 70     | 60       | 60    | 55     | 50     | 40      | 40       | 40       | 40    | 40    | 40    | 40       | 40       | 40       | 40       | 40    | 40    | 40    | 40       |
| 500                                 | -      | -      | 70     | 70     | 70     | 70     | 70       | 70     | 50       | 50    | 50     | 50     | 50      | 50       | 50       | 50    | 50    | 50    | 50       | 50       | 50       | 50       | 50    | 50    | 50    | 50       |
| 600                                 | -      | -      | 70     | 70     | 70     | 70     | 70       | 70     | 60       | 60    | 55     | 50     | 50      | 50       | 50       | 50    | 50    | 50    | 50       | 50       | 50       | 50       | 50    | 50    | 50    | 50       |
| 700                                 | -      | -      | 70     | 70     | 70     | 70     | 70       | 70     | 60       | 60    | 55     | 50     | 50      | 50       | 50       | 50    | 50    | 50    | 50       | 50       | 50       | 50       | 50    | 50    | 50    | 50       |
| 800                                 | -      | -      | 70     | 70     | 70     | 70     | 70       | 70     | 60       | 60    | 55     | 50     | 50      | 50       | 50       | 50    | 50    | 50    | 50       | 50       | 50       | 50       | 50    | 50    | 50    | 50       |
| 900                                 | -      | -      | 70     | 70     | 70     | 70     | 70       | 70     | 60       | 60    | 55     | 50     | 50      | 50       | 50       | 50    | 50    | 50    | 50       | 50       | 50       | 50       | 50    | 50    | 50    | 50       |

1 Based on the two almost identical versions: the complete version presented here; see *HAD*, pp. 88–89; and another, lacking the symbols in “the small material world”; see *HAIH*, pp. 275–276.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>الاسم</th>
<th>الألف</th>
<th>المقرّبون</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>العام</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>14,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>البرق</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>الرعد</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>الدعا</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>12,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>الجهاد</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>16,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>الصواعق</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>17,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>السكاكين</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>18,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>المسانحون</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>19,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>البيع</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>14,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>الزيتون</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>2,0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>اللالائقون</td>
<td>190</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### APPENDIX 5

**LIST OF THE IMĀMS AND THEIR BĀBS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Imām</th>
<th>bāb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'Āli ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/660)</td>
<td>Salmān al-Fārisī “Rūzbeh”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ḥasan ibn 'Alī (d. 49/669)</td>
<td>Qays ibn Waraqal-Riyāḥī “Safīna”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ḥusayn ibn 'Ali (d. 61/680)</td>
<td>Rushayd/Rashīd al-Hajari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Ali Zayn al-‘Abidin (d. 49/712)</td>
<td>Abū Khālid al-Kābulī “Kankar”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 114/732)</td>
<td>Yahyā ibn Mā‘mar al-Thumālī</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ja’far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765)</td>
<td>Jābir ibn Yazīd al-Ju’fī</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mūsā al-Kāzīm (d. 183/799)</td>
<td>Abū ‘l-Khaṭṭāb al-Kāhili</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Alī al-Ridā (d. 203/818)</td>
<td>Mufaḍḍal ibn ‘Umar al-Ju’fī</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muḥammad al-Jawād (d. 220/835)</td>
<td>Muḥammad ibn Mufaḍḍal ibn ‘Umar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ḥasan al-‘Askari (d.260/874)</td>
<td>Muḥammad ibn Nuṣayr al-Numayr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muḥammad al-Mahdi</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

1 Based on several sources, mainly: *RR*, p. 55; *FRR*, pp. 89–90; *MA*, p. 159; *TDN*, pp. 207–209; *BS*, pp. 13–14; Halm, *al-Ghunasiyya fi l-Islām*, pp. 213–214.
APPENDIX 6

DĪWĀN AL-KHAŞĪBĪ—INFORMATION AND SUMMARY

The following is a list of the poems in the Dīwān al-Khaṣībī appearing in other Nuṣayrī sources, divided into three levels of reliability. The location of each qaṣīda in other sources and its main topics are given. The aim is to be able to distinguish between the original poems of al-Khaṣībī and the later poems attributed to him. It is important to note that all the citations from Khaṣībī’s poems were located in the version of the Dīwān from Ms. Manchester Arab 452 a (see Appendix 1) and the list is based on it. The Damascus version, Zāhirīyya, Arab 247 and 3629, based on S. Ḥabīb’s book, is abbreviated as S. H.

All the reliable poems appear in the first part of Dīwān al-Ḥusayn ibn Ḥamdān al-Khaṣībī and only one in Dīwān al-gharīb (see below, item 14). The rest of Dīwān al-Ḥusayn ibn Ḥamdān al-Khaṣībī (fol. 12a+b, 18b–20b, 24a–28a, 31b–33b, 37a+b, 67b–83b) and Dīwān al-gharīb (fol. 89a–121a), including the low credibility poems, seem to be part of a pseudographic compilation that was added to the original corpus of al-Khaṣībī.

High reliability (cited by himself or his disciples, 10th–11th centuries)

1. Bāb al-hidāya (The Gate of Guidance; DKH fol. 5a–8b, 81 lines [S.H.: pp. 25–30, 81 lines], rhyme adī). Cited in: MA, p. 108 (DKH 5a, lines 1–3); RR, p. 39 (DKH fol. 6a, lines 19–22), RMHM, p. 185–186, 189 (DKH, fol. 5b, lines 12, 14, 15–17); MN, fol. 103b (DKH, fol. 6a, line 25).

Main issues: The unity of the divine triad, God’s transcendence and abstraction, His appearance to all cultures, the ahl al-marātīb, transmigration of souls as punishment, praise to the “true Shīʿīs”.

2. Inna yawm al-Ghadīr yawm surūr/ al-Ghadīrīyya (The Day of Ghadir is a Day of Joy; DKH fol. 9a–12a, 70 lines [S.H.: pp. 31–35, 62 lines], rhyme īrī/ īrī). Cited in: MA, p. 56–59 (cites the complete poem, 70 lines); MN, fol. 127a (DKH, fol. 10b, line 35); BS, p. 48 (DKH fol. 9a lines 1–3).
Main issues: The mystical meaning of the events of Ghadīr, the sin of denial and the punishment of transmigration of souls, Docetism of Jesus and Ḥusayn.

Main issues: Prayer for blessing members of the sect and saving them as in Noah’s Ark, prayer for punishment of sinners who deny the divinity of amīr al-nahīl.

Main issues: Al-Khaṣībī attacks those who cursed him after revealing the mystical doctrine and declares his belief in amīr al-nahīl. He mentions his accusation of Shi‘ism and his imprisonment and attacks the nāšība.

Main issues: Praise of Samarra and the two tombs (of ‘Alī al-Hādī and Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī), a demand that the open aspect of the pillars of Islam should not be neglected, the creatures in the world of light, critics of the deficient Shi‘īs.

6. Salām ʿalā ard al-Ḥusayn (Peace Upon the Ground of Ḥusayn; DKH fol. 28a–29b, 35 lines [S.H.: pp. 65–67, 34 lines], rhyme atiḥī). Cited in: MA, p. 108 (DKH fol. 28a, lines 1, 5–6) and in MA pp. 111–113 (the complete poem, 35 lines); BS, p. 48 (DKH fol. 31b, lines 38–40).
Main issues: Praise of Karbalā’, the Docetism of Ḥusayn.

Main issues: Praise of the pilgrims of the tomb of Ḥusayn, the Docetism concerning him.
8. ‘Alat qibāb lakum hudātī (Exalted Are the Time Circles Which Are My Guides For You; DKH fol. 33b–36b, 68 lines [S.H.: pp. 71–75, 67 lines], rhyme ātī). Cited in RMHM, pp. 181, 184, 185, 190–191 (DKH, fol. 33b, 34a, 35b, 36b, lines 1,3, 5,7, 8, 10–13, 49–52, 50–52, 65–66. The version of RMHM is arranged in a different order).
Main issues: Praise of Kufa and Samarra, the tafwīd passing through the twelve Imāms, anti-feminism, curse of the devil.

Main Issues: Al-Khaṣibī demands that Husayn should not be mourned for neglecting him because he was not killed in reality (Docetism).

10. Allāh akbar akbar Allāh (God is the greatest, Greatest is God; DKH fol. 44b–47a, 43 lines [S.H.: pp. 80–83, 43 lines], rhyme ā). Cited in: RMHM, p. 192 (DKH, fol. 45a, lines 1–2 with a different beginning Allāh Akbar Allāh Akbar).
Main issues: Praise of the ism, the ma’nā and the bāb, creators of the world of light, the transmigration of sinners.

Main issues: Curse of Syria, the land of the Umayyads, praise of Kufa, transmigration of sinners, praises to Salmān, curse of heretic groups.

12. Akālīl qudus (Crowns of Sanctity; DKH fol. 56a–64b, 186 lines [S.H.: pp. 109–116, 124 lines], the only qaṣīda in rajaz tempo with shifting rhymes). Main issues: Astral elements compared to the prophets and Imāms, praise of the twelve Imāms and of the Islamic religion, curse of all evil in history from Pharaoh to the Umayyads, curse of heretical groups.

13. al-Māʾ shakhṣ jalīl (Water is A Noble Saint; DKH fol. 64b–67b, 58 lines [S.H.: pp. 117–120, 58 lines the last line is different], rhyme īlūl). Cited in FRR, pp. 92–94, 47 lines (complete poem missing the last line, DKH fol. 67b, line 48); RA, p. 325 (DKH, fol. 65, lines 4–5).

1 The opening wa should be understand here as wa rubba (wa of plural).
Main issues: Water, the source of life, is compared to the five *ahl al-kisāʾ*, allegorical interpretations of the pillars of Islam, the eighty transmigrations of the believers.

14. *Asmāʾ sabʿa* (Seven Names; *DKH* fol. 73b–74, 12 lines, rhyme *mā*). Cited in *FRR*, pp. 95 (complete poem, 12 lines); *MN*, 131a (*DKH*, fol. 73b, line 1). Main issues: Praise of seven sacred names, which represent the seven stations of exaltation as well as the seven levels of transmigration.

15. *Hābil yā mawlāya* (Habel My Master; *DKH*, fol. 74b–75a, 14 lines, rhyme *ātī*). Cited in *FRR*, pp. 101–102 (complete poem, 14 lines). Main issues: Praise of certain prophets and saints from Adam to Ibn Nuṣayr, including some Persian legendary persons, curse of the deficient Shiʿīs.

16. *Nawrūz haqq mustafīd* (*Nawrūz Is a Useful Right/Truth*; *DKH*, fol. 103b, 6 lines [S.H.: pp. 181–182, 5 lines], rhyme *im*). Cited in: *MA*, p. 208–209 (complete poem, 6 lines). Main issues: The mystical meaning of Nawrūz (New Year), which represents God’s appearance to the Persians before his appearance to the Arabs, in a previous cycle of time; recommendation to drink wine on this day, which represents the light of Salmān.


*Middle reliability (cited only in the 12th century)*

18. *Alā yā maʿshar al-Shīʿa* (Oh, Community of the Shiʿa; *DKH* fol. 38a–45a, 149 lines [S.H.: pp. 84–93, 153 lines], rhyme *ātī*). Cited in: *MN*, fol. 126b (*DKH*, fol. 39b–40a, lines 35–36). Main issues: Only the lights who fell from heaven (the Nuṣayrīs) can understand the true religion and the secret that will be revealed on the Day of Judgment, the *ahl al-marātib*, attack against heretical groups.

Main issues: Apocalyptic vision of the war at the end of time between good and evil, the sin of denial and the punishment of transmigration, curse against heretical groups.

*Low reliability (cited only in the 19th century)*

20. *Kullumā nābanī nin al-dahr khatb* (Every Time Calamity Happens To Me; *DKH* fol. 77b–78a, 4 lines [does not appear in S.H.], rhyme āmī). Cited in: *BS*, p. 52 (Complete poem, 4 lines).

Main issues: A prayer to Ja’far as the personification of the ma’nā and other Imāms, who are personifications of the *ism*, to be saved from calamities.

21. *Yā zāhir lam taghīb ḥannā* [sic, for taghib], (Oh, You Present Who Is Never Absent from us; *DKH* fol. 83a, 4 lines [S.H.: p. 148, 4 lines], rhyme dan). Cited in: *BS*, p. 51 (complete poem, 4 lines).

Main issues: An aspect of the divinity, personified by Salmān, is accessible only to the believers, a prayer for God’s mercy.

22. *Qāla lī fī ’l-manām ab shafīq* (A Merciful Father Told Me in My Sleep; *DKH* fol. 113a, 7 lines [S.H.: p. 196, 7 lines], rhyme īq/ūq). Cited in: *BS*, p. 16 (fol. 113a, lines 1–2).

Main issues: Al-Khaṣībī’s mysterious release from jail by “a merciful father” because of the ḥijāb’s affection for him.


Main issues: Definition of God as the one without any form or boundary, the object of all prayers.

None of the rest of the poems in the *Dīwān* are cited in any of the available sources of the sect. To sum up, from the 99 poems (42 in *Dīwān al-Husayn ibn Ḥamdān al-Khaṣībī* and 57 in *Dīwān al-Gharīb*) only 17 poems are reliable, 3 may be reliable and the other 79 are
anonymous. Some of the latter match the style of Khaṣībī, but most of them display a lower level of both language and literary style. This study of the Dīwān should be the main tool for a critical edition of the text in the future. Such an edition should include the original Damascus-Zāhiriyya copy.
Chapter 1 (pp. 7–9), al-Awwal (the first): Blessing of ‘Alî; a prayer transmitted from Ibn Nuṣayr to Yaḥyâ ibn Ma’in to save believers from calamities; blessing for al-Khaṣībī “knowing the divine knowledge” (al-ʿārif bi-maʿrifat Allâh).

Chapter 2 (pp. 10–11), Taqdisat ibn al-Walî (sanctification of the son/disciple of the master): Blessing of ‘Alî; a mystical vision of the world of light seen by a believer during his sleep; prayer to be saved from the seven degrees of transmigration; “this is the secret of the master al-Jillî, son [disciple] of the master [al-Khaṣībī]”.

Chapter 3 (pp. 11–12), Taqdisat ibn Saʿîd (sanctification of ibn Saʿîd, i.e. al-Ṭabarâṇî): Blessing of ‘Alî, the five aytām, the twelve Imāms and their bābs; prayer to be saved from the material world by the blessing of al-Ṭabarâṇî; a curse against his enemy Abû Dhuhayba (leader of the Ishāqīyya).

Chapter 4 (pp. 14–16), al-Nisba (the lineage): Acknowledgment of ʿayn-mim-sin; a Nuṣayrī shahāda of the divine triad; a chain of transmitters of this secret going back to the founders of the sect (al-Ṭabarâṇî is replaced by a certain Aḥmad al-Tarrāz [the embroiderer] as the disciple of al-Jillî), and finally to Ibn Nuṣayr the bāb of the divine Imām Ḥasan al-ʿAskarî.

Chapter 5 (pp. 18–19), al-Fath (victory): Acknowledgment that ‘Alî is the creator of this world and that the ism, the bāb and the aytām

---

1 Based on the original version published in Sulaymān al-Adhānî’s al-Bākūra al-Sulaymāniyya; see BS, pp. 7–33. See a complete translation of Kitāb al-majmūʿ into French, with useful commentaries, in Dussaud, Histoire et religion des Nosairîs, Appendix, pp. 161–179.
were created from his light; a prayer for victory over the enemies of the sect.

Chapter 6 (pp. 20–21), *al-Sujūd* (worship): Repetition of the declaration *Allāhu akbar* (God is the greatest) three times; declaration of worship of the one abstract God; citing of the Āyat al-nūr (verse of light in the Qur‘ān).

Chapter 7 (pp. 21–22), *al-Salām* (peace/blessing): Self-definition of the believer as a Muslim; blessing of the triad and the *ahl al-marātib*.

Chapter 8 (pp. 23–24), *al-Ishāra* (the indication): Muḥammad indicates to ‘Ali in Ghadīr Khumm that he is God, the duty to celebrate that day.


Chapter 10 (pp. 25–26), *al-ʿAqd* (the connection): Acknowledgment of God, who is the truth, and of the water circling his throne in heaven.

Chapter 11 (pp. 26–27), *al-Shahāda* (declaration of belief): A *shahāda* including the declaration of Islam as God’s religion, the belief in the three aspects of the divine triad and in the five *aytām*; a self-definition as possessing Ibn Nuṣayr’s religion (*dīn*), Muḥammad ibn Jundab’s opinion (*rā’y*), Jannān al-Junbulānī’s path (*ṭariqa*), al-Khaṣībī’s theology (*madhhab*),2 al-Jillī’s belief (*maqāl*), and al-Tabarānī’s law (*fiqh*).

Chapter 12 (p. 28), *al-Imāmiyya*: Acknowledgment of the eternal and abstract nature of the divine Imām.

Chapter 13 (p. 29), *al-Musāfara* (the journey): Blessing of God and the 51 disciples of al-Khaṣībī in Ḥarrān; cursing of their enemies.

---

2 Compare with MN, fol. 75: Ibn Nuṣayr’s theology (*madhhab*) and al-Khaṣībī’s belief (*maqāl*).
Chapter 14 (p. 30), *al-Bayt al-maʿmūr* (the house to which pilgrimage is made): Mystical meaning of the Kaʿba, formed from *ashkhās* from the world of light.

Chapter 15 (p. 32), *al-Ḥijābiyya*: Blessing of the ḥijab and his bāb, for the aytām and the stars (which are the ahl al-marātīb).

Chapter 16 (pp. 32–33), *al-Naqībiyya*: Blessing of the nuqabāʾ, Muḥammad ibn Sinān in particular.
APPENDIX 8

THE FATWĀ OF IBN TAYMIYYA AGAINST THE NUṢAYRĪS

The following is the translation of the anonymous question concerning the Nuṣayrīs and the answer of Ibn Taymiyya, based on the Arabic version published by St. Guyard at the end of the nineteenth century. This document is the only fatwā issued in the Middle Ages dealing with the Nuṣayris, except for two much shorter fatwās issued by the same scholar that are dealt with in Chapter 3.

(a) istīfṭāʾ

What is the view of the noble scholars, the religious leaders, concerning the Nuṣayriyya, may Allāh forgive them? How could they help to unveil the clear truth and oppress the owners of lie, concerning the Nuṣayriyya, who believe in the permissibility of wine, in the transmigration of souls, in the eternity of the world and the denial of the resurrection of the dead and [the existence of] heaven and hell. [They believe] that the five prayers represent five names which are Ālī, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, Muḥsin and Fāṭima, that the mentioning of these five releases them from the cleaning from impurity and from the rest of the obligations of prayer.

[They believe] that the fast represents for them the names of thirty men and thirty women counted in their books, which this paper is too short to include. [They believe] that the one who created the heaven and earth is Ālī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may Allāh be satisfied with him, who is for them the divinity in heaven and the Imām on earth. They maintain that the logic of the appearance of the divinity in this human form is that he makes himself present among his creatures [yuʾnisu ḥalqahū] and his worshippers in order to teach them how to worship him.


2 The verb ānasa (from the root a.n.s., meaning to be on intimate terms with someone) seems to be taken from an original Nuṣayrī source. It was used to determine a kind
[They believe] that a Nuṣayrī does not become a believing Nuṣayrī, with whom they share the table and drink, and whom they initiate into their secrets and marry to their women, before he performs the khītāb [speech, see details in the discussion of initiation] by their master, which is in fact [the religious ceremony] that they swear to him [the master] to keep secret [kitmān] their religion and the knowledge of his [the master’s] shaykhs and that of the most respectable people of his doctrine. [They swear to him] not to consult a Muslim or any other person but only someone of their own religion. [They swear to him] to own an esoteric knowledge of his Imām and his God in the cycles of time [al-akwār wa-‘l-adwār] and will know the transition of the ism and the ma‘nā in every time and period. The ism among the first men was [in] Adam and the ma‘nā in Seth, then [the transition was that] the ism was Jacob and the ma‘nā was Joseph. Their proof for this material form is their claim that in the holy Qur’ān there is a story about Jacob and Joseph, God’s peace upon them, saying concerning Jacob that he was the ism because he was unable to surpass his level [to that of the ma‘nā] and said: “I will ask forgiveness for you from my Lord because he is the greatest forgiver and merciful” [Qur’ān, Yūsuf (12):98]. As to Joseph, he was the adorated ma‘nā because he said: “there is no blemish on you today” (Qur’ān, Yūsuf [12]:92) a phrase that cannot be attributed to anyone but him, because he knows that he is the divinity who acts according to his own will. Then [the transition was that] Moses was the ism and Joshua was the ma‘nā.

They believe that the sun turned back [to the east]4 to Joshua because he ordered it to do so and it obeyed him, and would the sun return at [the order of anyone] else but God? Then they consider Solomon as the ism and Āsaf5 as the ma‘nā, owner of the power, and they count

---

of appearance which is not hulūl (incarnation). The inās is explained in Mufaddal’s Kitāb al-sirāt as a case when a mystic invites the presence of a person (shakhs) from the world of light. The latter wears the form of his host and can speak with him. Oddly enough, the shakhs in the situation of inās is even capable of eating and drinking with his host as if he were actually human. See KS, fol. 100a, b.

4 The term used here is intiqāl, instead of the Nuṣayrī original term siyāqa.

4 See Joshua’s request that the sun stop, Joshua 10:12.

5 Āsaf ibn Barakhyā is known in Muslim tradition as the minister of King Solomon, who possessed mystical knowledge. See J. Lassner, Demonizing the Queen of Sheba: Boundaries of Gender and Culture (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 106–108. This tradition seems to be based on the Hebrew Asaph son of Berachiah from II Chronicles, 20:14; Psalms, 50, 73–83. However, this person was not found in any of the available Nuṣayrī sources.
all the prophets and messengers one after the other in that way, to
the time of the messenger of God, God's prayer and peace upon him,
claiming that Muḥammad is the ism and that ʿAlī is the maʿnā and
they continue to count in this order in every time until our period
[that of the cited Nuṣayrī source?].

A part of the truth of the khitāb and their religion is the grasping
that ʿAlī is the Lord (rabb), Muḥammad is the veil (ḥijāb) and Salmān
is the door (bāb) and this is based on a eternal order, and a well known
poem by a damned member of their dignitaries says:

I testify that there is no other God but ʿAlī the transcendent the esoteric,
and there is no veil but Muḥammad the righteous the faithful,
and there is no path to him but Salmān the powerful.

In addition [in their religion] there are the five aytām [orphans] and
the twelve leaders nuqabāʾ [sing. naqīb, leader] and their names are
known to them and in their evil books these three permanently appear
in every period of time to eternity. [In their religion] Iblīs al-Abālīsa
[the king of the devils] is ʿUmar ibn al-Khāṭṭāb and below him in the
rank of the devils is Abū Bakr and then ʿUthmān, may God be pleased
with them all and purify and exalt their rank from the claims of those
non-believers and the inventions of the corrupted extremists [ghālīn,
meaning Ghulāt].

In every period there is a group of people who mention their cor-
rupted doctrines as well as details of these aforementioned principles,
and this damned order [tariqa, a Šūfī term] took control of a big part
of the land of Syria [al-Shām]. They [the Nuṣayrīs] are known and
famous, they perform this doctrine openly and everyone from the
intelligent Muslims, the scholars as well as the ordinary people who
lived among them and got to know them, confirmed it in our period.
That is because their situation was veiled from most of the people in
the time of the conquest of the Crusaders who were fortified/defeated6
in the coastal land. When the day of Islam['s conquest] came their
situation was unveiled and their heresy was exposed but there is an
enormous negligence [in the treatment] of their matter although this
situation [enables the Muslims to reveal their heresy].

6 It may be assumed that the word mahdūlīn (exploited) here was corruptly cop-
ied from the original majdūlīn (fortified), which is more logical in this context. The
version appearing in both the Majmūʿ al-fatāwā, (vol. 35, p. 148) and the Fatāwā
al-kubrā (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadītha, 1966, vol. 4, p. 248), where the verb is
mahdūlīn (defeated) is also acceptable.
[For example] what is the judgment concerning the cheeses that are prepared with the rennet of their slaughtered beasts? And also, what about [the use of] their tools and garments? Is it permitted to bury them among the Muslims or not? Is it permitted to let them take [the Muslims’] place in the frontier positions of the Muslim [army] and to leave it to them, or not? Is the person in authority permitted to ban them and to use others from the Muslim administrators? Would he be to blame if he were to start to send them away and use others in their place? Or is he allowed to suspend [their removal] although his decision is to do so? Whether he uses them, then removes them or does not remove them, is it permitted to spend the money of the treasury on them? And if the person in charge were to pay to some of them a part of the salary later than the fixed date in order to pay the salary of another Muslim who deserves it or who would be satisfied by it—would it be authorized to keep it that way or is it his duty [to pay the Nuṣayrī fighter on time]?

Is it permitted to kill the above-mentioned Nuṣayrīs and to confiscate their property, or not? If the commander, may the exalted God support him, were to fight a holy war to oppress their heresy and remove them from the fortresses of the Muslims and the Muslim people were to refrain from marrying them and eating their slaughtered meat and were he to order them to fast [in Ramadan] and to pray [the orthodox prayers] and were he to prevent them from maintaining openly their heretic religion in order to make them understand their heresy—is this better and more rewarding than preparing the war against the armies of the Mongols in their territory [that of the Nuṣayrīs] and the attack of the Chinese territory, and that of Zanj [Africa], or is this [oppressing the Nuṣayrīs] better? Can a Nuṣayrī holy fighter be considered a murābiṭ [pl. murābiṭūn, a frontier defender] and should he be rewarded as a murābiṭ in the border towns by the sea preventing the invasion of the Franks [Crusaders], or is this [oppressing them] more rewarding? Is it obligatory for someone who knows the doctrine of the mentioned [Nuṣayrīs] to publish their matter and to help eliminating their heresy and spread Islam among them? Then maybe God may turn their descendants and their sons into Muslims, or is it permitted to him to overlook and ignore [their heretic doctrine]? What is the reward of someone who strives for it [revealing the Nuṣayrī doctrine and oppressing them]? And that of the fighter and the murābiṭ who persist in it? Please answer as simply [as possible] and we will be grateful and thankful.
These people called Nuṣayriyya, they and the other kinds of Qarmatians, the Bāṭīnīs, are more heretical than the Jews and the Christians and even more than several heterodox groups. Their damage to the [Muslim] community of [the Prophet] Muḥammad, may God pray for him and bless him, is greater than the damage of the infidels who fight [against the Muslims], such as the heretical Mongols, the Crusaders and others, since they [Nuṣayrīs and other Bāṭīnīs] are pretending before the uneducated Muslims that they are Shiʿīs and loyal to the ahl al-bayt [people of the house] but in reality they do not believe in God, in his messenger, in his holy book, in obligation or prohibition, [they do not believe] in reward and punishment, in paradise and hell, or in any of the messengers prior to Muḥammad, may God pray for him and bless him, or in one of the previous religions [prior to Islam]. They rather use the words of God and his messenger that are known to the Muslim scholars, and would give them allegorical interpretation based on matters they invent and call them the esoterical sciences.

They do not have any limit to their heretical claims concerning the names of the exalted God and his [Qur’ānic] verses, as well as to the falsification of the words of God and his messenger from their original signification. This is a result of their goal of denying the belief and the laws of Islam in any possible way, pretending that their claims are based on truths [only] they know. They have well-known struggles as well as [polemical] books against Islam and the Muslims. When they have an opportunity they shed the blood of the Muslims, such as their murder of the pilgrims and throwing their bodies into the Zamzam well on one occasion, and the stealing of the black stone of the Kaʿba and keeping it for some time on another occasion. They killed Muslim scholars and shaykhs, a number that only the exalted God can count.

The Muslim scholars wrote books unveiling their secrets and exposing their mysteries and explained in them their situation of heresy and their heterodoxy, which is more severe than that of the Jews and the Christians and [even] of the Brahmans7 of India who worship idols. It is well known about them that the Syrian coasts were conquered by the Christians from their [lands’] direction since they are always hostile to

---
the Muslims, with the Christians against the Muslims. And the most severe calamity for them is the victory of Islam against the Mongols and the Muslims’ conquest of the coastland and the submission of the Christians. Their greatest celebrations are when, God forbid, the Christians take over the border villages of the Muslims. Indeed, the border villages remained in the hands of the Muslims, even the island of Cyprus that was conquered at [the time of] the caliphate of commander of the faithful ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān, by Muʿāwiya ibn Abī Sufyān until the fourth[tenth] century. These objectors to God and his messengers became numerous in that time in the coastlands and other places and as a result the Christians conquered the coastland, then Jerusalem and other places. It is their conduct which was the main reason for this [conquest]. Then when God sent the Muslim kings, such as Nūr al-Dīn the shahīd and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, and those who followed them, and they conquered the coastlands [and took them] from the Christians and other lands taken by them, as well as Egypt, where they [the Bāṭīnīs] ruled for around two centuries. They [the Bāṭīnīs] and the Christians cooperated in fighting the Muslims until they conquered the land. From that time, the Muslim propaganda spread in Egypt and Syria. But then the Mongols invaded the Muslim territories and murdered the caliph in Baghdad and other Muslim kings using their help. Indeed it is the astronomer of the Mongol leader, his minister al-Nāṣīr al-Ṭūsī in Alamūt [center of the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs in Persia], who demanded the execution of the caliph under their rule.

They have names that are well known to the Muslims: sometimes they are called Malāḥīda, sometimes Ismāʿīliyya, sometimes Qarāmita, sometimes Bāṭīniyya, sometimes Khurramiyya and sometimes Muḥammara. Some of these names concern them all and some only a group of them, such as the name Islam and beliefs concerning all the Muslims, and some Muslim groups have a specific name according to their lineage, their territory or another component. Interpreting their goals would be a long task, as the scholars said concerning them: the open aspect of their religion is opposition [rafd, a nickname for Shi‘ism] and its concealed aspect is absolute heresy and the truth concerning their matter is that they do not believe in any of the prophets and the messengers, not in Noah, not in Abraham, not in Moses, not in Jesus or Muḥammad. They do not believe in any of the revealed holy books, not in the Bible, not in the Evangelical Gospels or the Qurʿān. They do not believe that this world has a creator that created it, or that there is a religion that he ordered be followed, or that he
has a world where he rewards and punishes people for their acts other than this world.

In some cases they base their belief on the doctrines of the naturalist and theist philosophers, as did the owners of the Epistles of the Brothers of Wisdom, and in other cases on the philosophers with inclination to the Persian heretics and objectors who worship and sacrifice to the ox. As proof for their belief, they use the words of the prophesies based on an expression which they corrupt and turn into a tradition that they attribute to the Prophet, may God pray for him and bless him, who said: “The first thing God created is the intellect, then he told him: Come! and he came; then he told him to go and he went”. They corrupt his words and claim that the first thing he created was the intellect to adjust it to the words of the philosophers and followers of Aristotle, that the first emanation from necessary being is the intellect. In other [cases they base their argument] on a reliable expression of the Prophet which they corrupt from its original meaning as do the owners of the Epistles of the Brothers of Wisdom, the theists and their kind of people, and [along the way] many of their lies penetrated [the beliefs of] many Muslims and influenced them, to the extent that in their books it [their doctrine] turned into a path for people who are related to knowledge and religion. Even though the latter do not agree with the heretical beliefs of the former, they still reveal their damned propaganda, which they call “the quiet propaganda” and which contains several levels called “the Edge of the Highest Initiation”\(^8\) and the “most exalted law”. They include in their “Highest Initiation” the denial of the Creator and show scorn towards him and those who are close to him, to the extent that one of them would write the name of the Almighty God at the bottom of his leg. This book also contains the denial of his laws and his religion and the denial of all the prophets, as well as the claim that they are of their kind [as the angels] seeking for leadership. Some of them excelled in seeking leadership, and some failed and even died. They consider Muḥammad, may God pray for him and bless him, and Moses, peace upon him from the first category [who succeeded] and Jesus from the second [who failed and died]. It [the book]) contains scorn for prayer, alms giving, fasting and

---
pilgrimage, and permits prohibited intercourse and the scorn of other obligations, which are too numerous to mention.

They have signs and [forms of] speech that enable them to recognize each other, so that if they are situated in a Muslim territory in which there are many believers they veil their identity from those who do not know them.

All the Muslim scholars agreed concerning such people that it is forbidden to marry them, nor can a Muslim marry one of them who is under his control or a free woman. The meat that they slaughter is prohibited. As to their cheeses, their rennet is a matter of controversy between two famous points of view, that it is like the rennet of carrion and that it is like the meat of the Persians and the rennet of the Crusaders of whom it is said that they do not purify their meat. As to the view of Abū Ḥanīfa and Aḥmad [ibn Ḥanbal], both agree that this cheese is permitted because the rennet of the carrion is pure, because of the belief that the rennet does not die with the death of the slaughtered beast and the use of the internal parts of an impure beast is not impure. Shāfiʿī and Mālik, as well as Aḥmad in another tradition, claim that this cheese is impure since the rennet of these people is impure, because the milk, the meat and the rennet are impure. It is the kind of meat that is forbidden to consume because it is like carrion. The holders of the two points of view both base their claim on traditions transmitted from the Companions. The former cite traditions that they [the Companions of the Prophet] have eaten from the cheese of the Persians, and the latter claimed that they have eaten only chosen cheeses from the Christians. This is [still] an issue of controversy and one should choose which tradition to follow.

As to their tools and their clothes they are like those of the Persians, which the great reliable scholars say cannot be used before being washed, since their meat is impure and that probably touched their tools to make them impure as well. The exceptions are tools which logically would not touch impure things and do not need to be washed. [Even] ʿUmar [the caliph] purified himself from his Christian slave woman, so there is no doubt about his impurity [since he touched her].

It is prohibited to bury them in Muslim graveyards or to pray for one of them who died because God forbade prayer for munāfiqīna [hypocrites] such as ʿAbdallāh ibn Ubayy and his kind, who openly prayed, gave alms, fasted and fought jihād with the Muslims and did not reveal doctrines which contradict the religion of Islam, but concealed them. In this context Allāh said: “You must not pray for any-
one of them who died or visit his grave” [Qur’an, al-Tawba (9):84], let alone those who are part of the heresy, hypocrisy and are openly infidels.

The use of such people in the border villages of the Muslims or their fortresses and army is a great sin and is like using wolves to pasture sheep, since they are the most seditious people towards the Muslims and their commanders and the most eager to destroy the [Muslim] religion and the regime. They are the most eager people to open the border camps to the enemies of the Muslims, so those responsible must remove them from the lists of the soldiers either for a raid or another war. It is not permitted to delay this matter even though he [the commander] has the ability to do it, unless they are used for [unarmed] work, and if they do it according to the agreement with them it is permitted. As to their salary, it should be paid to them on time because it was agreed upon with them. If the agreement is legal so the payment on time is an obligation even if he is heretic, and also if their employment is not on a salary basis but as in work in the field, which is permitted to them.

Nevertheless, their life and possessions are permitted [to be taken]. If they show regret there is a debate between the scholars whether to accept it. Those who accept their repentance if they accept the laws of Islam will agree to leave them their possessions. Those who reject their regret and refuse [to confiscate] the heritage of these kind of people, [judged that] it should be transferred to the spoils in the treasury. The reason [for the rejection] is that when those people are arrested they pretend to possess the opposite of their ridiculous religion and veil their true belief. And among the Muslims there are some who do not know, so they must be warned against them. They [the heretics] must not be authorized to gather or to carry weapons. If they are from the fighting soldiers and follow the laws of Islam, such as the five prayers, and the reading of the Qur’an, those should be left with scholars who will teach them the Muslim religion and stay between them and their commander. [Also] Abū Bakr the rightful, may God be pleased from him, and the rest of the Companions, when they won the fight against the rebels and came to him, he told them to choose between the war which brings honor and the peace which brings wages. They asked him: “O Caliph of the messenger of God we are aware of the honoring war but what is the peace which brings wages?” So he replied: “You would be paid ransom for our dead fighter but we would not pay for yours, and you would declare that our dead fighters are in heaven and
yours are in hell. We would gain the spoils we collected from your property and you would be paid ransom for your spoils, we would confiscate from you the land and the weapons and you would not be authorized to ride horses and would be left with the tails of the camels [i.e. less noble animals to ride] until the Caliph of the messenger of God would authorize it to you”. The Companions criticized him for this except for the guarantee for the Muslim dead fighters. Then ʿUmar told them: “Those died for the sake of God and would be compensated by God, since they are martyrs they have no ransom” and everybody accepted his claim and this is what the Companions agreed upon and is also the doctrine of the great scholars. There was a controversy among the scholars over this issue and most of them agreed that there is no guarantee for those who are killed by the rebellious apostates and this was their final decision. This is the doctrine of Abū Ḥanīfa and Aḥmad according to one tradition and that of al-Shāfīʿī according to another. This was the first thing agreed upon and followed by the Companions with those apostates after their return to Islam even though their blameworthiness was clear. So they were prevented from riding horses and carrying weapons and could not be authorized to stay in the army, as Jews and Christians are not authorized and are under the authority of the Muslim laws until they reveal their intention [literally: what they do] if they are good or bad. As to those who are the leaders of their corrupted religion and show repentance, they would be separated from them and taken to the Muslim lands where they would be guided [to Islam] or put to death for their betrayal.

There is no doubt that fighting these people and attacking them from the borders is one of the greatest obligations and the rightful [Caliph ʿUmar] and the rest of the Companions began the holy war against the apostates before the war against the heretics from the People of the Book, because fighting them [means] defending Muslim land and no one is authorized to keep secret what he knows about them. On the contrary, he should expose it and unveil them until the Muslims know the truth concerning them. No one is authorized to help them to remain in the army and in other kinds of work. No one has the right to prohibit the execution of an order of God and his messenger concerning them, since this is one of the most important issues [literally: doors] connected with commanding what is good and preventing what is evil and the holy war for God’s sake. God told his Prophet: “O Prophet! Fight the holy war against the apostates and the infidels! (Qurʾān, al-Tawba [9]: 73). And according to the two most
reliable traditionists [Bukhārī and Muslim] the Prophet said: “A war camp during day and night for God’s sake is better than pilgrimage in the holy months and in the rest of the periods”. God said: “Did you consider the watering of the pilgrim and the pilgrimage to the Holy Mosque equal to the belief in God and in the Last Day and fighting for the sake of God is not equal for God, etc.”. In his words: “Those who believed and migrated and fought the holy war for the sake of God with their property and soul are in the highest rank for God and they are the winners. God supply them with good news of his mercy and his contentedness [with their acts] and of Paradise for them in which they will remain happy. Remaining for ever there because God’s reward is great” (Qurʾān, al-Tawba [9]:19–21).
SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Nuṣayrī sources are presented in detail in Appendix 1.

al-ʿAstārābādī, Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī, Manhāj al-maqāl, Teheran 1889.
——, Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imami Shiism, Leiden 1999.


——, The Ismā’ili: Their History and Doctrine, Cambridge 1992.


al-Ḥamawi, Yaqūt, Mujam al-buldān, Beirut 1990.
Ivanov, V., Ummu’l-Kitāb, Der Islam 23 (1936), pp. 1–32.
——, Notes sur l’Umm al-kitab des ismaéliens de l’Asie centrale, REI 4 (1932), pp. 419–481.


——, Ṭabaqât a’lām al-Shī’a, Beirut 1971.
INDEX

'Abbasid(s), 175, 187, 215
'abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, 187
'Abdallāh ibn Mu‘awiyah, 91, 104, 111, 121, 147, 184, 242, 246, 287
Abū Bakr, 60, 113, 121, 123, 159, 161, 284, 301
Abū Duhayba, 43, 53, 277
Abū Ja‘far ibn ‘Uthmān, 8
Abū ‘l–Khattāb, 6, 61, 61 n. 240, 74, 78, 84, 86, 91, 129, 147, 184, 242, 246, 287
Abū Tālib, 7 n. 9, 86, 114
ahl al-kisāʾ, 86–87, 187
ahl al-marātīb, 93, 115, 121, 255, 264
Ahura Mazda, 164, 166–167, 232
Ajrūd, Ḥasan, 64
Akhbāris, 180, 182–183
akhdh al-ubūwwa, 19, 215, 221
arkān al-arbaʿ, al- 90, 142
’ānā, 52, 64, 191
’aqabāt, 116, 241
Arabs, 152, 165, 210, 224
Aristotle, 157, 225, 265–267
arkān al-arbaʿ, al- 90, 142
As‘ad ‘Ali, 51
‘āshūrāʾ, 19, 84, 158
’Askari, Imām Ḥasan al-, 7–8, 8 n. 11, 9–10, 10 n. 19, 12, 15, 17 n. 48, 18–19, 26, 29–30, 60, 64, 75, 119, 129, 163, 247, 251, 283, 287, 295
’ayn al-ḥayāt, 107
’ayn-mīm-sīn, 89, 212, 217, 295–296
ashkhās, 24, 24 n. 74, 114, 135, 140, 142
n. 326, 151, 153, 167, 173, 215, 224, 297
aytām, 9 n. 14, 17, 85–87, 89, 90, 90 n. 95, 91, 93–95, 225, 231, 295–297, 301
Ayyubid(s), 48, 49, 49 n. 189, 52, 55, 175
bāb, 8, 8 n. 10, 10, 12, 12 n. 28, 13 n. 31, 15, 17, 20, 29, 59, 64, 74–77, 79–80, 86–88, 90, 94, 111, 116, 118–119, 127,
INDEX


triad, 73–74, 76, 76 n. 36, 77, 80, 85, 87–90, 90 n. 95, 96, 113, 120–121, 123, 162, 194, 217, 225–226, 230, 295–296

Tripoli, 39 n. 143, 42, 48, 48 n. 181, 52, 57, 58 n. 227, 60, 62–63, 65–66

Tsugitaka, S., 56, 56 n. 223, 58, 58 nn. 226, 229, 60 nn. 232–233, 315

Türbâ’, 22, 25, 33, 65

Turkey, 23 n. 72, 199, 271, 273

Twelver Shi’ism, see also: Imāmi Shi’ism, 26, 28, 32, 74 n. 29, 110 n. 187, 132 n. 282, 139 n. 312, 144 n. 330, 148 n. 345, 312–314

‘Umar, xv–xviii, 6, 7 n. 5, 9 nn. 13–14, 11, 12 n. 28, 15, 31 n. 112, 57 n. 224, 60, 61 n. 237, 63 n. 249, 73–74, 78, 80, 83, 84 n. 72, 90, 121, 122 n. 245, 123, 129, 136–137, 139, 142, 158–159, 161, 171–172, 234, 243–244, 244 n. 16, 246, 249, 274, 280, 287, 301, 313

Umayyads, 23, 84, 91, 122–123, 150, 158, 166 n. 420, 184, 207, 215

Uşūlī, 180, 182–183

‘Uthmān, 42 n. 154, 90, 92, 94, 121, 123, 301

wakīl pl. *wukalā*’, 8, 74, 74 n. 29

wali, 20, 75, 132, 295

world of light, 77, 95, 97–100, 105, 111, 115, 117–119, 121, 134, 170, 210, 212 n. 140, 214, 216, 220, 227, 231, 277, 297, 299 n. 2

Yarshater, 60 n. 236, 164 n. 416, 169 n. 432, 231 n. 34, 224 n. 2, 315

*yatīm*, 17 n. 44, 85, 90, 92, 119, 142, 148 n. 347, 168, 242 n. 4, 247

Yemen, 91 n. 100, 156


*zill*, 81, 98

*ziyāra*, 40, 137, 141 n. 322, 159–160, 160 n. 400, 171

Zoroastrian, 37 n. 137, 60, 60 n. 236, 84, 97, 97 n. 122, 103 n. 151, 152, 164, 165 n. 417, 166 n. 421, 167, 169, 198, 224, 231–232, 232 n. 41, 242, 261


