Convert Literature, Interreligious Polemics, and the "Signs of Prophethood" Genre in Late Safavid Iran (1694-1722): the Work of ʿAlī Qulī Jadīd al-Islām (d. circa 1722)

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Contents

Abstract

The following dissertation is a work on intellectual history focusing on the polemical work of the late seventeenth/ early eighteenth century missionary and convert ʿAlī Qulī Jadīd al-Islām (d. circa 1722). Throughout the work of this author, this study seeks to explore broader questions regarding the nature of interreligious polemics in the late Safavid period in Iran (1694-1722). As such, ʿAlī Qulī's opera is situated within the context of the intellectual debates of his time as well as within the larger history of the polemical genre known as "signs of prophethood" (*dalā'il al-nubuwwah*). Although most of this study focuses on the author's anti-Christian polemics, it also analyses his role in shaping the anti-Sufi atmosphere that characterized this period.

La thèse suivante a été conçue comme étant un projet d'histoire intellectuelle dont le focus est l'œuvre polémique du missionnaire et « nouveau-musulman » ʿAlī Qulī Jadīd al-Islām (mort circa 1722). Cette étude cherche à explorer à travers de cet auteur des questions plus larges sur la nature des polémiques interreligieuses à la fin de la période safavide en Iran (1694-1722). Par conséquent, l'œuvre d'ʿAlī Qulī a été examinée dans le contexte des débats intellectuels de l'époque mais aussi plus généralement dans le cadre du genre polémique des « signes de la prophétie » (*dalā'il al-nubuwwah*). Bien que la thèse présente explore principalement les aspects anti-chrétiens de l'œuvre de notre auteur, ses contributions au climat anti-soufi de l'époque ont été aussi prises en considération.

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Introduction

As it often happens with academic research, the following study –with its methodology, structure, and content– is more a product of chance than of a perfectly preconceived project. Documentary gaps gave this study its current shape as much as (or even more) did my own intellectual interests. This was originally intended to be a wider social history of religious minorities (specifically non-Muslim ones) in Safavid Iran (1501-1722). However, as specialists on this period know all too well, we do not have at our disposal the kind of rich archival documentation that Ottomanists do. Many documents were likely lost during the 1722 Afghan invasion of Isfahan, but it is also likely that the Safavid state did not achieve the same level of bureaucratic centralization that the Ottomans did and hence the relative dearth of administrative documentation.[1] On the other hand we do have an important corpus of court chronicles, the richness of which varies substantially from one period to another within the Safavid era.[2] But as

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[1] Rudi Matthee mentions the relative dearth of Persian-language materials for the last decades of the seventeenth century. See Rudi Matthee. *Persia in Crisis: Safavid Decline and the Fall of Isfahan* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012), xxi.

[2] The most substantially documented period of Safavid history in terms of court chronicles would be that of Shah 'Abbās I (r. 996-1038/1588-1629), thanks to the work of Iskandar Beg Munshī's(d. 17th C) *Tarīkh-i 'ālam-arā-yi 'Abbāsī*. An English translation of it was made by Roger Savory. See Munshī, Iskandar Beg Munshī, *History of Shah 'Abbās the Great*, 2 vols., translated by Roger Savory. 2 Vols. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1978. This work also contains information from the reigns of the previous monarchs, as it also draws information from older sources such as the *Aḥsan al-tavārīkh* (*The Best of Histories*) by Ḥasan Beg Rumlū (d. 16th C). See Ḥasan Beg Rumlū, *Aḥsan al-tavārīkh* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Bābak, 1357 [1978]). The period immediately following the reign of Shah 'Abbās is still fairly well documented, as we find then the chronicles of Muḥammad Ṭāhir Vaḥīd-i Qazvīnī (d. 17th C) and that of Muḥammad Yūsuf Valah-i Iṣfahānī (d. 17th C). See Muḥammad Ṭāhir Qazvīnī, *'Abbāsnāmah: yā sharḥ-i zindigānī-yi 22 salah-i Shah 'Abbās-i Thānī, 1052-1073* (Arak: Kitāb-furūsh-i Dāvūdī, 1329 [1951]); Muḥammad Yūsuf Valah-i Iṣfahānī, *Rawzah-hā-yi shishum va haftum az Khuld-i barīn: tārīkh-i Timūriyān va Turkmānān*. Ed. by Mīr Hāshim Muḥaddis (Tehran: Mīrās-i Maktūb, 1379 [2000-1]). For the second half of the seventeenth, as Matthee says, the chronicle corpus is less rich. I would like however to nuance that statement by saying that we do

anyone who has ventured in them would know as well, hunting for data on social history of any sort in such materials is –to put it gently and unoriginally– searching for a needle in the hay. Although references to the commoners do exist in royal chronicles, they are minute and can rarely suffice to paint a complex portrait of lower social classes. Further, while modern editions of the chronicles contain helpful indexes and make it easier to navigate through its materials, the fact remains that these chronicles do not provide modern historians with "original research topics", but rather with a record of the elites' general political activities and with an exaltation of the sovereigns' exploits.

European travelogues and missionary accounts can and indeed have been used to fill in such gaps. Such is the case with missionary correspondence, which represents an interesting source in this regard. The *Archivio Storico di Propaganda Fide* contains an extensive corpus of the epistolary correspondence of Catholic missionaries in Safavid Iran, which sheds much light on their activities and on the social conditions of some of Iran's non-Muslim communities. These letters focus mostly on the relation between the Catholics (predominantly Europeans living in

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have a couple of very valuable regional chronicles from Kerman and from Khuzestan, see Mīr Muḥammad Mashīzī, *Tazkirah-yi Safavi-yi Kirmān* (Tehran: Nashr-i 'Ilm, 1369 [1990]); Sayyid Muḥammad Husayn Jazā'ir Shushtarī, *Tazkirah-i Shushtar* (Tehran: Chap-khāna-yi Ḥaydari, [198-?]). We also have works dealing with the period of the 1722 afghan invasion that were completed not so long after it occurred. A good example is Shaykh Muḥammad ʿAlī Ḥazīn-i Lāhījī's(d. 1180/ 1766) travelogue; See Shaykh Muḥammad ʿAlī Ḥazīn-i Lāhījī, *Tārīkh va Safarnāmah-yi Hazīn*. Ed. ʿAlī Davānī (Tehran: Markaz-i Asnād-i Inqilāb-i Islāmī, 1375 [1996 or 1997]). There is also a detailed chronicle of the Safavid frontier battles against the Afghans and Baluchis; see Muḥammad Mu'min Kirmānī, *Ṣaḥifat al-irshād* (Tehran: 'Ilm, 2005). There is another brief account of Shah Sulṭān Ḥusayn's (r. 1105-1134/1694-1722) by the name of *Tuḥfat al-ʿālam*; see Sayyid Abu Ṭālib Musavī Findiriskī, *Tuhfat al-ʿālam* (Tehran: Kitab-khāna-yi Shūrā-yi Islāmī, 2010). Finally, the chronicles written during the period of Nādir Shah (r. 1149-1160/1736-1747) and of Karīm Khān Zand (r. 1163-1193/1750-1779) do devote some pages to the period of Shah Sulṭān Ḥusayn, although the information they provide is not too substantial. See Muḥammad Kāzim Marvī, *'Alam-ārā-yi Nādirī* (Tehran: Kitāb-furūshī-yi Zavvār, 1364 [1985 or 1986]); Mahdī Khān Astarabādī, *Tārīkh-i jahān-gushā-yi Nādirī* (Tehran: s.n., 1341 [1962 or 1963]); Muḥammad Hāshim Asaf, *Rustam al-tavārīkh* (Tehran: Dunyā-yi Kitāb, 1382 [2003 or 2004]); Muḥsin Mustawfī, *Zubdat al-tavārīkh* (Tehran: Bunyād-i Mawqūfāt-i Duktūr Maḥmūd Afshār, 1375 [1996 or 1997]).

Iran) and the Armenian Orthodox.[3] This same archive also contains royal edicts (*firmāns* or

raqams) given to the missionaries to guarantee their protection against hostile Muslim regional

rulers and against vindictive Orthodox Armenians.[4] Thus, it would have been possible to write a

fairly interesting project on the social history of Catholic priests in Iran at the time.

However, two things prevented me from pursuing this line of research for my dissertation.

Firstly, John Flannery has already provided us with a superb book on the Portuguese Augustinian

Missions in Iran.[5] To be sure, that should not stop future scholars from studying the topic. As

with any other corpuses, Flannery's sources can and should be revisited by others in order to

propose different readings of them and advance the debate on certain relevant questions.

Secondly, and more importantly, this data appears to have been more suitable for studies on

European perceptions of Iran. A few works have pursued this line of inquiry in recent years with

very insightful outcomes.[6] However, it seemed to me that an overreliance on European-language

materials to ascertain how things were in Iran is problematic and would also defeat the purpose

of trying to understand Middle Eastern/Islamic history from the point of view of the Middle

Easterners or Muslims themselves, which has been the quest in the field for the last three decades.

There is yet a third type of corpus that can shed light on commoners and religious

minorities, namely that of the Armenians and Georgians. However, in this case linguistic

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[3] Vatican City: *Archivio Storico di Propaganda Fide*: Fondo di Persia, Messopotamia e i Caldei

[4] There are many examples of this. Consider, for instance a letter dated February 21, 1722 in which the Bishop of Isfahan is given permission to rebuild a previously destroyed Church in Tbilisi. See *Fondo di Persia, Messopotamia e i Caldei*, vol.3, ff 530-2

[5] John M. Flannery, *The Mission of the Portuguese Augustinians to Persia and Beyond (1601-1747)*. Studies in Christian Mission, 43 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2013).

[6] See, for instance, Rudi Matthee, "The Safavids under Western Eyes: Seventeenth-Century European Travelers to Iran," *Journal of Early Modern History* 13 (2009), 137-71.

competence becomes a major impediment for many of us. Some of these sources have been translated into other languages, among which the best known is the chronicle *The History of the Vardapet Arak'el of Tabriz* (d. 1670).[7] But in the end –and not surprisingly so– only scholars with command of these languages can access the most novel materials.

Facing these difficulties I sought to redefine the scope of my project and to restrict it to what a few concrete sources could offer. To my good fortune, in a research travel to Iran, Professor Mansur Sefatgol of the University of Tehran generously shared with me his edition of a Persian-language diary of an Armenian convert to Islam by the name of ʿAlī Akbar Armānī (d. 17th or 18th C).[8] In addition I could count on the epic poem of Bābāī b. Farhād (d. 18th C), which describes the fate of the Jewish community of Kashan in the wake of the 1722 Afghan invasions.[9] I also identified some cases of conversion of Zoroastrians in Kerman in the regional chronicle *Tazkirah-yi Ṣafavī-yi Kirmān*.[10] And finally, another colleague of mine, Reza Pourjavady, brought to my attention the polemical work of the Portuguese missionary and later Muslim convert ʿAlī Qulī Jadīd al-Islām (d. 18th C).[11] I thus had four interesting sources (or body

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[7] Arak'el Davrizhets'i, *The History of the Vardapet Arak'el of Tabriz.* 2 Vols. Transl. and intro by George A. Bournoutian (Costa Meza, California: Mazda Publishers, 2005-6).

[8] ʿAlī Akbar Armānī, "Iʿtirāfnāmah," in *Iʿtirāfnāmah: diary of Abgar ('Ali Akbar) Armani, one of new converts to Islam of Shah Sulaiman & Shah Sultan Husain Safavi's era, along with Risāla-yi Shinā'kht, in Gurji script on affirming Shi`ism by a Georgian new convert to Islam of Shah Abbas' time,* ed. Mansur Sefatgol (Tehran: Kitāb-khānah-yi Shurā-yi Islāmi, 2010).

[9] Vera B. Moreen, Vera B.,ed., *Iranian Jewry during the Afghan Invasion: the Kitāb-i sar Guzasht-i Kāshān of Bābāī b. Farhād* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1990).

[10] Mashīzī, Mīr Muḥammad Saʿīd. *Tazkira-yi Safavī-yi Kirmān.* Tehran: Nashr-i 'Ilm, 1369 [1990].

[11] 'Alī Qulī Jadīd al-Islām. "Favā'id-i Izdivāj," in *Mirās-i Islāmi-yi Irān*, ed. Rasul Ja`fariyan (Qom: Kitāb-khānah-yi Ḥaẓrat Āyatullah al-'Uẓmā Marʿashī Najafī, 1373-1374 [1994-1995]), 1: 291-310; "Risālah dar radd-i jamāʿat-i ṣūfiyān," in *Siyāsat va farhang-i rūzgār-i Safavī*, ed. Rasul Ja`fariyan (Tehran: Nashar-i ʿilm, 1388 [2009]), 1: 895-929; *Sayf al-mū'minīn fī qitāl al-mushrikīn*, ed. Rasul Ja`fariyan (Qom: Intishārāt-i Anṣāriyān, 1375 [1996 or 1997]).

of sources in the case of the latter) dealing, in their own way, with conversion and the four of them were written roughly around the final decade of the seventeenth century AD or at the beginning of the eighteenth.

However, having these did not resolve all the methodological problems. I immediately realized the great disparity between the nature, length and depth of these texts. The first was a sixty-page testimony of Armānī's conversion, dreams, and vicissitudes that read almost as a picaresque novella. The second one was a rather brief epic poem about the persecution and the forced conversions of the Kashani Jews. The third was a brief passage of a couple of pages, which –just as Armānī's and Bābāī b. Farhād's work– could be useful in reconstructing local historical events only to a certain extent, given that the information contained in it (if we were to take it at face value) could not be cross-referenced with any other materials. In contrast, the fourth body of sources –that is, ʿAlī Qulī's opera– comprised more than a thousand pages of theological polemics with only very sporadic references to its historical context. With this documentation in hand it became clear to me that I could not aspire understand the nature and significance of all four cases with the same depth. The material on theological polemics from ʿAlī Qulī's work outweighed by far all the data on social history that I could gather from the former three cases. Further, his polemical discussions were conceived as an intellectual dialogue with other similar works, whereas the material on social history from the other sources could barely even be cross-referenced with the court chronicles or travelogues in order to construct a coherent and rigorous narrative. As a consequence, ʿAlī Qulī's work was inexorably meant to become the core of my project.

Theoretical Considerations on Intellectual History

With this new avenue being opened, other methodological challenges arose. It was clear now that I could include some aspects of social history as a background to this study, but that my overall project would have to focus on the political and intellectual features of religious polemical activities as they can be "known" from the texts which ʿAlī Qulī left behind as well as from biographical and historical sources. This had its advantages and disadvantages. With textual studies there is always the risk of treating the sources as self-enclosed entities void of any contextual frame of reference. This approach is popular in literary studies, especially among adherents to the structuralist and to certain post-structuralist schools. Based on this approach, texts are taken as entirely self-sufficient entities divorced of any biographical considerations regarding their authors or of the historical conditions in which they were conceived: the text becomes thus the only "empirical evidence" to be taken into account, and any external (that is, meta-textual) reference should be disregarded in order to make justice to the text.

This might have been a fairly legitimate approach to fiction, but not to the kind of sources I was intending to deal with. What I was set to do instead was first and foremost a study of intellectual history, where the context or circumstances surrounding the emergence of these texts could not be overlooked. As obvious as this latter realization might have seemed, I was soon confronted with the question of how to define the "context". There were at least two possible ways in which I could do it in this case. One was as the socio-political background of Iran at the time of our author and the other one was as the broader intellectual tradition within which ʿAlī Qulī's opera situated itself.

Being thus aware of some of the methodological risks that intellectual historians should take into account, I decided to revisit Quentin Skinner's "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas", which I then decided to engage and debate, although using him more as a

guide than as a theoretical framework strictly speaking. In this article, Skinner has provided us with what is perhaps the most synthetic and yet detailed examination of the theoretical fallacies, which historians of ideas often fall prey to. Skinner's work was written partly as a reaction to (or at least as a dialogue with) Arthur O. Lovejoy, who conceived of the possibility of taking ideas as a unit of study that could be investigated throughout time and in all the "provinces of history" in which they appear, be it in politics, art, history, religion, science, literature, or philosophy.[12] Skinner feared that treating ideas as autonomous units would transform texts into autonomous and self-enclosed entities that could give us no insight into their context. On the other hand, he also questioned the attempt to present mere biographical accounts of thinkers as "the context" and to read their works in a mechanistic way as pure reflections of the authors' lives.

To be sure, there are many dimensions to these lines of inquiry. Non-contextual reading usually stems from modern readers' eagerness to extract "timeless truths" from the classics, which reveals more about the readers' expectations than about the texts themselves.[13] In connection to this tendency comes another, namely the attempt to systematize a thinker's incidental remarks on a subject, and to turn them into a coherent "doctrine".[14] This leads to anachronistic readings of texts projecting one's own historically-conditioned understanding of a particular concept, and which in turns leads to essentializing the term in question.[15] Paired with

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[12] Arthur O. Lovejoy, *Great Chain of Being: A Story of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), 15.

[13] Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," *History and Theory* 8, no. 1 (1969): 4-6.

[14] Ibid., 7. Skinner sees this as a mistake made both by those who seek to pursue the "intellectual biography" of a given figure as well as by those who seek to trace the evolution of a given "idea" as a perennial entity that has existed throughout time in one form or another.

[15] Ibid., 11.

this expectation at times is the counterfactual exercise of finding what a thinker would have thought about a given subject, which s/he did not explicitly address.[16]

I was aware of these risks when I approached ʿAlī Qulī's work. As I will explain at greater lengths throughout this study, as far as we know, he did not write extensive treatises on the kinds of canonical topics or disciplines on which the *ʿulamāʾ* have traditionally focused. Thus, it would have been problematic to say that he espoused a specific legal doctrine or even that he had a concrete position on certain legal, juristic, doctrinal, or theological questions entertained by the leading scholars of his generation. His work can be situated within a very specific genre of polemical literature and explicitly engaged a few specific Christian polemicists. In this respect, any investigation seeking to look further into his work for traces of broader legal and theological opinions would necessarily be speculative. However, would this preclude the significance of pointing out that some features of his work may intersect with features in other genres of writing (like legal manuals or *kalām*)? Shall we also refrain from noting that his works may reflect an adaptation of ideas or views of major intellectual figures of his time? I do not think so. A certain degree of speculation becomes inevitable when we are faced with references to other debates and some allusions to foundational texts and authors. By taking certain (informed) risks it is possible to advance an academic debate. Discursive developments in any field of the Islamic scholarly tradition, are legitimized on the basis of recourse to a corpus of foundational texts and scholars, as well as commentaries on such texts and new approaches to such scholars. As such, the *ʿulamāʾ* expect their readers to recognize certain references to these foundational texts and scholars without the need to mention them explicitly. I have attempted to follow as far as I can the connections and links between ʿAlī Qulī's hints, allusions, and direct

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[16] Ibid., 13.

references to illuminate some of the circumstances or implications of his work. Thus, as I had hinted at before, the notion of context which I will be using here does not refer to the merely socio-political environment in which the work in question conceived his work but rather to the broader intellectual and institutional framework surrounding his creation: that is to say, the way in which a given *ʿālim* (scholar) or a given *faqīh* (legal scholar or jurist) presents an argument, how it is informed by his academic upbringing, how he establishes a dialogue with certain texts. All these elements can become an integral part of his context in addition to the political events that took place during his life in Safavid Iran.

As I looked more closely at the text of ʿAlī Qulī, I kept in mind Skinner's warning against attempting to find coherence within the entire opera of a thinker, and in favor of understanding his work with all its contradictions.[17] I will later turn to the study of the circumstances surrounding the writing of ʿAli Qulī's text.[18] When addressing the validity of taking into account ʿAlī Qulī's intention, I was again guided by Skinner's view that an author can explicitly claim an intention, without achieving it in the text. An example of this is when an author states that he "intended" to write many volumes on a subject without being able to finish

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[17] He warns us also against a phenomenon he calls the "mythology of prolepsis" by which he understands the tendency of some historians to be "more interested […] in the retrospective significance of a given historical work or action than in its meaning for the agent himself". See Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas", 22. He believes that the risk of falling into this trap becomes even bigger for historians dealing with "alien cultures" or "unfamiliar conceptual schemes" (Skinner, 24). Furthermore, he argues that not only is there a danger of misattributing the significance of a certain work to the influence of others, but also by misrepresenting the *sense* of it. He notes another danger, namely, "that the historian may conceptualize an argument in such a way that its alien elements are dissolved into an apparent but misleading familiarity". (Skinner, 27). He refutes the idea that historians can avoid these dangers of "intellectual biographies" and "histories of ideas" merely by being aware of their potential excesses while continuing to pursue projects of a similar nature. Skinner argues that, "what is in question – even in the case where a given writer may appear to have articulated a system of doctrines with complete coherence– is the possibility, the conceptual propriety, of treating such a system as a self-sufficient object of inquiry and understanding". (Skinner, 31). Finally, he calls our attention to the frequent gaps that exist between the *occurrence* of a term and its *use* by a given agent. (Skinner, 37).

[18] Ibid., 39.

them. However, there are cases in which the explicit reference to the authorial intention could actually be useful, as when an author presents his work as a confession, a refutation, or a parody in order to guide (and manipulate) the reader's understanding of his work.[19] ʿAlī Qulī's introductions (*dībachihs*) proved to be useful in this respect. In many instances he explicitly mentions the authors of the works he is responding to. His references to certain texts and scholars and some knowledge of the context of his time can help us advance certain hypotheses – if not about his authorial intentions as such– at least about the broader *sense* of his work. It is worth reminding here that Skinner himself stresses that *explaining* the emergence of a text in its context is not the same as *understanding* all the intricacies of it.[20] Thus, my projects seeks to explain the emergence of ʿAlī Qulī 's polemical work from a historical angle, but also to understand it more profoundly as the output of a scholar trained within the Islamic Shiite textual tradition of Safavid Iran.

Theoretical considerations on conversion

As it must be clear by now, my intended approach to ʿAlī Qulī's work, given the nature of the sources and given some of the considerations mentioned above, is not a biographical or sociological one. Thus, I will not seek to explain through him the broader phenomenon of religious conversion in the late Safavid period (or in any other moment in history for that matter). However, given that –following Skinner's recommendation– I do wish to understand the circumstances surrounding his work, I cannot minimize the act of his conversion or how he presented it. Clearly, I am unable to use an empirical approach to conversion in Safavid Iran due

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[19] Ibid., 45.

[20] Ibid., 46.

to the lack of the necessary data, and thus I have also avoided a sociological analysis of mass conversion. Nonetheless, I found it useful to understand some of the theoretical issues and conclusions that sociologists of conversion have discussed in comparable case studies.

In their seminal studies on the sociology of conversion, David Snow and Richard Machalek have reached the conclusion that giving too much credence to the importance of a particular event in a convert's life might be misleading. Such events can only account for the external circumstances which a convert decides to publicize in connection to his new allegiance to a particular faith. They barely tell us anything about the extent to which the change of religious affiliation actually implies a deep change of inner conviction as opposed to a temporal social convenience. Furthermore, even in cases where there is little doubt as to the sincerity of a conversion, the degree of commitment to the new faith *after* embracing a new faith may also vary throughout time.[21] In response to the complexity of such questions, Henri Gooren has proposed a classification of factors of conversion, among which he lists situational, personality, institutional, and social factors. The major problem of course is that rarely do historians have access to enough documentary evidence to look beyond the purely external factors that lead people to conversion (be it actual coercion, missionary activities, institutional and social pressure, etc.).[22] As it should be rather obvious, the latter factors cannot help us distinguish between "sincere" conversions and "conversions of convenience". But even more importantly, the kind of sources that may allow historians to quantify massive cases of conversion can only give a purely materialistic explanation for the phenomenon.

[21] David A Snow and Richard Machalek, "The Sociology of Conversion," *Annual Review of Sociology* 10 (1984): 171-2

[22] Henri Gooren, "Towards a New Model of Religious Conversion Careers: the Impact of Social and Institutional Factors," in *Paradigms, Poetics, and Politics of Conversion,* eds. Jan N. Bremmer, Wout J. van Bekkum, and Arie L. Molendijk (Leuven; Paris; Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2006), 28.

To counteract these risks, I found Snow and Machalek's concept of *universe of discourse* useful. By this they mean a "system of common social meanings", which provide a "broad interpretative framework in terms of which people live and organize experience".[23] Thus, in the case of the Safavid period, no list of Armenian and Georgian converts could possibly provide us with insights into the universe of the converts' discourse. Only the most intimate autobiographical works or the most detailed third person reports can.

As we will see throughout this study, two of my sources offer a unique perspective on the deep transformation of their authors. The first one would be Armānī's diary, of which I will talk rather tangentially. This work is an intimate portrayal of the spiritual journey of its author, as he devoted almost as much space to the description of his internal struggles and his dreams as he did to the narration of his travels in Iran, the Ottoman Empire, and Venice. The second such source is ʿAlī Qulī's work. To be sure, and as I noted before, ʿAlī Qulī's opera has only traces of biographical data (mainly in his introduction, as I pointed out before). However, the fact that a former Catholic priest was able to write a sophisticated theological work following the rigorous conventions of traditional Islamic scholarship is in and of itself a mark of the depth of his commitment and of his internal transformation. Further, the fact that this kind of work was not mainly conceived as a spiritual confession by its author (unlike Armānī's diary), might be precisely what makes it more interesting in this regard: that is, instead of constantly reminding us of his sincerity by explicitly *saying* it, ʿAlī Qulī *shows* it through his theological insights. Thus, it might even be possible to affirm that the spiritual transformation of our author reached a stage in which he managed to transcend (at least to a certain extent) the stage of doubt which some converts may experience.

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[23] David A Snow and Richard Machalek, "The Convert as a Social Type," *Social Theory* 1 (1983): 265.

Structure of the Study

Having the above theoretical considerations in mind, I shall now briefly outline the division of my dissertation and the content of the chapters. In the first chapter, I concentrate on the social context of religious minorities (particularly non-Muslim) in Safavid Iran, especially during the late seventeenth century so as to pave the way for understanding the period in which ʿAlī Qulī lived. I also shed light on the earlier stages of the Safavid state and on broader historical changes in Iran. With respect to the question of conversion, I introduce the cases of Bābāī b. Farhād and ʿAlī Akbar Armānī mentioned earlier. Further, I complement the picture by using some European missionary material to illustrate the perception the priests had of their own mission and of the social conditions they were confronted with. I exercise methodological caution in order to identify the most useful and –to the extent to which it is possible– the most reliable historical data contained therein. I also introduce here the few biographical data that we have on ʿAlī Qulī and I provide a short overview of his intellectual production in order to situate him both within a specific sociopolitical context and within an institutional and intellectual tradition.

In the second chapter I go deeper into the framing of the intellectual context of ʿAlī Qulī's work. I trace a genealogy of the genre to which ʿAlī Qulī's main works belongs, namely that of *dalāʾil al-nubuwwah*, that is, a genre in polemical literature that seeks to identify the "signs of the prophethood" of Islam within the Christian and Jewish scriptures. In order to avoid the methodological fallacies pointed out by Skinner, I contextualize the emergence of this genre, but also the way it changed and was adapted within different periods and geographies. While I do analyze certain recurrent –read "timeless"– *topos* of the genre, I focus more specifically on

the way in which ʿAlī Qulī used them, and on how this use differed from that of his predecessors. I tie this to the personal and historical circumstances he lived through. I also illuminate the specific intellectual dialogues and theological disputes which ʿAlī Qulī's work was participating in. These dialogues and disputes have emerged in connection to the polemical commentary of Father Jerome Xavier (d. 1617), a Spanish Jesuit missionary, and his larger project of providing the Mughal court with Persian translations of the Gospels. This helped me understand the context of ʿAlī Qulī's texts and hence avoid treating them as self-sufficient entities. At the same time, this allowed me to identify discernible "authorial intentions" that add new layers to the context.

I should add here that although an in-depth and extensive study of Jerome Xavier's works (as well as that of ʿAlī Qulī's other interlocutors) could have been plausible, it would not have resolved the questions I was trying to answer. I needed to understand ʿAlī Qulī's rhetorical resources and interests within the Safavid Iranian milieu and to compare his approach and inquiries to parallel ones made by other Muslim scholars. The aim was not to search for ʿAlī Qulī's misrepresentations of the 'original' missionary texts, sacred sources, or theological works published earlier, but rather to understand ʿAlī Qulī's work on its own terms and how he adapted or changed the approach to a set of theological themes. It should be helpful in the future to study the primary work he argued against, namely, Filippo Guadagnoli's (d. 1656) *Apologia pro Christiana Religione*, which will require knowledge of Latin. But such a study is beyond the scope of the present project. Rather, what I seek to do here is to analyze how ʿAlī Qulī added an unusual dimension to the *dalāʾil al-nubuwwah* tradition by reinterpreting what it meant to say that the Bible had been tampered with. For this, I will revisit the history of the idea of *taḥrīf* or scriptural tampering, which had been used by polemicists since Late Antiquity to accuse other traditions of falsifying scriptures. However –I will argue– our author gave the term a different

connotation by directing this accusation against the Early Modern translators of the Bible rather than against the original compilers of the scriptures.

The third chapter attempts to look at the method and structure of argumentation as well as the intertextual materials of ʿAlī Qulī's major work, the *Sayf al-mū'minīn fī qitāl al-mushrikīn (The Sword of the Faithful to Fight the Idolaters)*. I will first concentrate on our author's response to Filippo Guadagnoli's attacks on Islam and on Prophet Muhammad. Most of the discussion here will focus on Guadagnoli's understanding of Muslim rituals and doctrine as continuations of early pagan practices, and on how ʿAlī Qulī refutes these claims. Intimately linked to the latter debate is the second theme of the chapter, where I explore ʿAlī Qulī's critique of Christian ritual practices such as the sacrament of communion or the use of imagery at church. We will be able to see how our author reversed the same accusation of idolatry that Guadagnoli had formulated against Islam and turned it against the Christian tradition. Finally, for the third thematic block, I analyze ʿAlī Qulī's sections on the prohibition of wine and on dietary restrictions. These segments are particularly interesting given that they allow for a broader comparison with other more systematic legal works dealing with the same issues. I am careful here not to fall for one of the fallacies Skinner has warned us against, namely that of looking for a comprehensive legal doctrine where there is none. However I do analyze ʿAlī Qulī's use of quasi-legal tools in his reading of the Bible.

The fourth chapter explores our author's position vis-à-vis Sufism. At first glance this topic might seem slightly disconnected from the rest of the study, which mainly focuses on Muslim-Christian polemics. However, a closer look shows that there is a logical connection between ʿAlī Qulī's critique of Christian doctrine and practices and his profoundly anti-Sufi sentiment. Furthermore, I argue that it is by linking them together that ʿAlī Qulī manages to

make his anti-Christian polemic more relevant to his contemporaries, who were in general more occupied with what they saw as "heterodox" Muslim groups than with the People of the Book per se, even if they also targeted the latter. To make this case, I offer an overview of the growth of anti-Sufi policies and attitudes in the Safavid period together with that of anti-Sufi treatises and literature produced roughly around ʿAlī Qulī's time.

Finally, I address another key methodological issue in this study, namely that of translation. ʿAlī Qulī's major work –as we will see in more detail throughout this dissertation– incorporated translations of biblical passages, which he in turn translated from Jerome's Xavier own scriptural translation. To add another layer, I tried to establish a general background for the reader to recognize ʿAlī's Qulī's specific contribution to the theological dialogues and disputes discussed earlier, so I translated several of his quotes myself. However, within these there are at times some renditions of biblical passages to make certain points. In the name of philological accuracy I chose to translate these biblical quotes directly from ʿAlī Qulī rather than to provide a standard translation of the Bible. As a consequence, the reader will be exposed to many varying levels of linguistic reinterpretation of the source. In order to minimize the ambiguity or the confusion that certain terms might provoke, I have provided the targeted Persian or Arabic terms in brackets wherever I considered that clarification was most needed. However, as is well known among literary aficionados, the translator is also the betrayer of the text (*traduttore, traditore*), and the act of translating is itself a hermeneutical activity. Thus, the reader will find that as much as this study aspires to follow a rigorous –albeit eclectic– methodology, the very nature of my sources forced me to deal with issues of interpretation at all times. This need not be seen as an impediment to historiographical insight and might indeed be a strength, but the reader must be aware of these theoretical considerations.

Chapter 1
A Convert in Late Safavid Iran: ʿAlī Qulī Jadīd al-Islām

In 1695 the Bishop of Isfahan Louis Marie Pidou de Saint Olon (d. 1717) sent a letter to

his superiors in Rome expressing great concern about the latest developments in Iran. News had

circulated regarding the apostasy and conversion to Islam of a former Portuguese Augustinian

missionary by the name of Padre António de Jesus (d. 18th cent.).[1] This was not the first time a

member of the Catholic clergy in Iran had become Muslim. Already in 1691, Padre Manuel de

Santa Maria (d. 17th or 18th cent.) had done so, adopting the name of Hasan Qulī Beg.[2] However,

the case of Padre António –known after his conversion as ʿAlī Qulī Jadīd al-Islām (d. circa

1722)– was deemed more scandalous than the rest due to an aggravating circumstance, which

Pidou described thus:

« *mais ce que je trouve encore de particulier de plus fâcheuse en cellecy, c'est qu'ayant se fait docteur de l'Alcoran, on dit qu'il compose un livre contre la religion chrétienne.*»[3]
[But what I find most pitiful in this respect is that, having made himself a doctor of the Qur'an, it is been said that he is writing a book against the Christian Religion].

So not only had Padre António converted, but he was also ready to provide the Shiite

hierocracy –to be understood as vested in those high-ranking *ʿulamāʾ* with *de facto* political

influence– and its constituencies within the Safavid state with an enviable tool against the very

same missionary activity he had originally been sent to undertake.

What were the circumstances that led to this inversion of ʿAlī Qulī's propagandistic

enterprise? How much can we attempt to know about ʿAlī Qulī or other converts in this period?

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[1] Archivio Storico di Propaganda Fide: *Fondo di Persia, Messopotamia e i Caldei*, Vol 2 ff 219; another version of the letter is cited in Francis Richard, "Un augustin portugais renégat apologiste e de l'Islam chiite au début du XVIIIe siècle, » *Moyen Orient et Océan Indien* 1 (1984): 74.

[2] Propaganda Fide, vol. 2, ff 16, 19-20.

[3] Propaganda Fide, vol 2 ff 219; Richard, 74.

As historians we tend to be unsatisfied with explanations that invoke purely spiritual convictions for these kinds of decisions. We want to situate historical characters in their contexts, and see them as reacting to their circumstances; and by so doing, we often bring forward interpretations that subordinate individual agency to pure sociological frameworks. But can the documentation available in this case allow us to entertain deep social and intellectual questions? Before addressing these issues it is useful to provide a historical overview of the milieu in which ʿAlī Qulī lived.

1.   Christians, Religious Minorities, and the Safavid State in the Seventeenth Century

Throughout most of the Safavid period (1501-1722) Iranian policy towards Christians was by and large cordial and described by some Christian missionaries as benevolent. Christian groups such as European missionaries and Armenian merchants were favored (or at least tolerated), as they came to play key roles in Iranian political, economic, and diplomatic strategies. While cases of persecution against non-Muslims did occur during this period, Christians tended to fare better than other groups overall. Also, as roger Savory correctly points out, and as we will be able to see, Christians of European origin in particular could always count on a certain level of political leverage through their diplomatic connections with European powers, which were not available to indigenous religious minorities.[4]

During the tenure of Shah ʿAbbās I (r. 996-1038/1587-1629) there were some instances of forced conversion of Jews, which took place under specific circumstances. For instance, from roughly 1615 to 1620 a group of about 8,000 Jews from the Caucasus were granted protection

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[4] Roger Savory, "Relations between the Safavid State and its Non-Muslim Minorities 1," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 14, no.4 (2003): 444.

and were relocated to Mazandaran province. Vera Moreen mentions a Judeo-Persian source in which the Shah is praised for these favors and for the creation of the town of Farahabad in Mazandaran, where the Jews would eventually settle.[5] Later on, having become strategic commercial allies of the Shah and working in the silk industry, Jews in Iran fared much better than the Jews living in the Caucasus under Christian rule.[6]

However, not all went well for them. Vera Moreen and Mehrdad Amanat both have identified some cases in which a Jewish apostate (who had converted to Islam out of choice) sought the Shah's intervention to take revenge against his former community.[7] In one of them, an individual by the name of Abū'l-Ḥasan Lārī (d. 1029-30/1620), obtained religious opinions (*fatwas*) from various *'ulamā'* in favor of enforcing stricter dressing codes on the Jews from various cities. This was relatively easy, as it was indeed a common policy to prescribe special dressing regulations on *dhimmīs,* the latter being the people of the book, who were protected but who had to observe certain restrictions and pay at times additional taxes. In revenge, a community leader of the Farahabad Jews by the name of Eleazar incited group of Jews to murder Lārī.[8] Not long after this, a forced conversion campaign ensued. Amanat suggests that Eleazar might have thought that the fact that the community had until that point enjoyed a privileged status would guarantee its protection. However, the Shah might have acted harshly against them only to appease any potential jealousy from other influential groups, such as the Turcoman

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[5] Vera B. Moreen, "The Status of Religious Minorities in Safavid Iran 1617-61," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 40, no. 2 (April, 1981): 124.

[6] Mehrdad Amanat, *Jewish Identities in Iran: Resistance and Conversion to Islam and the Baha'i Faith* (New York & London: I.B. Tauris, 2011); Matthee, Rudi, "Merchants in Safavid Iran: Participants and Perceptions," *Journal of Early Modern History* 3-4 (1999-2000): 233-68.

[7] Moreen, "The Status of Religious Minorities," 124; Amanat, Jewish *Identities*, 40.

[8] Amanat, *Jewish Identities,* 40.

Qizilbāsh tribes. Further, Amanat also notes that this measure was not definite and that later under Shah Safī (r. 1038-1052/1629-1642), the community reconverted to Judaism.[9]

Also around 1620, another wave of persecutions against Jews took place in Isfahan. In this case a Jewish leader converted to Islam after being accused by his peers of mismanaging communal funds. He then accused the community of engaging in black magic against the Shah, who upon hearing this ordered that all Jewish books dealing with magic be seized and destroyed. Then, according to another Jewish source, the *Book of Forced-conversions* (*Kitāb-i Anūsī*), the Shaykh al-Islām of Isfahan, the famous Bahā' al-Dīn al-ʿĀmilī (d. 1030/1621), sought to dissuade the Shah from taking further actions against them and to target the Zoroastrians instead. But Bahā'ī's efforts were unsuccessful and as many as seventy five Jews were then scared into converting after others were thrown as carnage to feed wild hounds.[10] In any case, what these examples show is that political motivations at a local level played a much bigger role in these campaigns than a systematic policy of religious zealotry from the regime.

Later, under Shah ʻAbbās II (r. 1052-1077/1642-1666), Jews, Banyans (Hindu merchants), Zoroastrians, and –in this case too– Christians came under increased religious restriction and suppression. At the beginning of his reign this Shah showed signs of tolerance towards other religions, earning for this the praise of the famous chronicler Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (d. 1689), who in 1644 described him as a "courageous and generous (*vaillant et généreux*) prince" who "loved foreigners" and who "took pleasure and was at ease seeing the

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[9] Ibid., 40-2.

[10] Ibid.; see also Vera B. Moreen, *Iran's Jewry's Hour of Peril and Heroism: A Study of Babai ibn Lutf's Chronicle, 1617-1662* (New York: American Academy of Jewish Research, 1987), 90-2.

works that [people] brought to him from Europe, specially the French".[11] However, things began to change in the mid-1650s, when many cases of conversion –especially from the Jewish community– started to occur in places like Isfahan, Kashan, and Hamadan, mainly through the means of financial incentives.[12] The Grand Vizier of the time, Muḥammad Beg (d. 17th C), is credited with having been at the forefront of many repressive policies. According to Moreen, he offered these communities only the options of conversion, exile to troubled regions of the country, or martyrdom.[13] This seems to be confirmed by Ezra Spicehandler, who cites another Judeo-Persian source in which the "Prime Minister" (the *I'timād al-dawlah*) declares his intention to expel the Jews from Isfahan and to relocate them to the Zoroastrian quarter of Gabrabad, only to then incite the Zoroastrians against them.[14] Yet, not everyone in the administration among the *'ulamā'* approved of this: both the *ṣadr* of the time and the famous theologian Muḥsin Fayḍ-i Kāshānī (d. 1090-1/ 1680-1) opposed conversions and persecutions as being contrary to the precepts of the *shari'ah*.[15]

Rudi Matthee suggests that campaigns attempting to convert or repress non-Muslim (or even non-Shiite) communities started when Khalīfah Sulṭān (d. 17th C) served as Grand Vizier, also under ʿAbbās II. To prove himself as a God-fearing and law-abiding functionary, the latter

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[11] Jean Baptiste Tavernier, *Les six voyages de Jean Baptiste Tavernier: Ecuyer, Baron d'Aubonne, qu'il a fait en Turquie, en Perse et aux Indes* (Paris, 1677), 522; also referenced in Amanat, *Jewish Identities*, 42 ; and in Ezra Spicehandler, "The Persecution of the Jews of Isfahan under Shah 'Abbās II (162-1666)," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 46 (1975): 337.

[12] Amanat, *Jewish Identities*, 42.

[13] Vera B. Moreen. "The Problems of Conversion among Iranian Jews in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries". *Iranian Studies*, vol. 19, no. ¾ (summer-autumn, 1986): 217.

[14] Spicehandler, "The Persecution of the Jews in Isfahan," 334.

[15] Amanat, *Jewish Identities*, 43.

targeted practices proscribed by the *shariʿah*, such as wine-drinking, and directed campaigns

against coffeehouses, brothels, and taverns.[16] Even though it was the *ʿulamā's* role, working

partly autonomously, to ensure the preservation of Shiite doctrinal and ritual customs, the

sovereigns came under sharp criticism whenever members of the royal household indulged in

acts that contravened the *sharīʿah*. Thus, the monarchs' demand for a strict application of

religious and moral rules may have been linked at times with their persecution of non-Muslims.

This provided legitimacy to the Safavid viziers and administrators as well. Yet, in moments

when such legitimacy could be taken for granted these rules became apparently more lax and

were only reinforced from time to time. Also, by its very nature as a pre-modern entity[17], the

Safavid state's ability to fully implement and police such laws was limited. Let it suffice as a

proof that throughout this period prostitution needed to be banned repeatedly, which indicates

that it was never truly eradicated and oftentimes seemingly tolerated.[18]

But let us now look closer to the situation of Christian groups. Despite what the

abovementioned examples might lead us to think, during this first half of the seventeenth century

Armenian Christians became in fact a relatively privileged group. In 1604-1605 Armenian

merchant communities were massively relocated from the town of Julfa close to the Aras River

in the Caucasus to what became the district of New Julfa in Isfahan after one of many Safavid-

Ottoman wars. Much debate has surrounded the question of whether this was indeed a forced

migration deliberately planned by Shah ʿAbbās I. Edmund Herzig, relying on Armenian sources,

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[16] Rudi Matthee. "The Career of Mohammad Beg, Grand Vizier of Shah 'Abbas II (r. 1642-1666)," *Iranian Studies* 24, No. ¼ (1991): 27.

[17] Immanuel Wallerstein. *World-Systems Analysis: an Introduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 53.

[18] Rudi Matthee. *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Drugs and Stimulants in Iranian History, 1500-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 26, 74, 92.

argues that this was rather an accident of history, as the Iranian army had to resort to scorched-earth policy in the Armenian homeland in order to cut provisions for the advancing Ottoman forces.[19] This view of the events coincides with the report of the Augustinian missionary Belchior dos Anjos (d. 17th C), who speaks of an orderly yet expedite retreat followed by the burning of all crops. According to another Augustinian, António de Gouvea (d. 1628), they were given a two-day notice to leave their lands and were given camels and pack animals by the Shah to ease their journey.[20]

Whatever the case might have been, the fact is that, once settled in New Julfa, Armenians were protected and became the cornerstone of the Iranian silk trade with both Europe and the Ottoman Empire.[21] As Christians, they were considered neutral during Ottoman-Safavid conflicts, which so often acquired sectarian (Sunni-Shiite) overtones. They had access to trading routes that average Shiite Iranians did not. For instance, back in 1514, following the Battle of Chaldiran when the troops of Selim I (r. 918-926/1512-1520) had put an end to Shah Ismāʿīl's (r. 907-930/1501-1524) westward expansion, the Ottomans boycotted Safavid trade. However, Armenians were exempted from this measure.[22] Having these precedents in mind, Shah ʿAbbās knew that he could use Armenians for his advantage and thus treated them as strategic allies.

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[19] For a detailed discussion of the matter, see Edmund Herzig, "The Deportation of the Armenians in 1604-1605 and Europe's Myth of Shah 'Abbas I," in *Pembroke Papers 1*, edited by Charles Melville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 64.

[20] Flannery, *The Mission of the Portuguese Augustinians*, 123-5.

[21] See Rudi Matthee. *The Politics of Trade in Safavid Iran: Silk for Silver, 1600-1730* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP, 1999), 87; Aslanian, Sebouh. *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: the Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

[22] Matthee, *The Politics of Trade*, 22.

This did not mean however that there were no cases in which Armenian Christians were pressured into conversion. For instance, Roger Savory has identified a passage from Iskandar Beg Munshī's famous chronicle *Tārīkh-i 'Ālam-ārā-yi 'Abbāsī* (*The World-Adorning History of Shah 'Abbās*) from the year 1030/ 1621-2, in which a group of Armenians living in the frontier region of Faridun in Gilan province were encouraged to embrace Islam. Interestingly enough the chronicler sees this as a means by the Shah to protect them from attacks from the Bakhtiari and Luri tribesmen at a moment where the central government could not guarantee their safety if they remained *dhimmīs*. Savory observes that Armenians did not necessarily shared Munshī's opinion regarding the Shah's motivations and spoke instead of a deep hatred towards them from the Shah and of the hostile influence of Bahā' al-Dīn al-ʿĀmilī. However, Savory rejects this latter thesis based on the overall contextual evidence of the time and on other policies championed by Shaykh Bahā'ī.[23] In any case, what is clear is that the Shah soon realized that pursuing these forced conversions of the Armenians would have been suicidal for the Iranian economy and gave up on them.[24]

In contrast, the situation of Georgians was rather troublesome from the offset. Since the early sixteenth century, the Safavid shahs had raided and plundered the Georgian kingdoms of Kartli and Kakhet'i. However, by this time, King Teimuraz I of Kakhet'i (d. 1663) made many attempts to keep Iranian invaders away. The Safavid-Ottoman war brought a truce between Iran and the Caucasian Kingdom. Hoping to alleviate hostilities, Teimuraz went as far as to send his sons and his mother, Queen Ketevan (d. 1624), to the court of Shah ʿAbbās, where they were held captive. Following the reestablishment of peace with the Ottomans, the Queen was martyred

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[23] Savory, "Relations between the Safavid State and its Non-Muslim Minorities 1," 447.

[24] Amanat, Jewish Identities, 41-2; Matthee, *The Politics of Trade,* 83.

and the Shah reinitiated his campaigns against Georgia. The hitherto independent Bagrationi

Dynasty (575-1810) was then forced to accept puppet-governments appointed by the Shah,

effectively making Georgia an Iranian suzerainty.[25] Through these raids and political

interventions, many Georgians were brought into Iran to serve as mercenaries and royal slaves.

They formed, together with some Armenians and Circassians, the *ghulām* corps (royal military

slaves). This became the Safavid equivalent of the old *mamlūk* soldiery of early Turkic dynasties

and of the Ottoman *devşirme* system.[26]

This practice of recruiting Caucasian boys to serve at the court had been in place in Iran

since at least the reign of Shah Tahmāsp (r. 1524-1576), who in the year 961/ 1554 apprehended

as many as 30, 000 people (chiefly among them Georgians) from the Caucasus and sent them to

Iran. This number would only continue to increase during Shah ʿAbbās I's tenure, who in

1025/1616 captured close to 200, 000.[27] Up to the ascension of Shah ʿAbbās I to the throne,

Safavid politics had been dominated by strife between the Turcoman Qizilbāsh tribes, which had

helped the Safavid order come to power at the beginning of the sixteenth century. But by

appointing *ghulāms* to positions of power, the Shah sought to assure that the latter would be

loyal to him alone, thus neutralizing the political influence of the Qizilbāsh.[28] As a result of these

administrative and political issues, many Georgians converted to Islam and became trusted

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[25] A good resume of Safavid-Georgian military and political relations can be found in Carlos Alonso, *Misioneros Agustinos en Georgia (Siglo XVII),* Estudios de Historia Agustiniana1 (Valladolid: Ed. Studio Agustiniano, 1978), 13-26.

[26] Sussan Babaie, Kathryn Babayan et al. *Slaves of the Shah: new elites of Safavid Iran* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2004).

[27] *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. "Georgia vii. Georgians in the Safavid Administration," by Rudi Matthee, accessed July 22, 2014, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/georgia-vii-.

[28] Kathryn Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs: cultural landscapes of early modern Iran* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002).

ghulāms. By the time of ʿAbbās II, twenty-one out of the ninety two most powerful positions were held by *ghulāms* as well as twenty three out of thirty seven appointed *amīrs*.[29]

The sincerity of their conversions (as of that of any other forced converts for that matter) can of course be questioned. Giorgio Rota has brought forward evidence that many of them remained secretly attached to their original faith.[30] Further, Babak Rezvani suggests that while the Georgians who became part of the elite (be it as *ghulāms* or as concubines of the Shah) were Islamized, this was not the case with the popular classes, who had less incentive to do so and many of which might have just become assimilated into the Armenian community.[31] Be that as it may, what is clear is that the situation of the Georgian *ghulāms* was different enough from that of the Armenians to merit being studied apart.

Towards the second half of the seventeenth century –that is, during the reigns of Shah Sulaymān (r. 1077-1105/1666-1694) and Shah Sulṭān Ḥusayn (r. 1105-1135/1694-1722)– began what many scholars have seen as the period of Safavid decline. Earlier scholars blamed this on the fact that, having spent most of their formative years secluded in the harem, the latter shahs failed to develop strong statecraft skills and lost control of political affairs.[32] This undoubtedly played a role, but as more recent studies have shown, there were other factors as well: Iran's

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[29] *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. "Georgia vii. Georgians in the Safavid Administration".

[30] Giorgio Rota. "The Death of Tahmāspqoli Xān Qājār According to a Contemporary Ragusan Source (How to become a Renegade, 2)," in *Iran und iranisch geprägte Kulturen*, ed. Markus Ritter, Ralph Kauz, and Birgitt Hoffmann, Studien zum 65 Geburtstag von Bert G. Fragner, directed by Dr. Ludwig Reichert, Beiträge zur Iranistik, Band 27 (Verlag: Wiesbaden 2008), 54-63; see also the example from the Chronicle of Carmelite, which I will cite later.

[31] Babak Rezvani, "The Islamization and Ethnogenesis of the Fereydani Georgians," *Nationalities Papers* 36, no.4 (2008): 600-2.

[32] Hans R. Roemer, "The Safavid Period," in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, eds. Peter Jackson and Lawrence Lokhart (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 6: 311-3.

coinage underwent a process of debasement, its military resources were drained, frontier wars became widespread, and harsh natural disasters became more frequent.[33] For our purposes however, what matters is that this period is often seen as one of increased hardship for non-Shiite (let alone non-Muslim) groups. Many scholars have attributed this trend to the growing influence of certain ʿulamā', chiefly among them Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī (d. 1111/1699). The latter is credited with the forced conversion of Armenians, the destruction of Hindu temples, the deportation of Banyan merchants to India, as well as with favoring oppressive measures against Jews, and even against Sufis and Sunni Muslims.[34] However, Matthee considers that it was Shah Sulaymān's chief musketeer Būdāq Sulṭān and his Grand Vizier Shaykh ʿAlī Khān Zanganah (d. 1101/ 1691) who bore most of the responsibility for these policies.[35] Scholars who single out Majlisī for these measures tend to rely on European sources or on some of Majlisī's own polemical writings.[36] Whether it is indeed possible to establish a causative link between polemical writings and actual hostilities on the ground is something that could and should be problematized in studies of intellectual history. But for now, it suffices to note that this has been one of the dominant narratives in Western scholarship dealing with Safavid historiography.

In the middle of these socio-economic shifts and cultural debates, stories of conversion continued to be documented. In 1671 an Armenian Bishop in Julfa embraced Islam. A year later Armenians were banned from the Muslim quarters of Isfahan and many prominent members of

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[33] Rudi Matthee, *Persia in Crisis: Safavid Decline and the Fall of Isfahan* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 244-50.

[34] Ibid., 192-3.

[35] Ibid.

[36] See for example Colin Turner, *Islam without Allah?: the rise of religious externalism in Safavid Iran* (Richmond; Surrey, Curzon: 2000).

the Julfan community were allegedly forced into conversion.[37] In the 1690s there were some

fiscal pressures against *dhimmīs*, but Armenian Christians were only mildly affected by it.

However, at the turn of the eighteenth century Shah Sulṭān Ḥusayn withdrew all royal patronage

from them and gave court eunuchs jurisdiction over their affairs.[38] Yet, these economic and

institutional policies affected other groups more, chiefly among them Sunnis –such as Afghans

and Baluchis– whose revolts eventually brought the Safavid Empire to its end.[39]

The aforementioned pressures notwithstanding, mass conversions of Armenian Christians

were rare. Many of them had more to lose than to gain from changing their faith. This was partly

because the Armenian merchant network of Julfa relied heavily on the principle of communal

trust. Julfans were more likely to collaborate with each other than with Armenians from other

regions. Evidently, the bonds created by such merchant networks were reinforced by their

belonging to the Armenian Orthodox Church. Sebouh Aslanian describes their situation thus:

"Most Julfan merchants had ongoing relations with the Church, not only as faithful and pious

members of a flock, but also as generous benefactors, relating and connecting members of the

network to each other".[40] Therefore, leaving the Christian faith could put a merchant at a

significant disadvantage in terms of trade connections.

An interesting source from this period sheds some light on this context. A document

known to us as the *Iʿtirāfnāmah* (*Confession Book*) narrates the story of ʿAlī Akbar Armānī (d.

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[37] Matthee, *Persia in Crisis*, 193.

[38] Matthee, *The Politics of Trade*, 205-6.

[39] The most detailed account of the Safavid state's struggles against the Afghans and the Baluchis is probably found in Muḥammad Mū'min Kirmānī, *Ṣaḥifat al-irshād* (Tehran: ʿIlm, 2005).

[40] Sebouh Aslanian, "Social Capitals, Trust, and the Role of Networks in Julfan Trade: Informal and Semi-formal Institutions at Work," *Journal of Global History* 1, no. 03 (Nov. 2006): 392.

17 or 18th C), an Armenian merchant who converted to Islam in the 1690s. Armānī says that, after having lost his faith in Christianity and after being persuaded by the *kalāntar*[41] of ʿAbbāsābād that even the Bible proved the veracity of Islam, he started having prophetic visions and dreams that led him to convert.[42] But this came at a price. During a trade trip to Venice, his relatives denied him lodging upon learning about his conversion. Furthermore, he was arrested in retaliation for the alleged abuse of Christians in Iran, a retaliation evoked by rumors circulating in Venice.[43] After being released from prison thanks to his brother's intercession, he fled to Istanbul. But before deciding whether to self-identify as a Shiite or as a Sunni, he arose suspicion among the janissaries for potentially being a *rāfiḍī* –that is, a recusant who rejected the legitimacy of the first three caliphs, hence, a Shiite– Iranian.[44] Eventually, he did become a Shiite and returned to Iran, where he embarked on different pilgrimages to Mashhad and Tabriz. I will refer to other relevant passages of this work in further sections. But for now this should suffice to show how, while we could be compelled to think that Armenian Christians (or members of other non-Muslim groups for that matter) had much to win by converting to Islam, the reality was much more complicated. Armenian Christian communities held enough political bargaining power and economic resources for safety and welfare to prevent massive defections from their ranks.

The case of other groups, which did not possess such extensive networks beyond Iranian borders, appears more ambiguous. For instance, the *Tazkirah-yi Safavī-yi Kirmān* narrates a story

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[41] A local official (mayor) or law enforcer. See *Encyclopedia Iranica*, s.v. "Kalāntar," by Willem Floor, accessed July 22, 2014, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/kalantar-term.

[42] Armānī, "Iʿtirāfnāmah," 60-1.

[43] Ibid., 66-8.

[44] Ibid., 85.

from 1673 where the son of Khvājah Sharīf, an influential functionary of the Divan, lured a young Zoroastrian woman into conversion in order to consummate a temporary marriage (*mutʿah*).[45] After her parents complained to the *kalāntar* of Kerman, the latter reprimanded Khvājah Sharīf, who in turn plotted with the Vizier –a sworn enemy of the *kalāntar*– to orchestrate a self-robbery of the Divan and to blame it on the Zoroastrian community. The Vizier, who owed favors to Rustam-i Majūs, a former Zoroastrian who served as a collector of the *jizyah* (poll tax paid by non-Muslims), entrusted the latter with the operation under the pretense that the he could collect the booty of the operation as payment.[46] However, since Rustam-i Majūs already had a history of trying to extort the Zoroastrian community, a group of them anticipated the plot and had him lynched beforehand. The *kalāntar* then tried to intervene on Rustam's behalf, but the community warned him that this was an internal issue, which had to be solved by them alone. Eventually, the Vizier heard the news and wanted a restitution to be given to Rustam's heirs, but the *kalāntar* then took sides with the Zoroastrian commoners, a mistake which eventually led to his own political assassination at the hands of the Vizier's allies.[47]

What the above account seems to indicate is that relations between non-Muslim (or non-Shiite) communities and the Shiite Muslim majority were complex, shifting and multifaceted. On the one hand, there seems to have been a certain degree of adherence to social and legal rules. After all, the sources point towards conducts and expectations based on communal belonging: non-Muslims had to pay *jizyah*, and there was a perceived need (whether or not based on actual legal arguments) for Zoroastrian women to convert before having *mutʿah* with Muslim men.

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[45] Mīr Muḥammad Saʿīd Mashīzī, *Tazkirah-yi Safavī-yi Kirmān* (Tehran: Nashr-i ʿIlm, 1369 [1990]), 575-6.

[46] Ibid., 577.

[47] Ibid., 578-80.

However, there also seems to have been a certain degree of fluidity in such relations: communal boundaries and legal norms were transgressed from time to time by political maneuvers and by alliances with "the others", as is shown by the Vizier's alliance with Rustam-i Majūs and by the *kalāntar's* backing of the Zoroastrians.

However, other cases do seem suggest that conversion brought many advantages for non-Muslims and in several cases it was the only option, especially among Georgians. The best known-cases were those of powerful *ghulāms* like Gurgin Khan (d. 1121/1709) and his brother Levan (d. 1121/1709)[48], who held important military posts and led the campaigns against Afghan and Baluchi rebels.[49] The *Chronicle of Carmelites* mentions a letter to the Pope from "Leon, Supreme Judge of Persia and King of Georgia" who had publicly renounced Christianity under great pressure after being held hostage in Persia in connection to his brother "the king and feudatory of the shah". In his letter he asks the Pope to recognize him as a Catholic "in secret".[50] This seems to be an allusion to Levan. According to this source, Leon's brother, Georgios (that is, Gurjī or Gurgin), commander of the Georgian force, was being prepared to receive the sacraments by the Carmelite Basil of Saint Charles (d. 1711), before both brothers and the missionary were killed in Kandahar under Afghan siege.[51] That some Georgians might have indeed faced persecution if they rejected conversion to Islam –as this source suggest– is quite plausible. Yet, the source also seems to suggest that the Missionary was able to have close

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[48] The date of 1709 are given by Matthee in his entry on Gorgin Khan for the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (see next footnote), yet the *Chronicle of Carmelites* mentions him being alive as late as 1711 (see footnotes 50 and 511)

[49] *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. "Gorgin Khan," by Rudi Matthee, accessed July 22, 2014, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/gorgin-khan.

[50] Anonymous, ed. *A Chronicle of Carmelites*, vol. 2 (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1939), 812-3.

[51] Ibid., 813.

contact with these mercenaries even as they continued to hold higher posts in the military. This again seems to imply that the extent of rigidity in religious policy depended on the political conditions at any given moment. For instance, the *ghulāms* were reprimanded at times for behaviors that contravened the *sharīʿah*. The chronicler Muḥammad Shafīʿ Tihrānī mentions a passage in which a group of *ghulām*s were chastised for drinking wine, eating pork, and indulging in "other depravities proper of drunkards" (*dīgar-i fisq va fujūr kih lāzimah-yi mastān ast*) inside the mosque.[52] Aside from that, we need to take into account that the testimony from the *Chronicle of Carmelites* might reveal more about the intra-Christian conflict of interest between Orthodox Armenian and Georgians and the Catholics, than about actual Safavid policy, but we will come back to this point in the next section of this chapter.

Once again, the strongest testimonies of religious pressure against non-Muslims in these final stages of Safavid rule come from the Jewish community. An important source for this is the *Kitāb-i sar guzasht-i Kāshān* of Bābāī b. Farhād (d. 18th cent.), which offers an account of the fate of Kashan's Jewry at the wake of the Afghan invasions. According to this work, a group of Muslims noticed that some Jews were inadvertently feasting during the twenty-first of Ramadan, which happened to be *Laylat al-qadr* that year. Interpreting this as an act of subversion, the Muslims managed to have one of the Jews executed. Allegedly, Shah Sulṭān Ḥusayn intended to execute more of them, but one of his advisors at the Divan suggested levying a heavy fine on the community instead. Thus, on the night of the Sabbath, the royal musketeers (*qurchīs*) gathered a group of Christian and Zoroastrian mercenaries and ordered them to break into the Synagogue

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[52] Muhammad Shafīʿ Tihrānī. *Mirʾāt-i vāridāt: tārīkh-i suqūṭ-i Safaviyān. Payāmadhā-yi ān va farmānravā'i-yi Malik Maḥmūd Sīstānī*, introduction and commentary of Doctor Mansur Sefatgol (Tehran: Mīrāth-i maktūb, 2004), 109.

while the Jews were praying. They dragged them into the plaza and threatened to burn the entire community unless they accepted to pay the fine.[53]

Thus, it is fairly clear that Christians and Zoroastrians fared better than Jews; but more importantly, it seems that such cases of repression depended more on highly localized circumstances, rather than on a systematic policy motivated by purely religious factors. Nonetheless, the accounts do identify a particular act as religiously offensive to the Muslim majority (such as feasting during Ramadan). Should we see this only as a pretext from the state to extract money from the Jewish community or is the picture more complicated? After all, the account does suggest that the initial intention of the monarch was to punish the entire community, even if only to reinforce his credentials as a pious leader. The economic fine as a solution only became an option after his advisors brought it forward.

Thus, it seems that cases like this or the other examples of religious suppression highlighted above, have diverse dimensions. They served at times as symbolic public acts of "piety" by the sovereigns and Viziers in order to legitimize their power as protectors of the faith. They also seem driven by struggles between various interest groups at the court. The bargaining power and privilege of a particular non-Muslim community helped it draw critical alliances with various political players. However, such protection was lost in times of political deterioration, when scapegoating became a powerful political tool.

Finally, and in contrast with the above scenes of hardship, there were also peaceful (albethey heated) intellectual exchanges and debates between religious communities, even during the troubled final years of the Empire. I will delve into more detail about polemics in the second and third chapters, but for now let the following example suffice. In his *Safarnāmah*

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[53] Moreen, *Iranian Jewry during the Afghan Invasion: the Kitāb-i sar Guzasht-i Kāshān of Bābāī b. Farhād*, 30.

(*Travelogue*), Shaykh Ḥazīn-i Lāhījī (d. 1180/1766) noted how in one of his trips to Isfahan he was given lodging by a rabbi, with whom he studied the Torah. He also studied the Gospels with Khalīfah Avānūs, a highly ranked Armenian orthodox priest who was well versed in Persian and Arabic.[54] Avānūs appears as well in the *Iʿtirāfnāmah* of Armānī, trying to reconvert the Armenian merchant back into Christianity. According to Armānī, this exchange resulted in a battle of curses that led to the priest's illness and sudden death.[55] It is not clear from these two references whether Khalīfah Avānūs only engaged in missionary or polemical activities with apostate Christians like Armānī, while renouncing all conversion attempts with Muslims, such as Shaykh Hazīn; or whether he always had a propagandistic agenda. Further, as far as we know, Shaykh Hazīn did not attempt to convert the priest or the rabbi, which could have been much easier in an Iranian context. As I will show in the following sections, an atmosphere of intellectual, inter-communal, and –to a great degree– diplomatic exchanges between Christians and Muslims was more likely to account for Padre António's conversion to Shīʿī Islam.

Further, for Muslim scholars the missionaries represented a very different kind of challenge than Jews, Zoroastrians, or even Orthodox Armenians ever did. As Reza Pourjavady and Sabine Schmidtke suggest for instance, Jews did not pose the same kind of intellectual challenge for the *ʿulamā'* that Catholic priests did.[56] This is mainly because of a rich history of theological polemic exchange between them that can be trace back at least a century before ʿAlī Qulī's time. I will elaborate on this in the next chapter.

[54] Shaykh Muḥammad ʿAlī Hazīn-i Lāhījī. *Tārīkh va Safarnāmah-yi Hazīn*, ed. ʿAlī Davānī (Tehran: Markaz-i Asnād-i Inqilāb-i Islāmī, 1375 [1996 or 1997]), 171-2.

[55] Armānī, "Iʿtirāfnāmah," 132.

[56] Reza Pourjavady and Sabine Schmidtke, "Muslim Polemics against Judaism and Christianity in 18th Century Iran. The literary sources of Āqā Muḥammad ʿAlī Bihbahānī's (1144/1732-1216/1801) *Radd-i shubahāt-i al-kuffār*," *Studia Iranica* 35 (2006): 71.

A theoretical note is now pertinent. David Snow and Richard Machalek have warned us in their studies on the sociology of conversion that it is important to distinguish between superficial (read façade) shifts in someone's religious loyalties and deep changes in doctrinal conviction. This is because the degree of individual commitment to a given faith or the level of participation within a religious organization can vary not only from case to case, but also throughout different periods of the life of each convert.[57] Snow and Machalek have also warned us against giving too much credence to the importance of a particular event to explain a case of conversion. Doing so would be myopic given that such events usually correspond only to the moments in which the convert publicizes his/her change of allegiance and often take place in situations where the convert feels considerable pressure to prove himself before his new coreligionists.[58]

In the cases we have seen so far it is obvious that Armānī and ʿAlī Qulī's conversions are radically different from those of the Zoroastrian woman, the *ghulāms*, or the Jews of Kashan. The former two offer testimonies of the deep processes of reflection they underwent, which suggests that their conversions were indeed "sincere". The latter three cases were merely results of social pressure in which the change of religious affiliation in public was more likely to be superficial. It might be true of course that many converts with trajectories similar to the latter's did end up embracing their new faith wholeheartedly, but in the cases we are concerned with we do not count on any information regarding their long-term commitment to Islam. Furthermore, Armānī and ʿAlī Qulī's texts show signs of a radical change in what Snow and Machalek have called the *universe of discourse*, defined as the "system of common social meanings" which

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[57] Snow and Machalek, "The Sociology of Conversion," 171.

[58] Ibid., 171-2.

provides a "broad interpretative framework in terms of which people live and organize experience".[59] Only the most intimate kind of testimonies can offer a window into this universe and work as a mirror of their author's deep individual transformations. Luckily, these two sources are among the few that do.

2.   Missionaries in Safavid Iran

By the time when Padre António was sent to proselytize, which roughly corresponds to the reign of Shah Sulṭān Husayn, most Catholic missionaries had already abandoned any hopes of converting the Shah or any substantial portion of the Muslim population. At the very beginning of the Safavid period, European strategists had misread the advent of Shah Ismāʿīl as that of a redeeming figure who would convert Iran into Christianity.[60] They saw in this a particularly attractive opportunity for establishing an anti-Ottoman axis. This would not have been the first alliance of its kind, since already in the fifteenth century the Venetians had cooperated with the Aq Quyūnlū (White Sheep Turk) Confederation (1378-1508) against Mehmed II (r. 848-850/ 1444-1446 and 855-886/1451-1481).[61] This is not to say, however, that European powers were only interested in geostrategic alliances with Iran and did not entertain actual colonialist ambitions at any point.

Padre António's people, the Portuguese, were among the first Europeans to venture into Iran and the Persian Gulf during the Safavid period. Afonso de Albuquerque (d. 1515) invaded

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[59] Snow and Machalek, "The Convert as a Social Type," 265.

[60] Rudi Matthee. "The Politics of Protection: Iberian Missionaries in Iran under Shah ʿAbbās (r. 1587-1629)," in *Contacts and Controversies between Muslims, Jews and Christians in the Ottoman Empire and Pre-Modern Iran*, ed. Camilla Adang Sabine Schmidtke, Istanbuler Texte und Studien 21 (Istanbul: Orient-Institut Istanbul; Wurzburg, 2010), 249.

[61] Roemer, "The Safavid Period," 377.

the island of Hormuz in 1507 and consolidated his rule in it in 1515.[62] The capture of Bahrain

followed suit in 1521. From the beginning of the Portuguese seaborne enterprise in Asia, Vasco

da Gama (d. 1524) had made it his mission to explore the edges of the world in search for

"Christians and spices".[63] However, having realized that indigenous Asian Christians were

nowhere to be found, the Portuguese rapidly started to prioritize spices and trade. As a

consequence, their empire remained largely confined to coastal regions where it could dominate

trading routes without needing to penetrate the continent. Yet, the Portuguese still sent

diplomatic and religious missions to various strategic locations in Asia, including mainland Iran.

Before the advent of the Safavids, the Dominican order had already sought to establish a

mission in Iran in the fourteenth century.[64] But the height of Catholic missionary activity came in

the mid-Safavid period. In 1581, an Armenian who served as the Neapolitan and Indian

ambassador to the Shah claimed that the Persian crown prince had converted to Christianity. This

had allegedly happened after the prince had been miraculously cured from an illness by the mere

sight of a crucifix. According to the story, the princess, a daughter of the Alexander II of

Kakhet'i (r. 1574-1605), had guided him to his conversion, and as a result, the Shah had

requested the king of Spain –through the ambassador– to send Catholic priests to Iran. While

almost no European dignitary seemed to believe this story, Philip II (r. in Portugal 1581-1598) –

who reigned over both Spain and Portugal at that time– sent a diplomatic mission in response. At

the head of it was the Augustinian Simão de Moraes, who worked for the viceroyalty of Goa. His

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[62] K.N Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 69.

[63] Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce: Southern India 1500-1650* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 114.

[64] Matthee, "The Politics of Protection," 245.

mission was brief, but he did manage to convert a number of Persians –including, allegedly, an unnamed major philosopher– before returning to Goa in 1584. [65] After Moraes, the Augustinians sent Nicolau de Melo (d. 1615), who was at the forefront of securing an anti-Ottoman alliance between Iran, Spain, England, Poland, Scotland, and France. De Melo's mission in Persia was brief, but he did have the opportunity to meet with Shah ʿAbbās, who allegedly said to him: "What is the reason why the Moghul and the Turk have priests in their lands while they are the enemies of the Christians, whereas I, who am so fond of them, have none".[66] In any case, he was sent to Russia towards the mid-1590s to explore alternative routes for silk trade, since both Iran and the European powers wanted to avoid Ottoman territory. There, he would meet a tragic fate due to intra-Christian conflicts. He was imprisoned for allegedly baptizing an Orthodox girl in accordance to the Catholic rite, and after experiencing many other hardships he was finally burned at stake in Astrakhan in 1615.[67]

At the turn of the seventeenth century, having had the precedent of the abovementioned embassies, the Augustinian order persuaded the king and the viceroy of Goa to entrust them with the founding of a permanent mission in Iran, citing concerns that the Jesuits had already pretensions to this regard.[68] Thus, with royal support, the Augustinians established their convent in Isfahan around the year 1602. That year, however, the Portuguese sought to reclaim their presence in Bahrain, where they encountered resistance from the Shah. The latter established a temporary strategic alliance with the British in order to expel the Portuguese from the island. As

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[65] Flannery, *The Mission of the Portuguese Augustinians*, 47-9.

[66] Roberto Gulbenkian. *The translation of the Four Gospels into Persian*, Schriftenreihe der Neuen Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft 29 (Immensee: Nouvelle Revue de science missionnaire, 1981), 18.

[67] Flanery, *The Mission of the Portuguese Augustinians*, 49-51.

[68] Ibid., 54.

a consequence, knowing that in this context it would have been inconvenient to send the

Portuguese Augustinians at the forefront of the Catholic mission, Pope Clement VIII (r. 1592-

1605) dispatched instead a Carmelite mission in 1604.[69] Hostilities continued until the

Portuguese were forced out of Hormuz in 1622. This did not mean the end of Portuguese

Augustinian presence in Iran and Georgia, were another convent had been established since at

least the previous year.[70] However, the missionaries did experience some hardship as a result,

and in that same year five Muslim apostates were executed for converting to Christianity.[71]

Tensions eased over time, which led Europeans to entertain once again false hopes of

converting Shah ʿAbbās I. They often cited the fact that his wife was Georgian and that he had

an overall favorable disposition towards the missionaries. The monarch certainly made some

gestures that could have been interpreted as an overture to Christians, going as far as to visit the

Augustinian convent in Isfahan on one occasion.[72] In reality though, it seems that the Shah's

only motivation in doing this was to secure European cooperation against the eternal Ottoman

threat and possibly even –as Matthee suggests– to use the Europeans as a counterweight to the

political influence of his own clerics.[73]

In the second half of the seventeenth century, with the Portuguese presence waning in

Iran, the French became one of the most ambitious European powers to send diplomatic missions.

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[69] Matthee, "The Politics of Protection," 246.

[70] For a chronicle of the mission, see Carlos Alonso (ed.) "El convento agustiniano de Ispahán durante el período 1621-1671," *Analecta Augustiniana* 36 (1973): 247-308; see also Carlos Alonso, *Misioneros Agustinos en Georgia (Siglo XVII),*Estudios de Historia Agustiniana 1 (Valladolid: ed. Studio Agustiniano, 1978).

[71] Flannery, *The Mission of the Portuguese Augustinians*, 71.

[72] Matthee, *The Politics of Protection*, 251-2, 259.

[73] Matthee, *Persia in Crisis,* 179.

Although there had been some intermittent French presence in the region since the reign of Shah

ʿAbbās I, it was not until 1665 that Louis XIV (r. 1643-1715) struck a trade deal with Shah

ʿAbbās II. France wanted to have the same tax cuts for silk trade in the Persian Gulf that the

Dutch and the English had enjoyed since the early decades of the seventeenth century.[74] Thus,

the French seized the opportunity of establishing this alliance as Iran saw itself isolated and

facing the possibility of an Omani attack in Bandar Abbas. Shah Sulṭān Husayn had sought,

unsuccessfully, to renew his alliance with the Portuguese for this reason, but since neither the

British nor the Dutch were willing to collaborate with him, he had no choice but to accept

France's deal.[75]

Although there were Capuchins and Theantins among the French missionaries, the Jesuits

constituted France's main clerical branch.[76] They were considerably more aggressive in their

attempts to convert Muslims than any other order had been until then. One of them, Aymé

Chezaud (d. 1664), went as far as to organize debates against Shiite religious scholars and to

write polemical treatises against Islam, as we will later see.[77]

However, from the beginning, missionaries started to realize that wining the hearts and

minds of Muslims would have been a nearly impossible task. They knew that seeking to do so

could potentially lead to political problems with Iran and that the European powers at the time

had more important priorities than providing supplies and protection for the missions. Seeing this,

they started to concentrate their efforts on the local Armenian and –to a lesser extent– Georgian

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[74] Anne Kroell. *Louis XIV, la Perse et Mascate* (Paris : Société D'Histoire de l'Orient, 1977), 5.

[75] Kroell, *Louis XIV*, 14-5.

[76] Abdul-Hadi Ha'iri. "Reflections on the Shiʿi Responses to Missionary Thought and Activities in the Safavid Period," in *Etudes Safavides*, ed. Jean Calmard (Paris-Téhéran: Institut Français de Recherche en Iran, 1993), 153.

[77] Ha'iri, "Reflections on the Shiʿi Responses," 153.

Orthodox populations, which they sought to bring under the tutelage of Rome. This does not

mean that no Armenian Catholics were to be found in the region before. Indeed, one of the things

that struck the Augustinians was the story, related by a group of Armenians Catholics, about

Bartholomew, a legendary figure who had allegedly converted many villages to Catholicism four

centuries before.[78] However –as would remain the case even after these missionary activities–

the Gregorian Church managed to retain its independence, and with it, the religious adherence of

most Georgians.

Yet, European missionaries did have some success stories. For instance, in 1607, the

patriarch David IV (d. 1629) promised to recognize the authority of Rome after visiting the

Augustinian monastery of Isfahan. He was seeking Rome's support to remain at the head of his

community, at a time when he was facing the opposition of another bishop by the name of

Melchizedek.[79] The plan for unification with Rome failed for many reasons: the missionaries had

been unable to convince the Orthodox population about some complex questions regarding the

divine nature of Christ, and they had also been inflexible regarding the possibility of allowing

Armenians to retain certain customs. But more importantly, David IV's project faced, not only

the opposition of many bishops, but also that of many powerful merchants. This began to affect

the missionaries even at a diplomatic level, as Shah ʿAbbās I was concerned that by converting,

Armenians would stop cooperating economically with the crown and would potentially revolt

against Iranian authority with European support. Thus, the patriarch was forced to retract from

his initial intentions.[80] But perhaps the most important success story for the Catholics was the

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[78] Flannery, *The Mission of the Portuguese Augustinians*, 119.

[79] Ibid., 132-3.

[80] Ibid., 136-8.

conversion of the Shahrimanian family, which often granted asylum and protection to the missionaries.[81] One of the members of this family, Basilio, became a priest and was sent to Rome to study at the *Colegio Urbano*.[82]However, according to the Carmelite Basil of Saint Charles, many members of this family were pressured into becoming Muslim at the turn of the eighteenth century.*[83]*

Missionary documentation from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries speaks of constant pressure against the orders. However, according to the missionaries' own accounts, most hostilities against them came, not from Muslims, but from the *schismatici* (that is, the Armenians). In a letter from 1694, the Carmelite Elia di San Alberto (d. 1755) claimed that the Armenian bishop of Julfa sent people to plunder the Carmelite church. During this operation the Armenians levied fines of 850 *scudi[84]* against the members of the Shahrimanian family for collaborating with the Catholics and threatened them with bastinado. In despair, the Catholics sent a delegation to Shah Sulaymān's court, hoping that the ruler would intervene on their behalf. Yet, since the latter had died before they could reach the court, they had to wait until the coronation of his successor.[85] In the same year, a letter by Father Beauvoilier suggested that seeking Shah Sulaymān's intervention would have been useless anyway, since "the defunct king was not intrigued by anything" (*il Re defonto non s'intrigava più in niente*).[86] Further, he claimed that the Armenians had brought donkeys and horses to desecrate the church, but that the

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[81] *Propaganda Fide*, Vol.2, ff 44

[82] Ibid., Vol.2, ff 42.

[83] Anon., ed., *A Chronicle of Carmelites*, vol. 2, 812.

[84] Coinage unit of the Papal States until 1866

[85] *Propaganda Fide*, Vol2, ff 110-1.

[86] Ibid, Vol 2, ff 119

Portuguese Augustinians intervened. They threatened to denounce the Armenian bishop for writing a book against the Qur'an and for sending the king over 50 000 gifts in bribes. They managed to have him sent to prison where he had his toenails pulled off through cane-strokes. Armenian churches were then closed, no masses were held in them, and the population demanded that the appointment of a new bishop.[87]

In the same year, Elia di San Alberto recounted a story with similar elements but which seems to have necessarily been a different case (or if not a very different version of the same one). According to him, the Armenian bishop Vartapet Stephen was hostile towards another bishop, Vartapet John, whom he accused of being a Catholic and of communicating with the missionaries. Vartapet Stephen then joined a *kalāntar* who had been deposed from his office the previous year (that is, in 1693) and who had converted to Islam in order to gain protection from the Muslim community. They both accused Vartapet John of translating the Qur'an into Armenian and of writing a refutation against it. The plaintiff was presented before an "inquisitorial tribunal of that faith [Islam]", where thirty Muslim witnesses testified to the charges. During the trial he pretended that he did not even know how to write, claiming that among Armenians, the post of the bishop consisted only of preaching through the performance of good deeds and the transmission of good teachings. He even offered the judge 1000 *tomans* for his liberation, but the latter did not accept. Finally, he was sentenced to be burnt at the stake, but the Queen Mother intervened on his behalf.[88]

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[87] Ibid.

[88] Anon., ed., *A Chronicle of Carmelites*, vol. 1, 467-8.

As for the damaged Carmelite convent, 1708 Shah Sulṭān Husayn allowed the order to rebuild it and issued a royal edict (*raqam*) as a guarantee of protection.[89] Some years before, in an undated letter to Pope Innocent XII (d. 1700) the Shah had also authorized the establishment of a Polish Jesuit mission in Kerman.[90] After the reparation of the Carmelite church, the Shah sent Vaqtan Mirza (d. 18th cent.), prince of Georgia, to punish a group of Armenians who had troubled the Capuchin Fathers in Tiflis.[91] However, despite counting on the Shah's apparent support, inter-communal problems continued to haunt the Catholics. Markar and Gaspar Shahrimanian left Catholicism and turned to Islam allegedly after being pressured to pay a heavy sum of money to another Armenian renegade.[92] According to an anonymous Augustinian Hermit, it was precisely ʿAlī Qulī Jadīd al-Islām who advised the enemies of the Shahrimanians.[93] Further, in 1710 the Armenians managed to convince the Shah to seize property previously given to the Catholics.[94]

Finally, we should emphasize that –as we have hinted at before– the Catholic orders continued to engage in internal rivalries which were perhaps even more damaging for them than any external pressures from the Safavid state or from the Orthodox Armenians. Our sources account for the existence of significant political strife among them. In 1706 a priest from the order of Santa Sabina by the name of Antonio di Poschiavo complained that the Jesuits wanted

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[89] *Propaganda Fidei*, Vol3 ff 327.

[90] Ibid Vol 2, ff 301.

[91] Ibid, ff328

[92] *A Chronicle of Carmelites*, vol. 1, 485-6

[93] Ibid., 486.

[94] Kroell, *Louis XIV*, 42.

their church to be instituted as the official parish of Julfa, to the exclusion of all others.[95] Further,

upon the apostasy of the two Portuguese Augustinians, Pidou subtly proposed a solution, which,

by hurting the Augustinians, could indirectly benefit the Jesuits. He signaled as the most urgent

priority:

> « […] obtenir du Roy de Portugal quelque résolution par le Convent des Augustins d'Ispahan et d'y employer que d'agents séculiers comme les anglois et hollandois et jamais d'ecclésiastiques.»[96]
> […to obtain from the King of Portugal some resolution for the Augustinian Convent of Isfahan and to employ there only secular agents such as the English and the Dutch, and never clerical ones]

Therefore, the orders did not constitute a united force any more than the diplomatic

missions to the court or the trading companies in the Persian Gulf did: apart from representing

the interests of Rome, they represented those of their own states, and those of their own

communities. It is hardly surprising that amid such a politicized environment the orders would

eventually face some defections from their ranks.

3.   ʿAlī Qulī Jadīd al-Islām: life and works

Virtually all we know about ʿAlī Qulī's life comes from missionary letters like the ones

cited so far. There are a few other references to him in diplomatic accounts: Jean Aubin has

identified three documents from the Dutch East India Company –dated between 1713 and 1715–

that mention him –either as Alie Koelibeg or as Alie Koelichan– as an interpreter for the King of

Persia.[97] The *Chronicle of Carmelites* also mentions that, in May 1708, the Carmelite Basil of

Saint Charles asked Rome for permission to translate and hand out to the Shah a refutation of an

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[95] Propaganda Fide, Vol.2, ff 490

[96] Ibid, vol.2, ff 219

[97] Richard, « Un augustin portugais renégat, » 83.

attack on Christianity produced by a renegade who worked at the Shah's court.[98] This also seems to be a clear allusion to our author. Persian chronicles are silent about him and his own work has very little to add in terms of strictly biographical information. His date of birth and death are unknown, although Francis Richards believes that he might have died during the 1722 Afghan invasions.[99] There is information about his presence in Isfahan from at least 1691.[100] As for his conversion, Francis Richard gives the date of September 1697[101] while Pourjavady and Schmidtke give the date of 1696[102]. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter though, Pidou de Saint-Olon already mentions ʿAlī Qulī's case in 1695; while in 1697 the account of the abovementioned anonymous Augustinian Hermit claims that the apostasy had taken place three years before, thus pushing the date back to 1694[103]. To add to this confusion, Richards cites another source saying that Padre António succeeded Gaspar dos Reis (d. circa 1690s) as the prelate of the Augustinians in Isfahan in October of 1696, which of course could not have happened had he already converted.[104] The *Chronicle of Carmelites* does mention his presence among Gaspar dos Reis's retinue in 1694[105], but this is also the source that mentions 1694 as the date of his conversion. Further, John Flannery has also identified two documents dated in 1697

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[98] *A Chronicle of Carmelites*, vol. 2, p. 813

[99] Richard, « Un augustin portugais renégat, » 74.

[100] Ibid., 74.

[101] Ibid., 74.

[102] *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, s.v. "ʿAlī Qulī Jadīd al-Islām," by Reza Pourjavady and Sabine Schmidtke, accessed July 22, 2014, http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/

[103] Anon. ed., *A Chronicle of Carmelites*, vol. 1, 486.

[104] Richard, « Un augustin portugais renégat, » 74.

[105] Anon. ed., *A Chronicle of Carmelites*, vol. 1, 469.

that speak of the apostasy and of the "recent" appointment of the Augustinian prior Padre

António.[106]

In any case, minor discrepancies on this date do not seem to make any difference in terms

of helping us understand the exact circumstances of ʿAlī Qulī's conversion, as it is not possible

to identify any particular event that could have triggered it. Flannery notes that the conversion of

Manuel de Santa Maria –whom we mentioned at the beginning of this chapter for having

converted and taken the name of Hasan Qulī Beg– seems to be much easier to explain: this priest

had taken advantage of church property and engaged in a lifestyle that was not compatible with

his religious investiture, and thus feared repercussions from Portuguese authorities.[107] However,

as he also correctly notes, ʿAlī Qulī's case was more ambiguous. If anything, the earliest

plausible date of conversion (1694) coincides with the abovementioned story of the bishop (or

bishops, depending on whether there were two different cases) who was (or were) accused of

writing polemics against the Qur'an. Further, Francis Richard has identified a citation in which

ʿAlī Qulī complained about the Capuchin Raphaël du Mans (d. 1696) and his retinue for bribing

Muslims into conversion.[108] Richard also cites a letter from du Mans, in which he claims that

ʿAlī Qulī had informed him of his intentions to convert. Du Mans tried to dissuade him by telling

him a personal anecdote: accordingly, one day the Prime Minister (Iʿtimād al-dawlah)

approached Du Mans and asked him why he refused to become Muslim. Showing his priestly

grey garments and his bare feet, Du Mans replied that if he were Muslim and rich he would not

even have access to the palace. This did not impress Padre António, who –while understanding

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[106] Flannery, *The Mission of the Portuguese Augustinians*, 96.

[107] Ibid., 97.

[108] Richard, « Un augustin portugais renégat, » 75; Flannery, *The Mission of the Portuguese Augustinians*, 99.

the advantages of wearing religious attire– did not fall for Du Mans's "deceitful arguments"
(*arguments mensongers*).[109]

Apart from this, as has been pointed out before, we know that after embracing Islam ʿAlī
Qulī became an interpreter of European languages at the court of Shah Sulṭān Husayn. Before
him, Du Mans had held this position; however, contrary to the latter, ʿAlī Qulī would actually
perceive a salary for performing these functions.[110] Further, the *Chronicle of Carmelites* also
indicates that he had an active role in anti-Christian hostilities –and not just intellectual
polemics–, going as far as to plot against the Catholic Armenian Shahrimanian family.[111]

Regarding his own conversion to Islam and his intellectual endeavors, this is what ʿAlī
Qulī had to say:

> […] at the time when I belonged to the Christian faith, I had a privileged position amongst priestly circles, to such a point that I was known as a leader of them [Christians]. Their men and women, who believed that I had been infused with the Holy Spirit, would come to me for the forgiveness of their sins; until the Grace of God and the Light of Faith illuminated the hovel of the heart of this poor man. In a matter of a few years, it [my heart] was released into a path illuminated by the lamp of Islam, aided by the love of the Leader of the Imams (may salutations and praise be upon him). Then, the alley of doubt was closed, and the darkness of the Christian path was completely removed and extinguished from my mind, and thus I spent much time diligently seeking Christian books and putting all my endeavors in refuting their false arguments. By comparing the terminology of their books, through blessings and pride I bore witness to the Truth of the Islamic Faith and to the prophetic mission of the Messenger of the Final Days and to the guidance of the Leader of the Imams until the Last among Them (pbuh).[112]

The lack of further biographical data on him makes it impossible to pursue a project of
social history (even of micro-history) using his case, which is why the present study will focus
mostly on the nature of his work.

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[109] Francis Richard, ed., *Raphaël du Mans missionaire en Perse au XVIIe s*, Vol. 1, Moyen Orient et Océan Indien 9 (Paris: Société d'Histoire de l'Orient, 1995), 131-2.

[110] Richard, « Un augustin portugais renégat, » 74 ; Richard, *Raphaël du Mans missionaire en Perse*, vol. 1, p. 132

[111] Anon. ed., *A Chronicle of Carmelites*, vol. 1, 486.

[112] Jadīd al-Islām, *Sayf al-mūʾminīn fī qitāl al-mushrikīn* , 56.

Unfortunately, not all of his writings are extant, nor are all of his surviving books integrally preserved. Reza Pourjavady and Sabine Schmidtke believe that his *Ithbāt al-nubuwwah* (*The Proof of the Prophecy*) might be identical with his *Radd bar yahūd*, a polemic against Judaism, of which only one manuscript has survived.[113] He wrote a couple of short treatises (*risālahs)*, both of which had been edited by Rasul Jaʿfariyan, and both of which are likely to have been written in preparation for his major works. These are the *Radd-i jamāʿat-i ṣūfiyān* or *Radd-i ʿaqāʾid-i ṣūfiyān (Refutation of the community –or of the beliefs– of the Sufis)[114]*and the *Favāʾid-i izdivāj (The Benefits of marriage).*[115]These two are now kept at Iran's National Library (*Kitābkhānah-i Millī*) in Tehran.[116]

However, his major works are two full-length treatises called *Hidāyat al-ḍāllīn (or al-muḍillīn) wa taqwiyat al-mūʾminīn* (*A Guidance for Those Who are Lead (or who Lead) Astray and a Strengthening for the Believers*) and *Sayf al-mūʾminīn fī qitāl al-mushrikīn (The Sword of the Faithful to Fight the Idolaters).*[117] The first one –the *Hidāyat al-ḍāllīn*– was originally written in "the language of the Franks" (*bi-zabān-i farangī*) and then translated into Persian, and it aims to provide proofs for the truthfulness of Islam using Christian scriptures.[118] According to Flannery, the date of completion of this work is most likely 1708.[119] There are two known

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[113] Pourjavady and Schmidtke, "ʿAlī Qulī Jadīd al-Islām".

[114] Ibid. For the text, see Jadīd al-Islām*, Radd-i jamāʿat-i ṣūfiyān*, 895-929.

[115] Jadīd al-Islām , "Favāʾid-i Izdivāj," 291-310.

[116] Jaʿfariyan, *Siyāsat va farhang*, 53-4.

[117] Pourjavady and Schmidtke, "ʿAlī Qulī Jadīd al-Islām".

[118] Ibid.

[119] Flannery, *The Mission of the Portuguese Augustinians*, 99.

manuscripts of this work which are now hosted at the Old Majlis Library in Tehran and at the Malek Library in Qom.[120]

His second major work, the *Sayf al-mū'minīn* –written under the encouragement of the famous jurist Fāḍil al-Hindī (d. 1137/1724-5) and dedicated to Shah Sulṭān Husayn– was conceived as a refutation of an important Christian polemic, the *Apologia pro Christiana Religione* by Filippo Guadagnoli (d.1656).[121] Three manuscripts of it survive and can be found at the Astān-i Quds- Razavī Library in Mashhad, at the private collection of Sayyid Muḥammad ʿAlī Ruzatī in Isfahan, and at the Library of the Congregational Mosque (*Masjid-i aʿẓam*) in Qom. As for its date of completion of this work, one of the manuscripts gives the date 15 of the month Rabiʿ al-Akhar of the year 1123 Hijri, which corresponds to June 2, 1711 in the Gregorian calendar.[122] My study would be chiefly based on this latter work and thus we will explore the details that gave rise to it in the next chapter.

For now let us conclude with a note of methodological caution: it is not always possible to establish a direct causative link between these works and the social and political history of their time. I do not deny of course that understanding the overall socio-religious environment of Safavid Iran helps us make better sense of them, and hence my exposition of the historical background in this chapter. However, establishing a causative link between the texts and the specific social factors surrounding their creation –like religious policy or religious persecution– could lead us to take for causation the correlation that exists between them. Because of the nature

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[120] Jaʿfariyan, *Siyāsat va farhang*, 53-4.

[121] Jadīd al-Islām, *Sayf al-mū'minīn*, 57.

[122] Jaʿfariyan, *Siyāsat va farhang*, 53-4.

of these texts, their most direct impact and their most direct motivations have to be understood within their ideological (as opposed to political or social) context.

With this in mind, in the following chapters I will focus mostly on the *Sayf al-mū'minīn*, which I will analyze at both textual and contextual levels. But by contextual here I mean that the reading of this source will be at times compared to other of texts, some of which were contemporary to it and some of which preceded it in addressing similar preoccupations within the tradition, constituting thus part of its intellectual genealogy. Hopefully, such an inter-textual approach linking ʿAlī Qulī's work to that of his contemporaries and to the work of those who preceded him in the tradition would shed some light on the politics of conversion in late seventeenth century Iran and on the evolution of rhetorical strategies of interreligious polemics.

Chapter 2
The Politics of Translation: *Their* Scripture, *Our Faith*

Section 1: ʿAlī Qulī and the polemicist tradition in the Muslim World in the 1600s

The intellectual genealogy of ʿAlī Qulī's polemical project –that is to say, the origins of

the historical dialogue in which he takes part and the textual Shiite Safavid tradition upo which

he discurses took its form in the first decades of the seventeenth century. It all started with the

arrival at the Mughal court of a Portuguese Jesuit missionary by the name of Jerónimo de

Ezpeleta y Goñi, better known to posterity as Jerónimo (or Jerome) Xavier (d. 1617). Although

his presence in India cannot be dissociated from European imperial ambitions, his easy access to

Akbar's (r. 963-1014/1556-1605) court should also be understood within the context of the

monarch's well-known interest in theological debates. Portuguese chroniclers such as Diogo do

Couto (d. 1616) mentions that already Bābūr (r. 932-937/1526-1530) and Humāyān (r. 937-

963/1530-1556) manifested some interest in Christianity; however, it was Akbar who pursued

this intellectual curiosity more seriously.[1] In 1578, the Mughal monarch summoned to his court a

Dominican priest by the name of Gil Eanes Pereira (d. 16th C), who had been until then based at

Sâtgâon in Bengal. At Akbar's own request, the latter started teaching about the Gospels at the

court using the 1558 *Comentarios sobre el Catechismo Christiano,* written by the Archbishop of

Toledo Bartolomé de Carranza (d. 16th C).[2] However, he adviced the king to seek specialized

instruction on the scriptures stating that he was not a real expert. Following his suggestion,

Akbar commissioned a diplomatic mission lead by the Armenian Domingos Pires to ask the

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[1] Gulbenkian, *The Translation of the Four Gospels*, 20-1.

[2] Ibid., 21-2.

Viceroy of India, the Archbishop of Goa, and the head of the Jesuits of Goa to send priests to the court, and to send with them copies of the Christian scriptures.

As a result, father Rodolfo Acquaviva (d. 1583), António de Monserrate (d. 1600), and Francisco Henriques (d. 16th or 17th C) arrived at Akbar's court in 1580, bringing with them a seven-volume Bible in Hebrew, Chaldean, Greek, and Latin printed in Antwerp between the years 1567 and 1572 by the famous publisher Christophe Plantin (d. 1589).[3] Although Akbar took great pleasure in this acquisition, he remained keen on having a Persian translation of the Gospels. Thus, in 1582 he intended to send a letter to Philip II with Father Monserrate explicitly asking for the Holy Books in Arabic or Persian. However, due to the overload of Portuguese ships, the embassy was never able to leave the port of Goa. Seeing this, Akbar commissioned instead his court chronicler Abū al-Faḍl (d. 1011/1602) to undertake the translation project, perhaps overestimating the latter's alleged knowledge of the Pentateuch and the Gospels.[4] Whether or not Abū al-Faḍl ever even started the translation is hard to tell; however, for Akbar's satisfaction, a Greek sub-deacon by the name of Leon Grimon (d. 16th or 17th C) arrived in Fatehpur Sikri around the year 1591 with a generous load of Chinese silk. Akbar decided to profit from his presence and had him dispatched as an ambassador to Goa, requesting once again that Jesuit priests be sent to the court. The Order of Jesus appointed thus three priests –namely Duarte Leitão, Cristobal de Vega, and Estevão Ribeiro– to the Mughal court. However, they soon returned in disappointment after failing to convert the king, even when the latter did show

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[3] Ibid., 23-4.

[4] Ibid., 25-6.

appreciation for their work and wanted them to establish a school so that the children of the nobility could learn Portuguese.[5]

In 1594, Akbar pursued his third attempt to attract priests to his court to engage with the translation enterprise. It was then that Jerome Xavier, together with Manuel Pinheiro (d. 16th or 17th C) and Bento de Góis (d. 1607) entered Lahore around 1595. Upon arrival, neither one had any knowledge of Persian or Arabic. In accordance with Akbar's earlier initiative, the priests were encouraged to establish a school to teach Portuguese to the princes and were granted Muslim intstructors to help them learn Persian.[6] However –by Jerome Xavier's own admission–, as of 1598 he had made little progress in his language skills. Yet, within a couple of years he claimed to have rapidly improved his philological abilities enough to be able to translate into Persian his own *Fons Vitae* (*The Fountain of Life*), through which he sought to refute the beliefs of all non-Christians.[7] Similarly, in 1602 he presented Akbar with a Persian version of his *Life of Christ*, which he had also written originally in Portuguese.[8]

However, Jerome Xavier did not work on his translations on his own. Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam have advanced the quite plausible hypothesis that Persian-knowing Armenians might have aided him with these tasks.[9] But more importantly, they have found

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[5] Ibid., 26.

[6] Ibid., 27.

[7] Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Frank Disputations: Muslims and Christians in the Court of Jahangir (1608-11)," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 46, no.4 (2009): 466-8; Noel Malcolm, "Comenius, the Conversion of the Turks, and the Muslim-Christian Debate on the Corruption of Scripture," *Church History and Religious Culture* 87, no. 4 (2007): 503.

[8] Gulbenkian, *The Translation of the Four Gospels*, 28.

[9] Alam and Subrahmanyam, "Frank Disputations," 468.

evidence proving that he counted on the collaboration of the philosopher, theologian, and chronicler ʿAbd al-Sattār (d. 17ᵗʰ C), with whom he often engaged in theological discussions at Akbar's court. In a colophon from a manuscript dated in 1602, Jerome Xavier acknowledges ʿAbd al-Sattār's assistance in preparing a translation of the Gospels, which he then presented at the court.[10] Further, ʿAbd al-Sattār notes in his own autobiographic testimony how he was encouraged by Akbar to learn Latin, and how he then engaged in the translation of Christian texts, collaborating with Jerome Xavier, even if he had to distance himself at times given the militant Christian orientation of the latter.[11]

There is yet another layer of complexity to the story of these texts: at least part of Jerome Xavier's (and ʿ Abd al-Sattār's) "translations" might not have been much more than transcriptions of earlier Persian renditions of the Gospels, as we will se later. In a letter from 1604 Xavier says that he had sent to Rome a copy of the Gospels in Persian written three hundred years before. He sent it with an Italian envoy by the name of Giovanni Battista Vecchietti (d. 1619), who had in turn brought to him a 1591 bilingual Arabic-Latin edition of the Gospels. In that same letter he mentions the fact that he was in the process of undertaking his own translation of the Gospels in Persian, which would include the Latin text from the Vulgate below the translation.[12]

After Akbar's death in 1605, Jerome Xavier feared that his successor Jahāngīr (r. 1014-1037/1605-1627) would not share his father's enthusiasm for theological debates. This was

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[10] Ibid., 468-9; Gulbenkian also mentions ʿAbd al-Sattār as Jerome Xavier's collaborator in his Life of Christ; see Gulbenkian, *The Translation of the Four Gospels*, 29.

[11] Ibid., 471.

[12] Gulbenkian, *The Translation of the Four Gospels*, 29-32.

indeed the case at the beginning, but it changed gradually. In 1607 the Jesuits presented the king

a Persian translation of the Gospels, although it is not clear whether this was one of the older

ones or the one prepared by Jerome Xavier.[13] He thus became more favorable to having books

about Christianity at the royal library and to having Persian translations of certain works. In

many occasions, he even invited priests to explain to him the meaning of the imagery of some

illustrated manuscripts and printed books.[14]

Some of the latter books provide more detailed information regarding the circumstances

behind their elaboration. For instance, Roberto Gulbenkian has identified a manuscript of the

Gospels presented to Jahāngīr, which contains the following note from Jerome Xavier:

I, Father Jerome Xavier of the Society of Jesus and Superior of the Fathers of the same Society residing at the court and kingdom of the great Moghul, certify that this book of the Gospels in Persian which an Armenian Padre was bringing with him from Hierusalem to this part of the world in the year one thousand and five hundred and ninety eight and it is said that this same book was written in the year of our Lord eight hundred and twenty eight and its letter and composition bear witness to its antiquity. It reached our hands in the following manner. The said priest who carried that book in arriving from Hierusalem to Persia left from there in the company of Manucher who was coming as Ambassador from Shah Abbas King of Persia to King Jehadin Acbar Mogor in the city of Lahore. And as the said priest for some reason was unable to continue the journey with the said Ambassador he remained behind and came in another caravan and died on the way. Some Armenians travelling with him brought his books including the said one of the Gospels to this city of Lahore and delivered them to Father Manuel Pinheiro of the Society of Jesus who was living there on orders from the holy obedience. The latter Father in returning the deceased Father's book to Hierusalem kept this one of the Gospels and as stated a transcription was made without changing anything at all and it is faithfully reproduced. And in testimony of the truth of these assertions I wrote these lines myself and signed my name and sealed this with the seal of the Superior of the fathers of the society in these places/ done in Lahore, court of King Nurdin Jahangir Mogor on the 21 of December of the year 1608.[15]

As we can see here, Jerome Xavier himself recognizes that the version of the Gospels that he

would later present to the Mughal king was not a translation of his own making but rather a

fidedigne transcription of an earlier one. Also, this note attests to the complex networking behind

the circulation of knowledge at that time. While it is undeniable that through local patronage

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[13] Alam and Subrahmanyam are unclear about this; see Alam and Subrahmanyam, "Frank Disputations," 476-8.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Gulbenkian, *The Translation of the Four Gospels*, 9.

some centers of learning flourished more than others (and chiefly among the major ones was Fatehpur Sikri in the Mughal Empire, of course), the intellectual communities of the Christian missionaries and the Muslim clerics were not strictly localized but rather transregional. Thus, we have to understand Jerome Xavier's desire to respect the text of the older translation not as a failing to produce one of his own, but rather as a necessity to ensure that the older translation could circulate more widely. This would help to establish a common intelectual ground with scholars in other locations through the sharing of texts.

Gulbenkian has also tracked down another manuscript of the Gospels in Persian held at the Academy of Sciences of Lisbon, which also contains a note from Jerome Xavier. The transcription is attributed to a man (possibly an Armenian)[16] called Sarkis Loudj ben Amir Maleik and it was produced between the years 718 and 728 Hijri (1318 and 1328 AD).[17]

Having found lexical difficulties and contradictions between the latter version and the Arabo-Latin version he had gotten from Vecchietti, Jerome Xavier decided just to transcribe the 1328 Persian Gospels verbatim rather than using them as a guide for a translation of his own. Gulbenkian thinks this might have been out of prudence, given that the contradictions between the older translations and his could have put his book at risk of being listed in the Roman Index.[18] In any case, it was in this context that all these translations/ transcriptions of Jerome Xavier were produced. Thus, we have to keep in mind that, in my succeeding references to

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[16] Gulbenkian mentions this possibility but recognizes that it cannot be determined with absolute certitude. Some of the clues are the fact that the scribe mentions St Thaddeus in the Colophon, and this latter saint was credited for spreaing the Gospel in Armenia. See Gulbenkian, *The Translation of the Four Gospels*, 43.

[17] Ibid., 11-3.

[18] Ibid., 32-3.

Jerome Xavier's "work", except for his *Fons Vitae* and his well-known polemical treatises, I might be talking simply of a that work he and his collaborators transcribed.

It is important now to note that Jerome Xavier's case was by no means an isolated phenomenon in the Early Modern period, nor was the interest for rendering biblical translations into Middle Eastern languages a monopoly of the Catholic Church. In 1666, a Turkish version of the New Testament was printed in Oxford, while its corresponding translation of the Old Testament remained in manuscript form. This scholarly enterprise was co-sponsored by the British and the Dutch, and the goal of it was to present the final product –which was never completed– to the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed IV (r. 1058-1099/1648-1687). The first written account of this project is found in a letter by the German-British polymath Samuel Hartlib (d. 1662) dated back to 1658.[19] The man in charge of it was the Moravian Jan Amos Komenský, better known through the Latinized version of his name, Jan Comenius (d. 1670).[20] Based in the Netherlands and counting on the generous patronage of Monsignor Laurens de Geer (d. 1666), Comenius coordinated a translation team led by the German-born orientalist Levinus Warner (d. 1665), who in turn relied on two collaborators: a Jewish-born Muslim convert by the name of Yaḥya b. ʿIsḥāq, and a Polish convert to Islam by the name of ʿAlī Bey (born Albert Bobowski) (d. 1675).[21]

Throughout the process of his translation project, Warner sent passages of the translations to his peers, seeking constructive criticism. He met the harshest response from his former teacher

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[19] Noel Malcolm, "Comenius, Boyle, Oldenburg, and the Translation of the Bible into Turkish," *Church History & Religious Culture* 87, no. 3 (July, 2007): 328.

[20] Malcolm, "Comenius, the Conversion of the Turks," 477.

[21] Malcolm, "Comenius, Boyle, Oldenburg," 331.

at Leiden, Jacob Golius (d. 1667), who benefitted from the aid of an Armenian from Aleppo, known as Shāhīn b. Qandī (d. 17th C). Golius then suggested that rather than completing his project, Warner should allow Shahīn b. Qandī to elaborate a new translation of his own using Bobowski's as a reference, since that was easier than having Warner and Bobowski incorporate all the revisions needed.[22] Thus, as the project in the Netherlands marched rather slowly and since it focused more on the Old Testament, Laurens de Geer himself encouraged a group of well-sponsored British scholars to work on the New Testament. The man in charge of the latter would be a humble clergyman by the name of William Seaman.[23]

Upon learning that Seaman had completed his New Testament, Comenius requested De Geer to show it to Golius and Shāhīn b. Qandī. The plan behind this was that if the latter approved of Seaman's translation, then Warner whould be discouraged from going ahead with his own New Testament. Comenius feared that any discrepancy between the two versions could lead to suspicion amongst the readers, which would of course have a deterrent effect on potential missionary attempts.[24] When Seaman's New Testament was finally published in 1666, Comenius wrote a letter of dedication to Mehmed IV.

Hoping perhaps to count on the Sultan's good disposition for the circulation of his Turkish Bible –as Noel Malcolm notes– Comenius's tone in his letter seemed rather sympathetic towards Islam.[25] However, earlier works of his revealed a much more hostile attitude against the Muslim faith. For instance, in a manuscript from 1617 called *Retuňk proti Antikristu* (*A*

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[22] Ibid., 337-8.

[23] Ibid., 341.

[24] Ibid., 343.

[25] Malcolm, "Comenius, the Conversion of the Turks," 485.

Forewarning against the Antichrist) he accused Muhammad of mixing Jewish, Christian, and

pagan traditions; and in the 1650s he resorted to a similar rhetoric in his *Orbis pictus* and his

Scholae ludus. In the latter work he even accused the Muslim prophet of having depended on the

services of a Nestorian Monk called Sergius, a claim, which –as Malcolm observes– was a

common trope of anti-Islamic Christian literature.[26] In his later works –especially after the

1650s– Comenius adopted a more moderate position, as he explicitly called for a tolerant

Christian attitude toward Muslims. This, however, did not imply that he had renounced any

missionary tendencies, because he continued to reflect upon the most effective ways to attract

Muslims into conversion.[27]

Thus, as the examples above show, biblical translation projects followed up or preceded

by polemical treatises were not uncommon in this period. Further, as Comenius's example

particularly shows, such enterprises were often heavily funded and closely monitored. Given this

general background, we can now move to the Iranian context and assess the nature of similar

project in this mileu. During Shah ʿAbbās I's tenure, in 1622 to be precise, Carmelite

missionaries brought to Iran a work by Jerome Xavier which would stir up a great polemic.[28]

This book, known as the *A'inah-yi ḥaqq-numā* (*The Truth-Reflecting Mirror*), was to a certain

extent a revised Persian version of Xavier's own *Fons Vitae*. In Iran, the first intellectual

response to this work came from Aḥmad b. Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn al-ʿAlawī al-ʿĀmilī (hereon referred

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[26] Ibid., 487.

[27] Ibid., 490-1.

[28] Ibid., 504.

to simply as Aḥmad al-ʿAlawī; d. circa 1060/1650).[29] Having learnt about Jerome's work

allegedly through his contact with Carmelite missionaries, he prepared a refutation of it entitled

Miṣqal-i ṣafā (*Burnisher of Purity*).[30] He then wrote two other treatises against Christianity and

Judaism, which might had also been conceived as responses to Jerome Xavier.[31]

In 1625, Carmelite friars brought a copy of the *Miṣqāl-i ṣafā* to Rome. The Vatican set up

a commission to have it translated and refuted. Among the people involved in the translation was

the famous traveler and chronicler Pietro della Valle (d. 1652). The first refutation of it,

published in 1628, was written by Bonaventura Malvasia (d. 1666). In his work, Malvasia

responded to al-ʿAlawī's attacks on the Christian views of the Paraclete –a topic on which we

will talk in more detail later– and to other questions regarding some apparent contradictions

between the Gospels. But the most elaborate response to the *Miṣqāl-i ṣafā* was Filippo

Guadagnoli's aforementioned *Apologia pro Christiana Religione*, published in 1631.[32] The

original version of it was in Latin, but it was immediately translated into Arabic and printed in

1637, to have it circulate in the Levant. Guadagnoli was careful to do some amendments to the

text in order to appeal to Muslim readership. For instance, in the Arabic version he omitted a part

in which he accuses the Muslim prophet of being a hypocrite. Furthermore, he also wrote a

conciliatory reply to Aḥmad al-ʿAlawī in which he said that the Qur'an was essentially very

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[29] For a detailed study of his polemical works, see Dennis Halft. "Schiitische Polemik gegen das Chrsitentum im safawidischen Iran des 11/17 Jarhunderts: Sayyid Aḥmad ʿAlawī's *Lawāmiʿ-i rabbānī dar radd-i šubha-yi naṣrānī*," in *Contacts and Controversies between Muslims, Jews and Christians in the Ottoman Empire and Pre-Modern Iran,* ed. Camilla Adang and Sabine Schmidtke, Istanbuler Texte und Studien 21 (Istanbul: Orient-Institut Istanbul; Wurzburg, 2010), 273-334.

[30] Malcolm, "Comenuis, the Conversion of the Turks," 504.

[31] Ha'iri, "Reflections on the Shiʿi Responses," 154-6.

[32] Malcolm, "Comenius, the Conversion of the Turks," 504.

similar to the Gospels. However, this text was swiftly suppressed by the Vatican, which –not

surprisingly– disapproved of Guadagnoli's tone in it.[33] Finally, in 1656 the Isfahan-based French

Jesuit Aymé Chezaud contributed to the debate by presenting his *Māsih-i miṣqāl-i ṣafā-yi*

ā'inah-yi haqq-numā, which is to a certain degree an extended Persian version of Guadagnoli's

Apologia.[34] This version was most likely the one used later by some the *'ulamā'* in Iran, although

little is known about its circulation.

Later on, already in the eighteenth century, the story of Guadagnoli's work became the

object of legendary accounts, some of which went as far as to claim that he had managed to have

Aḥmad al-ʿAlawī baptized and had him become a passionate defender of the Christian faith.[35]

Whether this was indeed the case is hard to prove. To my knowledge, the only reference to this

anecdote is a short paragraph in Jean-Pierre Nicéron's (d. 1738) *Mémoires pour servir à*

l'histoire des hommes illustres de la république des lettres.[36] I am also unaware of any work

attributed to Aḥmad al-ʿAlawī after any alleged conversion or of any penname associated with

him. In any case, it was as a response to Guadagnoli's *Apologia* that ʿAlī Qulī wrote his *Sayf al-*

mū'minīn. Thus, if Aḥmad al-ʿAlawī's conversion had indeed occurred and if ʿAlī Qulī had been

aware of it, this would have added another dimension to ʿAlī Qulī's project. However, I find this

highly unlikely. It seems to me that had this been the case, ʿAlī Qulī would not have failed to

mention it in his introduction (or elsewhere in his work for that matter).

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[33] Ibid., 504-5.

[34] Richard, « Un augustin portugais renégat, » 78; Alam and Subrahmanyam, "Frank Disputations," 506.

[35] Alam and Subrahmanyam, "Frank Disputations," 507.

[36] Jean-Pierre Nicéron, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire des hommes illustres de la république des lettres*, Vol. VII (Paris, Briasson, 1728-41), 276.

Be that as it may, another consideration to keep in mind in our author's case is the

relativity of the question of authorship. As we have seen in the examples of Jerome Xavier and

Jan Comenius, it was very common for European academics and missionaries to work closely

with native collaborators in their translation projects. It would not be unreasonable to suspect

that ʿAlī Qulī might have benefitted from some assistance as well. Therefore, when we refer to

his work hereon we should always consider that the actual authorship of certain passages or of

the translation of certain passages might be debatable. At the same time, it is fair to assume that

if he had not attained a considerable degree of linguistic skill, he would not have been an

attractive asset at the king's court. In any case, the purpose here is not to establish what parts of

the book were actually written by him. Rather, I am interested in identifying the central themes

and ways of arguing them, which emerged at the time using various polemical traditions and its

implications for the politics of conversion at the time.

‘Alī Qulī thus situated his project within this conext, describing it in the introduction of

his *Sayf al-mū'minīn* in the following terms:

> The intention of this translation was to collate the source of the Arabic Torah, which is a Latin translation, and then to translate it [into Persian] and interpret it so that it can serve as a proof to overcome the enemy. Were there to be any apparent discrepancies between it, its translation and interpretation, and its Arabic terminology, our brothers in the faith shall excuse [me], given that the source [of the Arabic Torah], is a Latin Torah translated from the Hebrew, and therefore the changes [made by] the impure Jerome [Xavier] contain many [instances of] tampering, and thus this Arabic translation also has many differences with the Latin one. [Therefore,] somebody who is not familiar with the Latin terminology may not realize from [reading] the Arabic translation the degree to which the Christian priests have tainted it with impurity.[37]

In trying to show the superiority of the Muslim understanding of the Torah, he turned to the

question of translation, which became an area of contention. Needless to say, this focus on who

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[37] Jadīd al-Islām, *Sayf al-mū'minīn*, 57.

knows Arabic well and who understands its true meaning was also a theme that ran in the

debates among Muslim jurists and clerics themelves. ʿAlī Qulī continued:

> So, in translating the Torah, this humble servant has translated every non-equivocal translatable term. Otherwise, I have done this [translation of the] Torah so that anyone who wants to [use] the Arabic Torah to challenge Christians can verify it with the authoritative collation of it which I have done with the Latin, so that the Christians will not be able to transgress its contents. For God is in whom help is sought.[38]

Thus, as we can see, our author goes back to the genesis of the polemic, traced back to

Jerome Xavier's Arabic Bible, which –as we have seen before –might have actually been just the

Bible that the latter had obtained from Vecchietti. Furthermore, the circulation of this Arabic

Bible must have caused a great degree of debate in Iran's Muslim scholarly circles judging by

the fact that, during the same period, another translation of the Gospels was commissioned by (or

at least dedicated to) Shah Sultān Husayn in response to it. This one was done by Mīr

Muhammad Bāqir Khātūnabādī (d. 1127/1715), who opened his study with the following

statements:

It so happens that a Christian [Jerome Xavier] that has commented on the Gospel in Arabic, was not very well acquainted with Arabic syntax and structure, and in some cases used foreign terms and non-Arabic words in his terminology as well as unfamiliar combinations and disjointed sentences; and thus, understanding what he meant is impossible without referring to the original Gospel –which is not Arabic– and without finding many subjects based on stories and terms which have to be learned from outside the text. [This translation] is based on some of their [Christians'] own trusted books and treatises which have found their way into this land, and I researched and studied, and consulted with people who are knowledgeable about the original Biblical source. I translated whatever [parts] where the intended [meaning] is clear, and whatever is based on stories, plus terminology and complex phrases is clarified in the commentaries. I did not write the explanation on the original source in order not to contravene the laws of translation; and wherever there were arguments against faulty Christian claims, or contradictions that would benefit Islam, all that has also been briefly mentioned so that the seeker of truth and righteousness can find some benefit from it. I do hope that those who command eloquence, the initiates and the wise masters who demand perfection would be so generous as to study all [this text] before pointing fingers at it and before raising objections. Thus, after having looked at it carefully, if they come across any oversight or error, they will proceed to amend it with a forgiving and lenient pen.[39]

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[38] Ibid.

[39] Mīr Muḥammad Bāqir Khātūnabādī, *Tarjumah-yi Anājīl-i arba'ah* (Qom : Markaz-i Amuzishi va Pizhūhishī-yi Imām Khumaynī, [1373, i.e. 1994 or 1995]), 56-7.

But Muslim-Christian debates in seventeenth century Iran were not all tied to the debate

with Jerome Xavier and Guadagnoli, even if the latter provoked the largest number of responses.

Another interesting case was that of Zāhir al-Dīn b. Mullā Murād Tafrishī (d. 17ᵗʰ C), who served

as a prayer leader (*pīshnamāz*) in Georgia at the time of Shah Sulaymān. Tafrishī engaged in

intellectual disputations against two Christian religious leaders from different denominations.

The first of these was the Carmelite Gabriel de Chinon (d. 1668), whom he refers to as Gabriel

the Frank (*Jibrā'īl-i Ifranjī*). Although not much is known about this missionary, there is

evidence that he established himslef in Tabriz in 1653 and that he debated Tafrishī in person

during a trip to Georgia.[40] He also seemed to have been favored by the Armenians, because

Raphaël du Mans noted how Chinon was hosted in Julfa even at a time when the Jesuits faced

trouble in the district. Furthermore, the previously mentioned Aymé Chezaud went as far as to

say that he would not stay in Julfa as long as Chinon remained there.[41] In any case, Chinon wrote

a polemical work called *Nuṣrat al-ḥaqq* (*The Victory of the Truth*), to which Tafrishī responded

with his own treatise.[42] Later on, Tafrishī took part in another debate against Makarios III Za'im

(Makarios of Aleppo, d. 1672), the Melkite Greek Patriarch from Antioch.[43] The latter had been

an enigmatic character himslef, as he had apparently professed loyalty to the Church of Rome

while remaining outwardly an Orthodox.[44]

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[40] Ha'iri, "Reflections on the Shiʿi Responses," 159; Flannery, *The Mission of the Portuguese Augustinians*, 105.

[41] Raphaël du Mans, "Jésuites à Ispahan," in *Raphaël du Mans missionaire en Perse au XVIIe s,* vol. 2, ed. Francis Richard*,* Moyen Orient et Océan Indien 9 (Paris: Société d'Histoire de l'Orient, 1995), 216.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ha'iri, "Reflections on the Shiʿi Responses," 159.

[44] Charles A. Frazee, *Catholics and Sultans: The Church and the Ottoman Empire, 1453-1923* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 133.

Apart from these examples, Rasul Jaʿfariyan has identified a manuscript from roughly the same period, known as *Radd-i Naṣārā* (*Refutation of the Christians*) by Muhammad Khalīl b. Muhammad Ashraf Qāʾīnī, but to my knowledge no research has been done about its contents.[45] Further, Francis Richard has written briefly about a short treatise (*risālah*) by an Armenian renegade priest, known as Muhammad ʿAlī Jadīd al-Islām (d. 17th or 18th C), who converted during the first year of Sulṭān Husayn's reign (1694). However, apparently this work is not really a polemic but rather a translation of the mass ritual, for "Muslims to know its sense (*de manière qu'ils* [Muslims] *en connaissent le sens*)". [46]

We must finally note that interreligious theological disputations of this kind transcended the Christian-Muslim debate. There is for instance the case of the rabbi Yehudah b. Elʿazar (d. 17th C), who wrote his main work, *Hobot Yehudah* (*The Duties of Judah*), in 1686.[47] Vera Moreen has suggested that this book, which was heavily modeled after Maimonides's (d. 1204) *Dalālat al-ḥāʾirīn* (*Guide for the Perplexed*), might have been motivated by the hardships experienced by Iranian Jews in the seventeenth century.[48] In it, Yehudah argued for the impossibility of apostatizing from Judaism, while attacking the "erroneous" beliefs of Christians and Muslims.[49] Moreen notes that, as with most classical polemics, Yehudah's work was largely an intellectual exercise, which shedded little light on the relation between Jews and their Muslim

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[45] Rasul Jaʿfariyan, *Dīn va siyāsat dar dawrah-yi Safavī* (Qom: Ansariyan, 1370 [1991 or 1992]), 311.

[46] Richard, « Un augustin portugais renégat, » 80-1.

[47] Vera B. Moreen, "A Seventeenth-Century Iranian Rabbi's Polemical Remarks," in *Safavid Iran and her Neighbors,* ed. Michel Mazzaoui (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2003), 158.

[48] Ibid., 158-60.

[49] Ibid., 162-6.

and Christian neighbors[50]. Yet, the author's context did manifest itself indirectly, as Yehudah refered to all Christians indiscriminately as Armanī (Armenians)[51], an inaccuracy that reveals the historical and geographic particularity of the context in which the text originated.

However, the impact of the Christian-Muslim (specifically Catholic-Shiite) exchange was indisputably bigger. The sheer number of works of this kind demonstrates this, as some scholars have identified about a hundred and sixty Shiite refutations of Christianity written after the seventeenth century.[52] The implications and the scope of translation exercises and polemics like the ones referred to above had a profound intellectual and, one can even say, political significance. What it meant to use the scriptures of the people of the book to prove theological points in Islam will be explored shortly with more detail in the following pages.

Section 2: ʿAlī Qulī's work as *dalāʾil al-nubuwwah*

2.1 An intellectual history of the genre

2.1.1 A genealogy of *taḥrīf* and *dalāʾil al-nubuwwah*

As we have noted before, ʿAlī Qulī sought to provide an authoritative partial translation (*tarjumah*) and commentary (*sharḥ*) of Jerome Xavier's Arabic Bible (or at least the Bible he used) to put in evidence the many instances of tampering (*taḥrīf*) it contained. This seems to imply that, aside from Jerome's translation or transcription of previous translations (and

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[50] Ibid., 166.

[51] Ibid., 163.

[52] The list was elaborated by Hamid Naji Isfahani in an edition of the *Miṣqāl-i ṣafā* used by Len Harrow, and cited by Flannery. See Flannery, *The Mission of the Portuguese Augustinians*, 106.

Guadagnoli's subsequent polemics partially derived from it) the original Bible itself was seen by him as a valid source for theological inquiry. As we will see later, the many passages in which ʿAlī Qulī uses the Bible to proof the validity of Islam seems to confirm that he held this view, at least to some extent. Further, as we have also seen, Khātūnabādī's assertion that Jerome Xavier (or previous translators) obscured passages that were favorable to Islam suggests that he too held a similar position. But how acceptable or how mainstream was this approach to the Bible within the –broadly speaking– Islamic tradition to begin with? Were the Hebrew Bible and the Greek Gospels themselves also considered products of *taḥrīf*, or only their later translations? And if the original sources were indeed products of *taḥrīf*, why did so many Muslim scholars use these allegedly tampered scriptures as proofs of Islam?

We should start by noting that the idea of accusing another religious community of tampering with the sacred scriptures preceded the rise of Islam. Throughout Late Antiquity (2nd to 8th centuries AD) Sabians, Samaritans, and Christians used this argument to discredit the authenticity of each other's Holly Books.[53] However, discussions around this theme became more systematized with the development of the Islamic tradition. Medieval Muslim scholars believed that, since Jews and Christians had exercised *taḥrīf* on the Bible, thus making it an adultered source, and since the Qur'an was in and of itself sufficient for Muslims as a proof (*ḥujjah*) of Islam; then Muslims did not need to use Christian and Jewish scriptures for guidance. However, in reality Muslims scholars had referenced the Bible since the early centuries of Islam, and they had done so for two seemingly contradictory purposes: on the one hand they wanted to prove that the coming of the Prophet Muhammad had been foreseen in it; and on the other, they

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[53] Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, "Some Neglected Aspects of Medieval Muslim Polemics against Christianity," *The Harvard Theological Review* 89, no.1 (January, 1996): 64.

wanted to expose what they saw as the falsities contained therein.[54] Thus, in the ninth century

AD, the Nestorian convert 'Alī b. Rabban al-Ṭabarī (d. 256/870) and his contemporary, Abū

Muhammad ʿAbd Allah b. Muslim b. Qutaybah (d. 276/ 889) became the first Muslim scholars

to write lists of biblical signs predicting the coming of the Prophet Muhammad. They

inaugurated thus a genre called *aʿlām* (or *dalā'il*) *al-nubuwwah* (*sings of prophecy*).[55]

Throughout the following centuries, both converts and Muslim-born scholars continued

to engage the Bible in their polemics. For converts this was a way of incorporating their

knowledge of their previous faith into their new one, while for other Muslims this was a way to

address certain soteriological concerns of their religion, which claimed after all a certain degree

of continuity with the salvation message of Christianity. Further, Muslim scholars sought to

reconstruct in more detail biblical stories, which were not narrated at great length in the Qur'an.

Historians and *ʿulamā'* systematically compiled these stories from the Christian and Jewish

traditions in what came to be known as the *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* (stories of the prophets).[56]

However, modern scholars have raised many questions regarding the depth of early

Muslim knowledge of the Bible. For instance, Hava Lazarus-Yafeh has noted that literal biblical

quotes are rare in works of early Muslim historiography or in the *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*. She believes

that this may be explained because –with few exceptions– most early Muslim scholars did not

have a direct knowledge of the biblical text, neither through the original version nor through

early Arabic translations. It rather seems that Muslim commentators knew about the Bible mostly

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[54] Walid Saleh, "A Fifteenth-Century Muslim Hebraist: al-Biqāʿī and his Defense of Using the Bible to Interpret the Qur'ān," *Speculum* 83, no. 03 (July, 2008): 630-2.

[55] Sabine Schimdtke, "The Muslim Reception of Biblical Materials: Ibn Qutayba and his *Aʿlām al-nubuwwa*," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 22, no. 3 (July, 2011): 250.

[56] Saleh, "A Fifteenth-Century Muslim Hebraist," 632-3.

through oral accounts, which probably explains why many authors continued to cite the same set of biblical verses throughout generations.[57]

Early Arabic translations of the Bible were made by –and for the use of – Jews and Christians. According to Lazarus-Yafeh, the earliest manuscripts of Arabic Bible translations (dated approximately from the eighth and ninth centuries AD) were found in Palestinian monasteries in areas where Arabic had replaced Greek as the liturgical language of the Orthodox Church. Although there are some surviving renderings of the Pentateuch into Coptic from the thirteenth century, translations of the Gospels were more common (and appeared much earlier) than those of the Old Testament.[58] Yet, by and large it seems that early Muslim scholars' contact with biblical translations was mostly limited to the knowledge of some excerpts. This was most likely the case even with the most representative polemicists from the Abbasid period (132-656/750-1258), such as the previously mentioned Ibn Qutaybah and Abū Muhammad ʿAlī b. Aḥmad b. Saʿīd b. Hazm (d. 994/1064), both of whom included quotes and paraphrases from the Old Testament in their *Kitāb al-Maʿārif* and *Al-faṣl fī al-milāl wa-l-ahwāʾ wa-l-niḥāl* respectively.[59]

In contrast, converts were an exception to this rule, since they were usually well acquainted with the original Hebrew version of the Old Testament (and the Greek version of the Gospels in some cases), or were at least familiar with early Syriac, Coptic, or even Arabic translations. However, as Lazarus-Yafeh correctly observes, oftentimes it was precisely these

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[57] Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 112-4, 118.

[58] Ibid., 115.

[59] Ibid., 122-3.

well-informed converts who contributed the most to "biblical misinformation" in Islam by

misquoting Christian and Jewish scriptures, either willingly or unintentionally. Some, like a

thirteenth/ fourteenth century convert by the name of Saʿīd b. Ḥasan of Alexandria (date of

conversion, 1298 AD), extrapolated the name of Ismael in various passages of the Old Testament

in order to justify an Islamic reading of it. Others, like the Maghrebi Jewish convert ʿAbd al-

Ḥaqq, played with phonetics and altered the vowels of Hebrew words to make them sound like

references to "Muhammad".[60] In this way converts sought to reconcile the seemingly

contradictory idea that the Bible could have been tampered with and yet remained a reliable

source, and referred to its content for establishing legitimate proofs for the validity of Islam. In

other words, by declaring that the 'original' text of the Bible was preserved in some form even

after being tampered with or misinterpreted, these converts could count on a tool for supporting

the Islamic faith from within the Jewish and Christian discourses. As such, the notion of *taḥrīf*

and the genre of *dalā'il al-nubuwwah* became complementary rather than antithetical.

Furthermore, another major shift in the tradition occurred in the fifteenth century when

the Egyptian Hebraist and *mufassir* (Qu'ānic exegete) Ibrahīm b. ʿUmar al-Biqāʿī (d. 885/1480)

became the first of his kind to use the Bible, not to discredit the beliefs of Christians and Jews in

polemical works or to prove the anticipation of the coming of Islam, but as a tool for *tafsīr*

(Qur'ānic exegesis). In his study on al-Biqāʿī, Walid Saleh shows how controversial the latter's

postion was, as scholars in Mamluk Cairo heatedly debated on the permissibility of using the

Bible as a source of guidance. As *fatwas* (Islamic legal opinions) circulated for and against al-

Biqāʿī's project, he felt the obligation to justify his decision through a treatise called *Al-aqwāl al-*

qawīmah fī ḥukm al-naql min al-kutub al-qadīmah (The Established Arguments regarding

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[60] Ibid., 124-5.

Intellectual Judgment from Ancient Books)[61]. This signified a break away from the pure *dalā'il al-nubuwwah* tradition, which opened new possibilities for textual engagement with the Bible and the Torah.

However, this did not mean that the *dalā'il al-nubuwah* genre disappeared. On the contrary, it continued to flourish in the Early Modern period. Camila Adang has identified a case of a Jewish convert to Islam by the name of ʿAbd al-Salām al-Muhtadī al-Muhammadī who lived in Istanbul during the reign of Bāyazīd II (r. 886-918/1481-1512) and who wrote a refutation of Judaism called *Al-risālah al-hādiyah*. In it, the author claimed that the Torah itself inspired him to become Muslim.[62] In the first section of the work he argued that Jews have misunderstood a line from the *Book of Exodus,* which states that "the nation of the Children of Israel should observe the Sabbath throughout the times as an eternal covenant".[63] For Jewish exegetes, this implies the eternal validity of Judaism to the detriment of later prophets; whereas for him, "eternity" in this context refered to a lengthy but finite duration.[64] In the second section, he saw evidence of Muhammad's prophethood in a quote from the *Book of Deuteronomy,* which says that God will "raise up a prophet for the Children of Israel from among their brethren".[65] For

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[61] Saleh, "A Fifteenth-Century Muslim Hebraist," 630-1.

[62] Camilla Adang, "Guided to Islam by the Torah: The *Risāla al-hādiya* by ʿAbd al-Salām al-Muhtadī al-Muḥammadī," in *Contacts and Controversies between Muslims, Jews and Christians in the Ottoman Empire and Pre-Modern Iran*, ed. Camilla Adang and Sabine Schmitdke, Istanbuler Texte und Studien 21 (Istanbul: Orient-Institut Istanbul; Wurzburg, 2010), 57.

[63] Ibid., 61.

[64] Ibid., 61-2.

[65] Ibid., 67.

him, the "brethren of the Children of Israel" was equal to the Children of Ismael, and therefore the prophet to whom this passage refers could only be the prophet of Islam.[66]

In these two sections, al-Muhtadī went into many linguistic details to prove his interpretation, engaging in an exegetical dispute with Jewish theologians without accusing them of altering the text itself. Thus, for his first two sections al-Muhtadī subscribed to the *dalā'il al-nubuwwah* tradition without discussing the question of *taḥrīf*. However, in the third and final section he discussed what he saw as alterations of some words in the Torah. For him, the way in which some temporal markers are used in the text suggested that Moses died before receiving the revelation and that the Canaanites were not permanently established in their land at the time of Abraham. This of course contradicted doctrinal views on prophecy and legitimacy. Al-Muhtadī recognized that Jewish commentators like Abraham ibn Ezra (d. 562/1167) had already pointed out that these phrases should be interpreted with caution.[67] However, by choosing to focus here on questions regarding the actual text more than its interpretation, he subtly approached the question of scriptural tampering.

In any case, this should suffice to show how these questions survived well into our period of interest, and we will later see how they permeated also into the Iranian realm.

2.1.2   Christian responses to *taḥrīf*

Not surprisingly, as references to *taḥrīf* became an integral part of Muslim anti-Christian and anti-Jewish polemics, Christians and Jews had to elaborate intellectual responses to the challenges they posed. Ironically, some Christian polemicists used the Qur'an in a way that

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[66] Ibid., 67-8.

[67] Ibid.

resembled to a large extent the use of the Bible made by authors of *dalā'il al-nubuwwah*. Let us take the early example of the twelfth century bishop Paul of Antioch (d. circa 1180), author of the famous *Risālah ilā aḥad al-muslimīn* (*Letter to a Muslim*). In his work, Paul of Antioch addressed some of the most recurrent Muslim theological accusations against Christians, one of them beign of course that of scriptural corruption. As a response, he claimed that the at least two Qur'anic *surahs* explicitly denied this possibilty. These were *Sūrat al-Mā'idah* (5:48), in which it is claimed that God had revealed the Jewish and Christians scriptures himself; and *Sūrat Yūnus* (10:94), which confirms the legitimacy of the books that had come before the Qur'anic revelation.[68] Paul of Antioch's work was influential enough to attract responses from some major Muslim thinkers, such as Taqī al-Dīn ibn Taymiyah (d. 728/1328) and Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Idris al-Qarafī (d. 683-4/1285) who sought to refute his interpretations, although the details of their arguments are beyond our present focus.[69]

Closer to our time of interest, the Dutch Calvinist Theologian Johannes Hornbeeck (1666) also wrote treatises to defend Christianity (and even Judaism) from accusations of scriptural corruption, by claiming that all biblical manuscripts coincided. He also explicitly rejected the idea that the Bible contained any prophecies about the coming of Islam.[70] Further, he inverted the accusation of *taḥrīf* against Muslims, by saying that it was them who had falsified parts of the scriptures. Yet, he expressed optimism regarding the possibility of converting Muslims, precisely because they were already acquainted with the essentials of Christian scriptures.[71]

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[68] Thomas F. Michel, *A Muslim Theologian's Response to Christianity: Ibn Taymiyya's Al-Jawab al-Sahih* (Demar, NY: Caravan Books, 1984), 88-90.

[69] Ibid., 93.

[70] Malcolm, "Comenius, the Conversion of the Turks," 506.

[71] Ibid, 507

Another major Christian response to the idea of *taḥrīf* in the seventeenth century came from Jan Amos Comenius, whom we mentioned earlier for his involvement in the Anglo-Ducth Turkish Bible project. In his letter of dedication to Mehmed IV (r. 1058-1099/1648-1687), and much in the same vein as Hornbeeck, he sustained that there were no major discrepancies between the existing copies of the Bible, although he did acknowledge that there could be some minor differences between certain words or numbers due to scribal mistakes. However, he was careful not to use the Qur'an as a tool of validation for the Bible as Paul of Antioch had done five centuries before, nor did he directly attack Islam as Hornbeeck did.[72]

But perhaps the most relevant European challenge to both *taḥrīf* and to the entire genre of *dalā'il al-nubuwwah* in the seventeenth century came from the aforementioned Filippo Guadagnoli. His approach was similar to Hornbeeck's in that he reversed the accusation of forgery against Muslims, but it was closer to Paul of Antioch's in that he sought to instrumentalize Muslim's views of the Qur'an to his own advantage. He argued that, since Muslims recognized the validity of the Bible despite certain objections, and that since they saw the Qur'an as a continuation of the prophetic message of the Bible; then they would have to extend any claims about the corruption of the biblical text to the Qur'an as well.[73] Like Comenius, he conceded that some alterations in some copies of the biblical text did indeed exist, and that they could be attributed to scribal mistakes, the passage of time, and even –indeed– to "some person's malice".[74] Thus, by acknowledging *taḥrīf* as something existant but not problematic enough to represent any theological threat to Christianity, Guadagnoli sought to

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[72] Ibid., 506-7.

[73] Ibid., 506.

[74] Ibid.

banalize this traditional component of Muslim polemics against Christians and to turn it against the Muslim Holly Book itself.

As we will see next, Guadagnoli's position was not to remain unchallenged. The implications of scriptural corruption were of course much more serious for Muslims, for whom the Qur'an is the literal word of God, and for whom the smallest scriptural mistake represented a major theological challenge.

2.1.3 *Dalā'il al-nubuwwah and taḥrīf* in Safavid Iran

As it should be rather obvious by now, most of the anti-Christian literature of Safavid Iran that we have referred to so far can be classified within the *dalā'il al-nubuwwah* genre. The case of Aḥmad al-ʿAlawī might very well have been the first instance of this kind of literature in the Safavid realm. Given his widespread use of biblical quotes in his work, one of the main matters of debate almongst scholars working on him has been the extent of his knowledge of the Hebrew Bible in its original version. Earlier scholars like Henry Corbin believed that he must have been well-versed in Hebrew and that he had direct access to the Bible. In contrast, Dennis Halft argues –quite convincingly, in my opinion– that he did not and that all the biblical quotes that he used were taken from previously existing Arabic translations and transcriptions of the Bible or from the works of earlier Muslim polemicists.[75] This is hardly surprising and actually quite consistent with the aforementioned pattern whereby non-convert Muslim polemicists reproduced the same Biblical quotes for centuries due to their lack of direct access to the Christian scriptures. Likewise, there were hardly any new sections, themes, or arguments, which

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[75] Dennis Halft, "Hebrew Bible Quotations in Arabic Transcription in Safavid Iran of the 11th/17th Century: Sayyed Aḥmad ʿAlavī's Persian Refutations of Christianity," *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 1, no. 1-2 (2013): 241-4.

may reflect an active reading of the original sources on the part of Aḥmad al-ʿAlawī. In any case, what is clear –as I have noted earlier– is that his opera was triggered by the circulation in Iran of Jerome Xavier's works.

However, whether or not they were explicitly responding to the likes of Jerome Xavier and Guadagnoli, other religious scholars and men of letters in seventeenth century Iran wrote works on *dalā'il al-nubuwwah* and addressed in their writing the thorny issue of *taḥrīf*. For instance, in his *Risālah dar bashārātī bā ẓuhūr-i haẓrat-i khatm al-anbiyā' az kutub-i āsimānī* (*Treatise on the good tidings of the appearance of the seal of the Prophets from the Holy Books*), Shaykh Ḥazīn-i Lāhījī argued that (in this case) Jews had tampered with the scriptures. He did think however that their ability to hide the essence of the text was limited, which is why certain theological truths can still be found in the Torah:

> […]the structure [*siyāq*] of this book [the Bible] is such that anyone who is endowed with reason and acumen and is acquainted with the methods of philosophers, logicians, and scholars of religion and is God-fearing, can tell that these kinds of words do not come from the *'ulamā'*, who are knowledgeable about God Almighty, but that they are from the kind [of words] that Jews cannot hide, interpret nor deny.[76]

But he then introduced a cautionary note, suggesting that very little truth could be found in the Jewish book: "it is clear to scholars that not much [of it] is void of tampering and editing" [*bar muṭālaʿah-kunandigān ẓāhir mī shavad kih khāli az taḥrīf va tabdīl bisyār nīst*].[77]

This position seemed to be one of extreme caution regarding the use of the biblical source itself. Further, we noted in the first chapter how Lāhījī claimed to have studied the scriptures with rabbis and Armenian priests; yet it is hard to judge the depth of his knowledge of Jewish and Christian sources from this *risālah* alone. We referred earlier to Lazarus-Yafeh's observation

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[76] Shaykh Muḥammad ʿAlī Ḥazīn-i Lāhījī, *Rasā'il-i Hazīn-i Lāhījī* (Tehran: Ayinah-'i Mirās̲: Daftar-i Nashr-i Mirās̲-i Maktub, 1998), 121.

[77] Ibid., 123.

about converts having usually a deeper knowledge of the Bible than Muslim-born scholars. We noted also that the latter would often know only a few excerpts of it. However, Lāhījī did occasionally discuss textual references to Arabic translations; and in some parts he even implied that he consulted different manuscripts by using expressions such as "in other manuscripts" [*dar baʿḍ-i nuskh-i dīgar*][78]. So this suggests that he might had had access to translations like the ones used by Jerome Xavier.

Yet, however deep Lāhījī's knowledge of the Bible might had been, it is unlikely to had matched ʿAlī Qulī's expertise on the Christian tradition. After all –and as we will see throughout this study–, ʿAlī Qulī's entire claim to authority in his *Sayf al-mū'minīn* resided in his claim to a deeper-than-average knowledge of the religion of *the other* within the *ʿulamā'* circles in Isfahan.

But ʿAlī Qulī's work is not the only one we know of written by a convert in Safavid Iran. An anonymous Georgian text from the time of Shah ʿAbbās I –know in its Persian translation as the *Risālah-yi shinākht* (*Treatise on Knowledge*)– has survived.[79] This rather short piece –which was most likely conceived as a missionary text, given that it was written in the language of a Christian community– contains a list of proofs of the validity of Shīʿī Islam, although not necessarily of a biblical nature. Another text written by a convert, much different from ʿAlī Qulī's in its nature and style, but which does incorporate biblical proofs of Islam and which was written roughly around the same time, was the aforementioned *Iʿtirāf-nāmah* of Armānī. It is hard to know whether this work was conceived with any missionary goal in mind, as the only

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[78] Ibid., 118.

[79] Anonymous, "Risālah-yi shinākht," in *Iʿtirāfnāmah diary of Abgar ('Ali Akbar) Armani,one of new converts to Islam of Shah Sulaiman & Shah Sultan Husain Safavi's era, along with Risālah-yi Shinākht, in Gurji script on affirming Shi`ism by a Georgian new convert to Islam of Shah Abbas' time,* ed. Mansur Sefatgol (Tehran: Kitāb-khānah-yi Shurā-yi Islāmi, 2010).

surviving manuscript of it suggests that it was written originally in Persian instead of Armenian and that it is unlikely that it had a wide circulation at its time.[80] In that sense, we could say that ʿAlī Qulī's work, apart from being far more scholarly than Armānī's, is also more transparent regarding the relationship between the author and the text: it is quite understandable that a convert acquainted with *ʿulamā'* circles would have known the conventions of polemical literature well enough to reproduce them in a systematic scholarly work, whereas –if we take Armānī's story at face-value – it is not as clear how a merchant who never had access to any traditional Islamic scriptural training could have been aware of the systematic use of certain polemical methods and themes in support of conversion to Islam. If anything, what this seems to suggest is that certain elements of the "high" scholarly culture permeated into society at large.

And yet, one could still see how a merchant non-native speaker of Persian (or at the very least, not scholarly trained) could have written Armānī's text as it exhibits a fairly simple language with occasional grammatical inaccuracies. In contrast, ʿAlī Qulī's style is so complex that it is hard to think that he could have written all of his text without ever relying on the expertise of a Muslim scholar or scholars. As we saw earlier, European missionaries often counted on the support of local scribes and translators, so it should not be surprising if ʿAlī Qulī had such support as well. However, we should also take into account the fact that he was trained as a Christian theologian and had attained the skills and tools that would help him learn new languages and literary traditions.

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[80] Mansur Sefatgol, Introduction to *Iʿtirāfnāmah*: *diary of Abgar ('Ali Akbar) Armani,one of new converts to Islam of Shah Sulaiman & Shah Sultan Husain Safavi's era, along with Risālah-yi Shinākht, in Gurji script on affirming Shiʿism by a Georgian new convert to Islam of Shah Abbas' time,* ed. Mansur Sefatgol (Tehran: Kitāb-khānah-yi Shurā-yi Islāmi, 2010).

The material we have at hand does not allow me to ascertain when and how ʿAlī Qulī initially studied Persian and Arabic and whether he acquired a full and specialized training in the Islamic religious sciences. I suspect that he must have indeed benefited from scribal support but that he obviously had achieved a superior degree of proficiency in literary Persian in order to attract the court's attention. So from now on, whenever I refer to ʿAlī Qulī's work the reader must keep in mind that –as I indeed mentioned before– the "authenticity" or the "authorship" of every single passage might be a matter of dispute in future philological studies. This does not detract from the importance of the arguments and conclusions I make about the connections between conversion and the politics of scriptural translations. The purpose of this study is not primarily to establish what ʿAlī Qulī individually achieved for the sake of glorifying his character but rather to discuss what the Muslim polemical tradition in Iran did as a whole and how he as a convert engaged with it. As such, in a number of instances where I did not have clear evidence about the source or basis for a particular argument of his, I have nonetheless entertained a set of possibilities for such an argument or method, and raised some questions, without arriving at definitive answers.

2.2 Tropes of *dalā'il al-nubuwwah* in the *Sayf al-mū'minīn*

2.2.1 The *fārqālīṭ*

One of the most recurrent *topoi* in works of *dalā'il al-nubuwwah* is that of the *fārqālīṭ*, the Arabic rendering of the Greek Paraclete. The first reference to the Paraclete in the Islamic tradition appeared in *Al-sīrah al-nabawwīyah* (*The Biography of the Prophet*) of Ibn Isḥāq (d. circa 150/767)[81], and the biblical passage it comes from is *John* 15:26: "But when the Paraclete

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[81] Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 77-8.

comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes forth from the

Father, he will bear witness about me."[82] Ibn Isḥāq accused the Jews of withholding information

regarding the prophecy of the Paraclete (which is why, following this line of reasoning, the latter

is only mentioned in the New Testament). According to Lazarus-Yafeh, the term that Ibn Isḥāq

used for Paraclete was translated into Arabic from the Syriac *Munaḥanma,* which he believed to

be a concealed reference to Muhammad.[83] As for early occurrences of this theme in specifically

polemical works, Ibn Qutaybah included a reference to the Paraclete in his *Aʿlām al-nubuwwah*.

He embarked on an etymological analysis of the term and linked it to the trilateral Arabic root ḥ-

m-d, relating it thus to the name of the Prophet.[84]

Following this early tradition, both ʿAlī Qulī's *Sayf al-mūʾminīn* and Armānī's

Iʿtirāfnāmah brought forward the theme of the *fārqālīṭ*. The way in which they approached the

topic was, as expected, very different. In Armānī's story, the *fārqalīṭ* was discussed in the

following context: as was briefly explained in the first chapter, at the beginning of his memoir,

Armānī started doubting his Christian faith. He cited how, in the Gospel, Jesus said that giving

clothes to the naked, feeding the hungry, and visiting the poor was equivalent to doing all this to

Him.[85] Yet, Armānī was constantly reprimanded by his Christian family for trying to help the

poor, that is, for following the model of Jesus Christ and his teachings. As his faith in

Christianity started to crumble, he began to have visions and dreams in which defunct members

of his family told him that one day he would become a Muslim. One night he fell asleep in the

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[82] *John* 15:26 (Douay-Rheims Version)

[83] Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 77-8.

[84] Schmidtke, Sabine. "The Muslim Reception of Biblical Materials: Ibn Qutayba and his Aʿlām al-nubuwwa," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 22, no. 3 (2011): 256.

[85] Armānī, "Iʿtirāfnāmah," 57-8.

direction of the *qiblah* and dreamt about being struck by an Angel with a wooden stick (*chūb*)[86].

Later, when his grandfather died, he looked upon his burial place and, miraculously, the

gravestone moved and the old man appeared "wearing a Muslim outfit" (*rakht-i Musalmān*

pūshīdah), and holding a wooden stick in one hand and a book in the other.[87] Full of confusion,

Armānī asked the *kalāntar* of ʿAbbāsabād to teach him more about Islam. The latter offered to

demonstrate that even the Gospel itself proved that Islam was the true faith, and challenged

Armānī: "Were there to be found anywhere in the Gospel [saying] that this religion is the true

one, become a Muslim yourself" [*har gāh dar Injīl bāshad kih īn dīn bar ḥaqq ast Musalmān*

shū].[88] And thus the miracle occured when the narrator read in the Gospel the passage where

Jesus walked over the river and announced the coming of the *fārqālīṭ*, the promised one, who –as

the *kalāntar* explains– was no other than the Prophet Muhammad. Having been thus convinced

of the validity of Islam, the narrator took the *shahādah* and recited *fātiḥah* at ʿAlī Qāpū palace.[89]

In contrast with this testimonial and rather brief reference, ʿAlī Qulī's approach was more

scholarly and systematized. While Armānī did not specify what section of the Bible he was

referencing, ʿAlī Qulī did so and provided his own translation of John's Gospel:

It is good for you [*maṣlaḥat-i shumā dar ān ast*] that I leave, for if I do not leave, the Paraclete cannot come, and at the time when he comes to the world he will prove [*ilzām khvāhad dād*] the world wrong about three things: about sin [*gunāh*], about righteousness [*ḥujjat*], and about judgment [*qiyāmat*]: about sin, given that they did not have faith in me, about righteousness given that I will leave you to join my father [in Heaven] after which you will not want to see me [and he omits the third element of the quotation][90]

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[86] Ibid., 60-1.

[87] Ibid., 61.

[88] Ibid., 61.

[89] Ibid., 62-3.

[90] Jadīd al-Islām, *Sayf al-mū'minīn*, 75.

And he followed it with his interpretation:

A sign to recognize him [Muhammad] in this passage from the Gospel [is] that it is better not to interpret the Paraclete as [beign] Jesus. Whenever you see Jesus announcing the Paraclete, know that he is referring to our Prophet [Muhammad]. You should believe whatever Jesus says about the arrival of this Holly man, that is, the journey when Jesus says that he is going with his father [it means he is going] to meet the divine (*rafiʿ ilhahī*) and [it has nothing to do with] the killing that [Christians] have talked about [the Crucifixion][91]

ʿAlī Qulī's approach here consisted of questioning the general interpretation of the text, but not the integrity of the text itself. This can be contrasted with the aforementioned *risālah* of Shaykh Hazīn-i Lāhījī, where the author did introduce an accusation of *taḥrīf* in his engagement with this passage. He started by saying: "The meaning [or the sense: *maʿnā*] of the phrase 'when I leave I will send him [upon you]', had it not been tampered with, would be the following: 'since his arrival will follow my departure, and since I will leave, it follows that I had sent him [as a messenger], for if I do not leave, he cannot arrive'".[92]

However, there are also similarities between ʿAlī Qulī and Hazīn-i Lāhījī's approaches. For instance, in accordance with the tradition of etymological inquiry that had permeated discussions on the Paraclete since Ibn Isḥāq's time, both of them ventured into the definition of the term. Let us look first at Lāhījī's, who combined etymological inquiry with hermeneutics:

And we have sought to interpret [*istifsār namūdīm*] the meaning of "Paraclete" which has been extracted [*istinbāṭ shudan*] from the books below and from Christian accounts [written by] many of their men of knowledge, priests and leaders [*dānāyān va pādiriyān va khulafā-yi khūd*], who had agreed to [treat the subject] in such a way that they had concealed its logical meaning [*ittifāq dāshtand bih inkih murād-i ḥakīmī ast kih asrār dānad*]. And in many instances it can be seen how many references about the Messenger appear with this name. So it is no secret that this indication is a clear sign that the meaning of it is the announcement of the coming of the Seal of the Prophets; for after the [coming of] the Messiah [Christ], who else corrected [*takhtiʾah*], condemned [*taqbīḥ*], and refuted [*radd*] what Jewish and Christian scholars along with those belonging to other religious groups [*sāyir-i milal*] have said as well as their misguided beliefs, words and deeds [*ʿaqāyid va aqvāl va aʿmāl-i bāṭilah-yi īshān*]?[93]

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[91] Ibid., 75.

[92] Ḥazīn-i Lāhījī, *Rasāʾil-i Hazīn-i Lāhījī*, 115-6.

[93] Ibid., 116.

In contrast, ʿAlī Qulī's etymological strategy was grounded on that which distinguished him from other Muslim polemicists, namely his knowledge of the European tradition. In his engagement with European sources, he did not deny their authoritative status, but rather turned this authority against them and used their arguments to prove his own position. Thus, to seal his discussion on the Paraclete, ʿAlī Qulī refered to the sixteenth century Italian lexicographer Ambrogio Calepino (d. 1510):

[…]Ambrogio Calepino, who knew Greek, Hebrew, and six other languages, and who is well-reputed among Christians, says [in his lexicon in the entry for] the letter "a", which is [the equivalent of] aleph, that Angelus means angel, and that angel means the bearer of a message from God. Therefore, anyone who brings a message from God can be called an angel, and this is supported everywhere [in the scripture]. Thus, following this line of reasoning, since Jesus brought a message from God Almighty through the Paraclete, then he [the Paraclete] can also be called an angel. And this angel of the covenant, of whom Almighty God said: "he is the ruler of the House of God" [*firmān-firmā-yi bayt-i Allah*] is the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). While he was living in this insignificant world [*ʿālam-i dharrah*] one day God said to him: "am I not your Lord" [*a-lastu bi-rabbikum*], [and thus] Almighty God made a covenant and promised him that by attesting to the unity of God and faith with prophethood and with the imamate, he will bring a message to men, anouncing the Day of Judgment [just as He had announced it to] all his creation and to all jinns and humans on behalf of God, the creator of the worlds[…].[94]

ʿAlī Qulī's use of Calepino's work as an interpretational aid was of course a novelty in the *dalā'il al-nubuwwah* genre. Muslim polemicists did not commonly use European texts or refer to European authors (if they were to rely on them at all) to support their own arguments, but rather to debate them. However, as we have said, the use of this reference is equivalent to the etymological inquiries that had accompanied debates on the Paraclete since Ibn Isḥāq. ʿAlī Qulī thus managed to follow this quasi-canonical formula of the genre while bringing about his unique expertise on European theological and lexicological scholarship.

I have mentioned earlier how ʿAlī Quli's knowledge of the Bible seemed to be in general deeper than that of Lāhījī. I also mentioned how this was an old trend in the polemical tradition: converts had historically engaged the Bible in more detail than Muslim-born authors, who –as a

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[94] Jadīd al-Islām, *Sayf al-mū'minīn*, 124.

general rule – had resorted to formulaic references of Jewish and Christian scriptures. The example of ʿAlī Qulī and Lāhījī's analysis of this particular passage might seem to contradict this rule, as they both delved into the topic with the same level of detail. This could be the result of two things. For one, as I have also mentioned, at this stage in history some few Muslim-born scholars like Lāhījī could have benefitted from access to integral Bible translations, some of which, as I have shown earlier, were produced in the Safavid period. But more importantly, and as Lazarus-Yafeh has observed, Muslim scholars have been repeating certain biblical references (like that of the Paraclete) for generations. Any Muslim-born scholar would have been as familiar with the reference to the Paraclete as any convert. It is thus hardly surprising that the level of analysis regarding this trope was not significantly deeper in ʿAlī Qulī's text than in Lāhījī's. What we are dealing with here is a standard trope of polemical litearature rather than a unique insight. Thus, the similarities between our two authors' texts here should not be taken as an indication that the *ʿulamāʾ* of this period had –as it were– "catched up" in their knowledge of Jewish and Christian sciptures enough to match the knowledge of converts. Had this been indeed the case, ʿAlī Qulī's claim to authority through his Biblical knowledge would have been weakened. Instead, what the above citations show is that the repetition of certain tropes and of a standard set of quotes continued to be used in the *dalāʾil al-nubuwwah* genre as late as the seventeenth century.

In conclusion, when we compare ʿAlī Qulī's use of the biblical text to that of Armānī and Lāhījī, we observe two things: the first one is that, just like Armānī, ʿAlī Qulī seemed to consider the Bible a legitimate source of guidance, much in the spirit of the *dalāʾil al-nubuwwah* tradition. In this context then, the question of *taḥrīf* was not raised. The second is that, precisely because ʿAlī Qulī did not dismiss the biblical text *itself* categorically (at least not here) but rather its

interpretation; he then needed, like Lāhījī, to engage in an exercise of textual exegesis to differentiate his reading from that of his former coreligionists. Thus, in this section the nature of ʿAlī Qulī's argumentation was hermeneutical, based on developing a particular interpretation and understanding of what the "accurate" meaning of the biblicatl text is. This approach was differentiated from a philological or scriptural one seen in other polemical endeavours. In contrast to him, Lāhījī introduced some accusations of *taḥrīf*, eventhough he stated that such a practice could not hide all the truth contained in the Bible.

2.2.2 Proofs of the *Wilāyah* of *Amīr al-mū'minīn*

As the example of the Paraclete shows, authors of *dalā'il al-nubuwwah* appropriated and reinterpreted messianic passages from the Bible. However, while the latter theme was a commonplace of this genre in the Islamic tradition at large, other themes were more specific to the Shiites. One of ʿAlī Qulī's preoccupations as a new Shiite was to prove that the Bible had announced the guardianship (*wilāyah*) of Imam ʿAlī, the Commander of the Faithful (*Amīr al-mū'minīn*). For this, he began with a reference to the covenant between God and the sons of Jacob (which appears in *Isaiah* 59:20-21). Before quoting the passage he mentioned how at the time of Isaiah's revelation, the Seal of the Prophets [*khatm al-ānbiyā*, that is, Muhammad] and the Commander of the Faithful [*amīr al-mū'minīn*, that is, ʿAlī] were united in one light [*yak nūr būdand*] which manifested itself in the prophetic revelation.[95] He then proceeded with his translation from Isaiah:

This is the what your Lord have said: "and know that the covenant that I have made with them [says]: my spirit is with you, and my words which I have put in your mouth through the mediation of this spirit will never depart from

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[95] Jadīd al-Islām, *Sayf al-mū'minīn*, 249.

your mouth, nor from your children's mouths, nor from the mouths of the children of your children, from now and forever.[96]

After quoting this, he proposed the following analysis:

[…][T]his covenant [comes] after that [other] covenant which God Almighty made with his people at the beginning of the leadership [*imāmat*] of the sons of Aaron [*dar bāb-i imāmat-i awlād-i Hārūn az mardum giriftah būd*]: given that when God Almighty brought the message to the Prophet Isaiah; Moses, Aaron, and his children had all returned [from exile], [it follows that] the covenant that God had made at the beginning of the leadership of the sons of Aaron had been fulfilled [*bih ʿamal āmadah būd*]. Therefore, it is understood that this [new] covenant which God talks about [here] is different from that [other] covenant, and that this religion [*dīn*] and its leaders [*imāmān*] will be different from that of [the religion of] Moses, and this is why God Almighty said "I would never abandon your sons nor the sons of your sons from now and forever", and the religion and prophecy of Jesus and his apostles departs from the dictum of this statement [*az ḥukm-i an ʿibārat bīrūn mī ravand*] […][97]

The most obviously striking feature of this passage is the choice of the word *imāmat* applied, perhaps not so innocently, to the leadership of Moses and Aaron in order to establish some kind of terminological continuity with ʿAlī Qulī's new crede. But more importantly, he established a distinction between the two covenants. He did not deny that God had made a covenant with the Israelites at some point in history but he argued that the Bible also stated that this pact had already been fulfilled then replaced by a new one. The beneficiaries of the new covenant would not be the Christians. Before we turn to this question, we need to highlight ʿAlī Qulī's use of the apocryphal tradition to prove his point.

ʿAlī Qulī cited an extensive passage from the Fourth *Book of Ezra* (or Second *Book of Esdras*) in which God reminded the Israelites how he had helped them throughout their exodus and reprimanded them for their lack of faith. The excerpt finishes with the mentioning of some

[96] Ibid., 249.

[97] Ibid., 249.

enigmatic people "who come from the East" (*kih az ṣamt-i mashriq mī āyand*).[98] ʿAlī Qulī

offered his interpretation about who these characters were:

[There were] fifteen persons in the following order: **Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Oseas, Amos, Micheas, Joel, Abadias, Jonas, Nahum, Habacuc, Sophonias, Aggeus, Zachary, and Malachy, which also the name Angel.[99]** It is no secret then that since there is a king among those fifteen persons, it becomes evident through both reasoning and scriptures [*muvāfiq-i ʿaql va naql maʿlūm mī shavad*] that these kings must be the Prophet of the End of Times Muhammad Muṣṭafā (the Chosen One (saw)), the twelve succesors of the religion [*khalīfah-hā-yi dīn*], and the remaining two would be Isaac and Ismael.[100]

Overall, this interpretation could be adapted to any sort of narrative seeking to validate Islam.

However, it seems clear that the intention was to associate the twelve *khalīfah-hā-yi dīn* to the

Imams through a Shiite lense. He insisted on the importance of there being twelve successors,

thus adding that "since there are a few thousand prophets from the Sons of Israel, all of them

should have been mentioned and not specifically these twelve."[101]

However, since ʿAlī Qulī needed to demonstrate that there was also a rupture in terms of

the intended recipient of God's covenant, and that this "people from the East" were not from the

Banī Israel, he then needed to show that such a discontinuity did not come with Christianity. To

achieve this, he resorted to *Matthew* 5:17 where Jesus emphasized the fact that he did not come

to abrogate (*naskh kardan; mansūkh shudan*) the Jewish scripture: "Do not think that I have

come to abolish the religion of Moses; I have not come to abolish it but to fulfill it".[102] Having

established this, ʿAlī Qulī then brought forward evidence of the rupture in the alliance with the

Israelites. He continued with the Fourth *Book of Esdras* 2:33-34, quoting the following passage:

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[98] Ibid., 251.

[99] Note: the bold letters are used to distinguish the actual biblical quote from ʿAlī Qulī's commentary

[100] Ibid., 251; Biblical reference from *2 Esdras* (or *4 Ezra*) 1:39-40

[101] Ibid., 252.

[102] Ibid., 253; Biblical reference, *Matthew* 5:17 (New International Version)

I, Esdras, have received an order from the Almighty on Mount Oreb [asking me] that I should go [an preach] to the children of Israel; but since when I came to them they rejected what I had to say and did not accept my message, I shall say to you: "oh, nation who listens [*ay, ummatī kih mīshnavī*], what I have written in this book by God's command [is that] you should wait for the Shepherd [chūpān], which is your Messenger, for he will grant you everlasting rest for He who will come at the end of times is already near.[103]

Having acknowledged that his choice of Esdras could easily be contested, since not all Jews and Christians accepted him as a canonical prophet, ʿAlī Qulī then needed to rely on another passage which, in his view, would convey the same meaning. This passage would be *Genesis* 49:10 in which Jacob summons his tribe on the day of his departure. ʿAlī Qulī's rather loose translation appeared as such: "The crown of prophethood [*tāj-i nubuvvat*] shall not depart from the head of the tribe of the Judah, nor shall the robes of rulership [*libās-i imāmat*] fall from their bodies until the coming of He who God Almighty will send, for He is the one that all nations [*ummat-hā*] are awaiting."[104] Needless to say, once again the subtle use of the word *imāmat* in ʿAlī Qulī's translation corresponded to his intention –expressed later in many other instances– of advancing a pro-Shīʿī exegesis of the Christian scriptures. The translation of this passage according to the New International Version appears as such: "The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor will the ruler's staff from between his feet".[105] However, as we have seen before, and as Lazarus-Yafeh has warned us, converts would oftentimes misrepresent the scriptures, or at least take out and manipulate certain terms, to serve their own argumentation. In this case we can speak of a subtle hint rather than an outright misrepresentation.

ʿAlī Qulī then proceeded to look more closely at geneoalogical and ethnic 'information' provided by the scriptures to establish the identity of the "awaited one":

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[103] Ibid., 253.

[104] Jadīd al-Islām, *Sayf al-mūʾminīn*, 254.

[105] *Genesis* 49:10, New International Version

This Judah is the same Judah son of Jacob into whose tribe –Christians say– Jesus (pbuh) was born –just as they say about any a lineage group [*sind*] that is missing in their books–. Thus, since Jacob said that until God sends the man for whom all mankind is waiting, the crown of prophethood and rulership will not depart from the tribe of Judah; therefore it follows that the character of which Jacob talks here –and the coming of whom Esdras announces in the [previously] cited passage– is not Jesus, of whom Christians speak and who they invoke in place of the one [mentioned in the Prophecy]. Nor is he one of the sons of Aaron, of whom Jews say that he was the awaited Messiah, since this character [the Mesiah] cannot come from the people of Israel […].[106]

Having thus discarded the possibility that the Messiah could be of Jewish origin, ʿAlī Qulī concluded that the "awaited one" of the *Genesis* and of *Esdras* was Prophet Muhammad, since he descended from the tribe of Ismael and not from the Banī Israel.[107]

Just as the Paraclete passage from John's Gospel, the choice of *Genesis* 49:10 was rather formulaic and had been systematically used by Muslim polemicists since at least the Abbasid period. However –and again, as with the discussion on the Paraclete–, the way in which ʿAlī Qulī treated this passage differed from the way in which other polemicists before him had approached it. The aforementioned Andalusian thinker Ibn Hazm quoted *Genesis* 49 only to argue that its contents were historically innacurate because the scepter departed from Judah long before the coming of the awaited one.[108] In contrast, a convert from Judaism, Samawʾal al-Maghribī (d. 575-6/1180), quoted this same passage in order to discuss how Jews rejected Muhammad just as they had rejected Jesus before him.[109] ʿAlī Qulī's treatment of the subject resembles more that of al-Maghribī, since he also emphasized Jewish failure to accept the messianic figure foretold by the scripture, and how –as a consequence– the eternal covenant of God had to be fulfilled through the line of Ismael and not through the Israelites. What was more particular to ʿAlī Qulī

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[106] Jadīd al-Islām, *Sayf al-muʾminīn*, 254.

[107] Ibid.

[108] Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 98-9.

[109] Ibid., 99-100.

was of course his numerological interpretation of the fifteen names mentioned by Esdras, which

gave his work its distinctively pro-Shiite character.

2.2.3 Proofs of *rajʿa*

For ʿAlī Qulī, the final coming of the Shiite messiah –the *Mahdī*– was also a matter foretold by

the Bible. To bring forward some biblical proofs of *rajʿa* (the return of the twelfth Imam), he

discussed *Daniel* 12[110]:

But on that day, Prince Michael the Great will rise. It is evident by [the use of] this term "prince" [*shāhzādah*] that the name of the *Mahdī* should have been used instead of [the name of] Michael, because the former is the real prince that will rise at the end of times, and not Michael, who is known not to have been a prince. [Also] he [Michael] is not [part] of human kind but rather an angel who is close to the Great [*firishtah-yi muqarrab dar gāh-i kubrā ast*], and nowhere in the Holy books is the name of Michael mentioned among the sons of Adam who will reveal himself at the end of times.[111]

In this passage ʿAlī Qulī began to introduce the idea that the biblical text itself could have been

corrupted by Jews and Christians. The nature of his polemic here began to trascend the purely

hermeneutical level, as he intoduced –albeit implicitly– the notion of *taḥrīf*.

He further elaborated on this idea as he continued his interpretation, building on his

intellectual feud with Jerome Xavier:

And so it had to be that either Jerome [Xavier] or someone else –for his own profit and under Satan's advice– changed the name of the *Mahdī* and wrote that of Michael; and this character [the forgerer, that is] said every time through [the voice of] Daniel that: "**on that day Prince Michael the Great, ruler and lawgiver of your nation, will rise. And when that time [comes] it will be unlike any other time since the creation of mankind, and at that time there will be a list of everyone from your nation whose name has been written in the book**". This book must certainly be the Holy Qurʾān. And thus, the meaning of this section is that "on that day everyone from your nation who is mentioned in the Qurʾan as having done good deeds will be free from any torment, be it in this world or in the afterlife". [Also], this book must be an alteration of the Qurʾan [*muṣḥaf*] of Fatimah (saw). In it appears the name of Gabriel instead of the correct name, namely [the name of] the Commander of the Faithful, for it is inferred from the *ḥadīth* of the family of the Prophet that the name of each pious person and each unbeliever and

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[110] Note that in the following citations, the bold text corresponds to the biblical text, whereas the regular font represents ʿAlī Qulī's commentary

[111] Jadīd al-Islām, *Sayf al-mūʾminīn*, 298.

anything they did and will do from the beginning and until the end of times and until the day of resurrection have been written in this text. This text is now with the Commander [ṣāḥib al-amr], the *Mahdī*.[112]

Here ʿAlī Qulī incorporated the idea that Fāṭimah, the daughter of the Prophet had a copy of the original and accurate Qurʾan and that this Qurʾan is in the hands of the awaited *Mahdī* where all human actions and decisions are recorded. He elaborated on this when presenting his interpretation of the passage:

Therefore, the interpretation of this passage from Daniel is that: on that day, anyone from your nation whose name is mentioned in the book which the Almighty will bring as an act of kindness [*luṭf*] to the most honorable of women [*sayidah-yi zanān*], Fāṭimah Zaḥrā, and which He will bring to her to confort her mind and through His intermediary Gabriel; all of them will be released from the torment and will see goodness in both worlds [here and the hereafter]. And so it is that this book is the Preserved Tablet [*lawḥ-i maḥfūẓ*], and this book stands for three books: for anyone who is mentioned in the *lawḥ-i maḥfūẓ* as being a well-doer, will also be mentioned as a well-doer in the Holy Qurʾan and in the Book of Fatimah, and [the same will apply] in the opposite sense [meaning, that eveil-doers will be considered as such in all three books]. Therefore, the key [*sar-rishtah*] to understand these three tablets will be the source [*sar-chishmah*] of the ultimate divine knowledge [*ʿilm-i rabbānī-yi muntahā*].[113]

The idea of the Preserved Tablet (*lawḥ-i maḥfūẓ*) was of course a common trope in the Islamic tradition at large. It is beyond the scope of this study to delve into detail on the literature surrounding this term and its development in the Islamic exegetical and doctrinal traditions. Suffice it to note that our author used it here as a hermeneutical key to understand the soteriological features present in this passage.

The second proof of the *rajʿa* in the *Sayf al-mūʾminīn* came from the *Book of Revelation*, which ʿAlī Qulī called the *Book of John* [*Kitāb-i Yūḥannā*], after the disciple to whom it is attributed. From it, he quoted an excerpt from chapter 19: "a voice reached me and said to me: 'come, for I want to show you what will happen' […] I saw the open heavens and I saw

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[112] Ibid.

[113] Ibid.

somebody riding a white horse and [he] was called faithful [*amīn*] and true [*rāst*]".[114] The

author's interpretation of this passage was the following:

And this knight must be the Commander [*Sāḥib al-amr*], because in a *ḥadīth* the Messenger said that "at the end of times a person from my kin [*az dharriyah-yi man*] will come, and his name will be my name". And since Amīn was the epithet [*laqab*] of the Messenger and since it had become commonly used (*mustaʿmal*) with the name of the Prophet, then [it follows] that he will be called Muḥammad Amīn, and so according to this *ḥadīth* the name of this holy person will also be Muḥammad Amīn. And John also said: **"he will ride a white horse and his name will be Amīn [which means, the Faithful], and he will pass judgment so that the proof be fulfilled [*bih ḥujjat tamām shudah dīvān mī kunad*], and will step forward in the Holy Fight [*bih jihād iqdām mī namāyad*] and his eyes will be filled by fire".** This is a metaphor [*kināyah*] of the wrath [*khishm*], the might [*ghaṣb*], and the anger [*rak-ī*][115] that this holy person will have at the time of his appearance. **"And on his head he will have many crowns"** alludes to the fact that, when he rises, this king will rule over all other kings and will reign over every kingdom on earth. **"And there was a name written down which nobody knew other than himself"** must be the magnificent name of God Almighty which nobody will know on that day other than this holy person. **"And he will be dressed with an outfit full of blood stains"** is a sign of the great amount of executions that he will have to carry on on the day of his coming. **"He made the word of God be mentioned [*nāmīdah mī shud kalām-i Allah*]"** means that this holy person is the Speaking Qur'an [*Qur'ān-i nāṭiq*]. **"And every army in heaven followed him"**, means that an army of angels will be there to assist him in his auspicious stirrup [*rikāb*] on the day of his appearance, and it can also indicate the coming of Jesus and his disciples, all of whom will be at the service of the commander (pbuh) on that day.[116]

Once more we can see how ʿAlī Qulī extrapolated concepts proper to Islamic soteriology to his

reading of the Book of Revelation. The reference to the speaking Qurʾān was perhaps what gave

this passage its richest character from the point of view of the Islamic tradition.

2.2.4 The covenant

Finally, no Muslim polemic against Christianity would be complete without a substantial

reference to the covenant of Abraham, and its continuation through Ismael (as opposed to Isaac).

That fact that Muslims believe that God made a covenant with Ismael, the son of Abraham and

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[114] Ibid., 299.

[115] The edition vocalizes this word as *rukī*, which could be translated as "frankness", but it seems to me that in the context rakī would be more apropiate, given that *rak* means "a grumbling through discontent of anger" (Steingass disctionary), and thus the final ī would correspond to the indefinite article as opposed to the suffix ī that is attached to adjectives to form an abstract noun. This is why I preferred to simply translate it as "anger"

[116] Ibid., 299-300.

Hagar, is sufficiently well-known to merit much discussion here. Further, we have already seen

how ʿAlī Qulī hinted at this in his section on the *wilāyah* of ʿAlī. Not surprisingly, this theme

was used by some of his contemporaries as well. In his aforementioned *risālah*, Ḥazīn-i Lāhījī

refered briefly to Hagar's journey, noting how she and her son were comforted under the shade

of a tree and were given water in the desert until they settled at Paran.[117] However, his discussion

on this lacked detail.

In contrast, ʿAlī Qulī's treatment of this topic was elaborate. He began by alluding to the

covenant in *Genesis* 18, and by arguing that Jerome Xavier –and Christian theologians in

general– had misinterpreted its sense. His objection was the following:

[…] Christians say that this covenant [implied that] Abraham (pbuh) would have many children and that amongst his offspring there would be prophets and masters of the law, all of whom would worship God. [Also], that this covenant would come into being in the religion and prophecy of Moses, Aaron, and of all the prophets of the House of Israel, and that it would be completed through the religion of Jesus (pbuh), and continue [to be valid eversince]. But the refutation of this interpretation is [the following]: any mention in the covenant of the number of sons that Abraham had and of the religion and the prophets that came into existence through them [should imply that], just as some prophets came from [the sons of] Isaac, the youngest son of Abraham, and just as the religion was entrusted to them; likewise, [some prophets would come] as well from [the kin of] Ismael, who was also the son of the friend of God [Abraham]. However, since he [Ismael] was the eldest son, we should pay more attention to his case, since [other] prophets would also come into existence through him, and each of them would adorn their worshipping rituals [*ʿibādat*] and those of the rest of God's servants with the ornaments of religion [*va har kudām bih zuyūr-i dīnī rū-yi ʿibādat-i khūd va sāyir-i bandagān-i Khudā rā biyārāyand*]. God Almighty does not specifically mention every single son of Abraham, but says in general terms [*bih lafẓ-i ʿām*] that "this covenant which I now establish between you and me, will be [valid] for you and for your children after you until the end of times". Therefore, [it follows that] anything that comes into being through Isaac and his sons, according to this belief, should also come into being through Ismael and his sons. However, Christians and Jews have rejected this by saying that no religion and no prophecy have come from Ismael and his sons. Despite his honor and grandeur, they have concluded that he should not even be counted among the pious. Thus, it is clear that if Christians indeed suscibed to this interpretation of the covenant –since it is not in the taste of their sect to account for both tribes [that of Isaac and Ismael]– that the foundations of their accursed sect would be destroyed. And given the closeness [between Christians and Jews], the foundations of the Jewish sect would be even more wretched [*kharābtar gashtah*], falling close to unbelief [*az bī-madhhabī dar bi-dar khvāhand āftād*]. Therefore, it is inevitable that they should either renounce this sect, or become aware of the fallacious nature of this interpretation that they make [of the covenant].[118]

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[117] Ḥazīn-i Lāhījī, *Rasāʾil-i Ḥazīn-i Lāhījī,* 110-1.

[118] Ibid., 318-9.

In contrast to the Jewish and Christian rejection of Ismael, ʿAlī Qulī noted how Muslims had accepted Prophet Muhammad, who was directly linked by blood to Ismael.

He discussed the Christian interpretation of the right of Moses to the Promised Land, arguing that Christians believed that the tribe of Moses became entitled to the entire Levant and its surroundings precisely through the covenant of Abraham. However, ʿAlī Qulī argued that such a promise should extend to all the descendents of Abraham and not just to the kin of Isaac. Further, in his view, biblical evidence suggested that the Levant was not meant for Moses (nor for his descendants). To prove this, he resorted to *Deuteronomy* 34, where Moses was comforted by God in the land of Moab (as opposed to the Levant), the location of which remained uncertain.[119]

Until this point, our author had added little to the standard Muslim view on Ismael. However, for the rest of his debate he brought about less common arguments, including his specifically Shīʿī position on this issue. He noted how according to the foundations of his new faith:

[…] from the time when God Almighty made this covenant with Abraham (pbuh) until today, and from today until the Day of Resurrection, the Earth had not and will not be void of any proof [*ḥujjat*] that had come from the children of Abraham. And thus [the position of the Shīʿīs is also that] they believe through absolute faith [*īmān-i tamām*] and firm devotion [*ikhlāṣ-i muḥakam*] that at this time, the *Mahdī*, the Lord of the Age [*ṣāḥib al-zamān*] is standing firmly by Abraham's side, and is occult [*dar ghayb ast*] in the the land of God, but will [come to] bring order over everything on this Earth [*ṣāḥib-i ikhtiyār-i hamah-yi rū-yi zamīn mī bāshad*]. Yet, God Amighty's promise is that every land is Canaan: for in chapter thirteen of this same book [*Genesis*] God Almighty promised to Abraham that all the land of the habitable quarter [of the Earth] was given to the dominion of Abraham and his children. And from the most minute appendixes of this thirteenth chapter which I [ʿAlī Qulī] have verified, it is evident that at the time of the appearance of the government of the Lord of the Age –that is, the *Mahdī* (pbuh)– every pious person who had died in exhile ever since the children of Abraham –that is, anyone who had died during the time of the *fitrah*– will be resurrected, and the entire Earth will be at the service of its Master an under His domain, and –God willing– an age of well-being will come to the Earth […][120]

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[119] Ibid., 319.

[120] Ibid., 320.

What this passage meant was that through the covenant, God had promised Abraham to expand his territory to all inhabited quarters of the Earth at that time and by extension to every populated land thereafter. This represented the universal nature of the Prophetic message and of the sovereignty of God. However, our author added another layer to this passage by acerting that the *Mahdī* would be in charge of fulfilling the sense of this message. He would surrender every land to the will of the Almighty and those who were exhiled for their faith would be rewarded on the Day of Judgment.

Having thus set the tone for his Shīʿī reading of this passage, ʿAlī Qulī proceeded to debate the implications of the circumsicion of Abraham. He did not deny that it was a sign of a covenant. However, while he had previously argued that the covenant mentioned by Isaiah was not the same as the one in *Genesis*; he now argued that the covenant of the circumcision was a continuity of that of Noah in *Genesis* 9. He reprimanded Christians for believing that prophets before Abraham did not practice circumcision. He noted that Christians believed this due to the lack of any mention of circumcision in *Genesis* 9. He then accused Jerome Xavier of having forged a passage in *Genesis* 17:26 which stated that Abraham and Ismael were ninety and thirteen respectively at the time of their circumcisions. Our author considered this a forgery because it would have suggested that circumcising boys seven days after birth was not the standard practice before. And he condemned this idea saying:

We seek refuge from this act of disbelief [*kufr*] that this accursed man [Jerome Xavier] has written; because regarding Christian belief, [it is written] everywhere that prophets before Abraham did not circumcise, because [otherwise] it would follow that this covenant, which is the same covenant that God had made with Noah and his sons did entail the circumcision of Noah and his sons. But [Jerome] made it clear that this [other] covenant [meaning, Noah's] did not entail any circumcision.[121]

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[121] Ibid.

He argued that this interpretation was problematic because there was no indication in the

scriptures suggesting that the covenant of Noah had ever been broken or invalidated:

> […] we do not read in any of the Christian books that this covenant between God and the family of Abraham was transgressed by them and been tranfered to anyone else [as a result]. [On the contrary], the *Book of Genesis* [implies] that it remains well-established and obligatory. This would mean that this circumcision would be different from that [other] covenant. Therefore, by departing from this covenant and from the circumcision in their evil disposition and by forbidding the religion that invented this [Judaism], Christians have overlooked God's command […][122]

Having noted how the covenants of Noah and Abraham were one and the same, ʿAlī Qulī

emphasized that circumcision remained a duty for all Muslims, and that its avoidance would

attract the wrath of God and of the fourteen innocent (or unsinful) ones [*maʿṣūm*; meaning the

Prophet, Fāṭimah, and the Twelve Imams].[123] In this –he argued–, Christians had made the

mistake of believing that Jesus had the power to abrogate the obligation of circumcision. And

just as he had done in the section on *wilāyah*, ʿAlī Qulī offered his translation of *Matthew* 5 as a

proof that this was not the case:

> Oh, people of mine! Do not think that I have come here to put aside the religion of the prophets and all of what they have said. Do not think either that I have come to annul the rulings of Moses (pbuh) and those that the prophets before him had revelead on behalf of the Creator. It is not thus, but rather that I have come to fulfill whatever has been revealed as a ruling by the Creator in the religion of Moses and of all other prophets […].[124]

Yet, perhaps the most interesting aspect of this section is the next parallelism that ʿAlī

Qulī established between the Bible and the Islamic tradition. He concentrated on a passage from

Ezekiel 32 in which God condemns the Pharaoh as a sign of the defeat of ʿUmar at the hands of

ʿAlī. In this case, ʿAlī Qulī seemed to recur once again to a vague accusation of *taḥrīf*: he did not

just suggest that the passage should be interpreted this way, but he implied that it had been

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[122] Ibid., 321-2.

[123] Ibid., 323.

[124] Ibid., 325.

originally written that way. He introduced the quote saying that God spoke, not to the Pharaoh, but to ʿUmar b. al-Khattāb, saying: "You too will be ruined among the uncircumcised, and Edom and his kings and servants will be killed by the sword with all his armies: you and Rome and all of its kings and all of those who did not practice this custom [circumcision]. And thus they all descended to the very bottom of hell."[125] As we can see, the subtle way in which this quote was dealt with males it difficult to know whether ʿAlī Qulī was implying that the text had been actually altered, or whether he was just suggesting that the text should be interpreted in a way that would be more in tune with a Shīʿī reading of the covenant of Abraham.

2.2.5 Conclusion: *Taḥrīf ad infinitum?*

I noted earlier how Hava Lazarus-Yafeh had already identified cases of *dalāʾil al-nubuwwah* in which the authors misquoted the Bible or misrepresented Christian exegetical arguments to prove their points.[126] I also mentioned how he concluded that –in the case of Muslim-born authors– these flawed quotations or biased interpretations could have been the result of a lack of direct knowledge of Jewish and Christian scriptures by early Muslim commentators, since many of them only knew these traditions through oral accounts. In contrast, in the case of converts who were learned in the scriptural tradition of their previous faiths, misrepresentation of the Bible was rather a deliberate attempt to discredit Jewish and Christian exegesis in favor of a Muslim one.[127]

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[125] Ibid., 326.

[126] Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 82-3.

[127] Ibid., 119.

As we have seen through our brief summary of the history of the circulation of religious knowledge and translation projects during the Early Modern period, by the late seventeenth century in Iran a certain number of Arabic and Persian translations of the Bible (albethey partial in some cases) had been available to certain Muslim scholarly elites. More work should be done to assess the extent of the circulation of such translations and of the actual knowledge of them by Muslim commentators, both Muslim by birth or converts. A detailed study of these works' manuscripts and colophons might be needed to determine how often these Bibles were copied and by whom. This could give us a better idea about the question of the ʿulamāʾ access to them. If we take at face-value Lāhījī's claim that he consulted multiple manuscripts of the Torah for his discussion of the Paraclete and –as we saw in the past chapter– that he actually studied the scriptures with Armenian priests and Rabbis, then it would seem that Muslim scholars were indeed acquiring more direct knowledge of Jewish and Christian scriptures and exegetical traditions. However, even in his case, the persistence of standard references to themes the Paraclete should be taken as a sign that, for all the potential for new discussions that the translation projects represented, direct access to Christian sources by Muslim scholars remained by and large a limited phenomenon. As such, it seems that converts like ʿAlī Qulī still had an edge over Muslim-born ʿulamāʾ even if the latter were indeed starting to breach the knowledge gap at least through partial Arabic translations.

In our case-study, ʿAlī Qulī's claim to authority was definitely based on his detailed knowledge of Jewish and Christian scriptures. To a certain extent also, he also followed the ancient tradition of convert polemicists of purposely misrepresenting such scriptures. However, what is interesting here is that he did not base his polemic on the widespread use of this rhetorical strategy. While he occasionally used some charged words in his translation of biblical

passages to make a case for his interpretation –such as the word *imāmat* as we saw–, his main polemical arguments were based on exegesis and on the claim that contemporary European translators had tampered with the original sources.

In his sections on the Paraclete and on the *wilāyah* of Imam ʿAlī, ʿAlī Qulī seemed to adopt a purely exegetical approach to interreligious polemics whereby only the interpretation of the text was challenged but not the integrity of text itself. However, in his section on the proofs of *rajʿa* and to a lesser extent in his section on the covenant he introduced the idea of *taḥrīf* in the biblical text.

What distinguishes ʿAlī Qulī's opera from other works of the polemical tradition is precisely that he redefined the notion of *taḥrīf* in such a way that, to a certain extent at least, he legitimized the original biblical text itself –which would be thus free of corruption– and redirected the blame of tampering on the likes of Jerome Xavier. Further, he also briefly entertained the possibility of a misreading by Fatimah in the section on *rajʿa*, although this is far from being equivalent to textual tampering. In the next chapters we will be able to see that he did extend this accusation of excercising *taḥrīf* to Saint Paul in order to discredit Christianity while rescuing certain principles of the Jewish tradition. But overall most of his accusations are directed against the Jesuit missionary. Thus, the logical consequence of his reinterpretation of *taḥrīf* is the following: if the perpetrators of *taḥrīf* were neither the evangelists nor the assemblers of the canonical text, but rather the later European translators; it would follow that the caution with which early Medieval Muslim scholars treated the original biblical text should apply primarily to translations, whereas the original sources should be trusted (with the exception of Paul's letters, as we will later see). As a consequence of this –and to a certain extent more in tune with the tradition inaugurated by al-Biqāʿī, whereby the Bible could by used even as a tool

of *tafsīr*– ʿAlī Qulī suggested that the biblical text could and should be used by Muslims given that –in its purest version, which would not available to those lacking philological training– it contained traces of the Divine Truth. This line of thinking put him at an advantage as an intellectual authority for his knowledge of the Bible and allowed him to compensate for any shortcomings he might have had in his knowledge of the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*.

Chapter 3
Defending Islam: Refuting Guadagnoli and the Foundations of Christian *mores*

Throughout the previous chapter we examined the way in which ʿAlī Qulī's *Sayf al-mūʾminīn* fits into the genre of *dalāʾil al-nubuwwah*. In its selective interweaving of motifs and arguments known to classical works in defense of Islam from within but more importantly from without, *Sayf al-mūʾminīn*'s distinct theological dimensions become apparent. In the examples quoted so far, the polemic strategy in this work consists more of validating Islam through alleged prophecies about it in the Bible, rather than of delegitimizing Christianity. We have found of course some occasional accusations of *taḥrīf* and some exegetical features, which allowed ʿAlī Qulī to justify an Islamic reading of Christian scriptures. However, we have not seen any comprehensive attacks on Christianity from the point of view of its moral conducts, its broader theological claims, its institutions, or its ritual practices. These aspects of his work will be explored throughout the present chapter. For this, we will look at a series of sections in *Sayf al-mūʾminīn* which –for our own analytical purposes– will be organized in three groups: one comprising matters of doctrine –that is, what in Islamic terms would loosely correspond to ʿaqīdah–, another regarding religious rituals –or in Islamic terms, ʿibādāt–, and a third one regarding social interaction –that is, something similar to the Islamic *muʿāmalāt*– and legal issues. Given that ʿAlī Qulī's work was not really conceived as a work on law, I will often use the term "quasi-legal" or "legalistic" to refer to those sections that have common features with legal discourse and methodology.

Evidently, since this taxonomy of the sections was not made by ʿAlī Qulī himself, it will appear obvious to the reader that certain passages could have potentially been placed into more than one of the thematic sections listed above. The same could be said indeed about the artificial differentiation between sections "defending Islam" and those "attacking Christianity". Yet,

thinking in these terms of practice/ doctrine should help us classify and assess our author's major preoccupations.

Section 1: Matters of Doctrine

1.1 Refutation of Guadagnoli

Let us first focus on our author's refutation of the major claims advanced by Filippo Guadagnoli in his *Apologia pro Christiana Religione*. While this section of ʿAlī Qulī's work is – as the rest of the book for that matter– abstract and theoretical, insofar as it deals with theological issues, it is also –because of its direct reference to Guadagnoli– one of the most easily *historicizable* ones: in it ʿAlī Qulī briefly revisited the genesis of his debate, identifying not only the contribution of Jerome Xavier –as we have already seen in various occasions– but also that of Aḥmad b. ʿAlawī al-ʿĀmilī's (known also as Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn) refutation of the latter, and that of Filippo Guadagnoli's work as a third layer to this refutation debate.

Having noted these contextual details, let us now consider the content of the text. ʿAlī Qulī started by discussing a claim from the first chapter of Guadagnoli's book, in which the Italian scholar allegedly said:

The Muhammad of the Arabs invented a religion that bans idol-worshipping and orders that only God be worshipped; yet at the same time he teaches idol worshipping. And he also issued an order [*firmān*] –although the accursed father [i.e. Guadagnoli] does not say in which book[1]– saying that on Friday they [Muslims] should glorify [Him], and he ordered that on that day, just like in ancient idolatry [*bih dastūr-i but-parastī-yi qadīm*], everyone, male or female, should strip off their clothes and dance together.[2]

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[1] This is ʿAlī Qulī's own ellipsis

[2] Jadīd al-Islām, *Sayf al-mū'minīn*, 188.

ʿAlī Qulī then continued to show how Guadagnoli considered the Muslim proclamation of faith –
the *shahādah*– as an extension of this deviancy, since he understood the idea of acknowledging
Muhammad as the Messenger of God as *shirk* (polytheism).

ʿAlī Qulī first refuted the claim that Islam encouraged naked ritual dancing. He accused
Guadagnoli of linking this practice to the well-known passage in *Genesis* 9 where Noah gets
drunk. As we will see later in more detail when discussing wine drinking, ʿAlī Qulī considered
that passage as a forgery from Jerome Xavier, which would in turn invalidate Guadagnoli's
scriptural argument.[3]

To better refute Guadagnoli's interpretation of the *shahādah,* ʿAlī Qulī resorted to a
parable. He narrated the story of a woman who befriended Satan: one day the woman's husband
asked her whether she would approve of him enlisting in the army at a time when the king
needed men to defend their land from foreign enemies. She asked for three days to reflect on the
matter. During this time, she asked Satan whether her husband was likely to be killed in the
battlefield should he decide to go to war. Satan answered with a letter, the meaning of which she
interpreted as a guarantee that her husband would return alive. The husband then went to war and
was killed by the enemy. She returned to Satan in grief and asked him why he had deceived her,
to which the latter answered that it was her who had misread his letter. She had read it thus:
"You will go and come back, you will not die at the battle" [*mī-ravī mī-ayī, namī-mīrī dar jang*].
Satan then revealed that she should have put the emphasis on a different syllable to understand
the real meaning of the letter: "You will go and not come back, you will die at the battle" [*mī-
ravī mī-ayī nah, mī-mīrī dar jang*].[4] ʿAlī Qulī then compared Guadagnoli to the woman of the

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[3] Ibid., 189.

[4] Ibid., 191-2.

story, for being equally blinded by Satan and being unable to properly understand the subtleties of the Arabic language and for interpreting the *shahādah* as *shirk*.

A similar critique was then applied to Guadagnoli's claim that no one but God could know the interpretation of the Qur'an. Guadagnoli relied for his interpretation on the phrase "*mā yaʿlamu taʾwīlahu illā Allah*" [no one knows its interpretation except God]. ʿAlī Qulī argued that Guadagnoli had left the Qur'anic reference incomplete, omitting the phrase "*wa-l-rāsikhūn fī-l-ʿilm*" [and those who are rooted in knowledge].[5]

And finally, our author tied the discussion on the meaning of *rāsikhūn fī-l-ʿilm* with a seemingly gratuitous –yet profoundly significant– comparison between Sunnism and Christianity. He used his critique of Guadagnoli as a pretext to accuse Sunnis of engaging in similarly selective readings of the Qur'an. For him, Sunni refusal to accept the teachings of the Imams was akin to Guadagnoli's deliberate choice to ignore the statement "*rāsikhūn fī-l-ʿilm*".[6] This analogy between Sunni and Christian misreading of the scriptures and how that had led them to ignore the sense of the original doctrines was anything but banal. It highlighted the sectarian political dynamic of the late seventeenth/early eighteenth century, when Safavid rule faced major internal and external challenges. During this time, Sunni Muslim groups were viewed by some of the court's *ʿulamāʾ* as a menace to the Shiite foundations of Iran and to Safavid political power. I will delve into this in the next chapter, where I will explore ʿAlī Qulī's stance on Sufism.

1.2 On Guadagnoli's inquiry into Muhammad's *daʿwah*

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[5] Ibid., 193.

[6] Ibid.

In a section titled *Afkār-i Filīp-i Pādirī dar bāri-yi baʿthat va daʿvat-i Muḥammad* (*Filippo's thoughts on Muhammad's Prophetic Mission and Preaching*), our author addressed Guadagnoli's questions regarding the authenticity of a number of accounts that made up the Prophet's biography, the *al-Sīrah al-nabawwiyah*. Guadagnoli was keen on showing that Muhammad's message had no divine basis and was, hence, a fabrication. He thus started "investigating" whether Muhammad's revelation was purely a product of his state of madness (*dīvānigī*) and he tried to "establish" whether Muhammad had indulged in pagan practices during his youth.[7] In response, ʿAlī Qulī questioned once again Guadagnoli's knowledge of Arabic philology, casting doubt on his ability to deal with Islamic scriptures because all his knowledge of Arabic amounted to nothing more than what he had learnt hastily in Rome. ʿAlī Qulī then discredited Guadagnoli as a mouthpiece for the devil, who took the message of Satan, "his helper" [*muʿāvin-i khūd*] wherever he went: from Rome to India, Uzbekistan, and the Maghreb.[8]

Following suit, our author then sought to correct some of the inaccurate claims that Guadagnoli had advanced against Muhammad. Among these was the idea that Halima, the Prophet's wet nurse, took care of him and raised him until the age of sixteen, whereas Muslim scholars had established that he only stayed with her until the age of four. Another misrepresentation of the scripture was that Muhammad was an idolater before reaching the age of forty. Muslims (in this case Shiite Muslims) –ʿAlī Qulī noted– believed that all prophets from the time of Adam had been monotheists.[9] And finally, our author addressed Guadagnoli's accusation that Muhammad had converted people from faithful worshippers of the Trinity into a

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[7] Ibid., 583.

[8] Ibid., 586.

[9] Ibid., 587-8.

dubious kind of monotheism based on "one false God" (*yak Khudā-yi durūgh*).[10] Our author

referred back to his own *Hidāyat al-ḍāllīn*, where he had refuted –through a detailed textual

analysis of the scriptures– the idea that any of the prophets of the Old Testament had ever said

anything even slightly related to the Trinity.[11]

1.3 The Satanic Verses

Under a section titled *Khabar-i gharānīq va ishkāl-i Filīp-i Pādirī va naqd-i mu'allif*

(*The Satanic Verses, the Doubts of Filippo and the Authors' Critique*) ʿAlī Qulī argued that

based on Jerome Xavier's rendition of the *Book of Genesis* in all its existing versions, God was

pleased with Lot, Abraham, and Jacob, all of whom had worshipped various creatures prior to

converting to monotheism. Christians, he insisted, recognized this fact and still accepted these

men as prophets of God. Our author then wondered why Guadagnoli was so overzealous in

condemning Muhammad and discrediting his prophecy for having allegedly worshipped other

deities before the age of forty.

ʿAlī Qulī argued against Guadagnoli, who saw in Muhammad's practice of ritual

prostration a sign of paganism. In trying to prove his viewpoint, Guadagnoli cited *Sūrat al-Ḥajj*

(22:52): "And We did not send before you any messenger or prophet except that when he spoke

[or recited], Satan threw into it [some misunderstanding]. But Allah abolishes that which Satan

throws in; then Allah makes precise His verses. And Allah is Knowing and Wise."[12] ʿAlī Qulī

could not deny this interpretation entirely but he insisted that only scholars in the Sunni tradition

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[10] Ibid., 589.

[11] Ibid; to strengthen his case, ʿAlī Qulī recapitulates the main arguments that he had made on this regard in his *Hidāyat al-ḍālīn*, but it is beyond the scope of our study to delve into them. See Jadīd al-Islām, *Sayf al-mū'minīn*, 590-604.

[12] Ibid., 621; translation of the *ayah* from the *Saḥīḥ* International Version

would take this *āyah* to mean that Muhammad was seeking purification through ritual. At the same time, he noted that if indeed biblical prophets had engaged in the same ritual, it would be hypocritical for Guadagnoli to denounce it only in relation to Muhammad. He also accused the Italian writer of attributing error and misguidance to Muhammad simply for having practiced ritual prostration (*ān sajdah sahwan būdah ast*).[13] ʿAlī Qulī argued that Muhammad can be excused for partaking in this ritual before the revelation of the Qur'an. However, if the biblical text were to be accepted at face value, there would be no excuse for the biblical prophets' engagement in similar practices.[14]

ʿAlī Qulī then ended his discussion by relying once again on one of the strategies known to the *dalā'il al-nubuwwah* genre, that is, by finding evidence for Muhammad's prophethood in the biblical text. This time he quoted from *Isaiah* 53: "By his knowledge, this righteous (*maʿṣūm*) servant will justify many and will carry their sins upon his shoulders, and therefore I will grant him many children, and he will take a share from the spoils that he seizes from the brave ones [*shujʿān*], for he poured his soul among the dead and was counted among the sinners".[15] He saw this passage as evidence that the Seal of Prophets would be able to carry the weight of sinners, which meant that the Prophet of Islam would be the one who would redeem humanity through his revelation.

ʿAlī Qulī then presented his "correction" of Guadagnoli's interpretation of *Sūrat al-Ḥajj* quoting from *Hosea* 13[16]: "Samaria shall perish, because they have embittered their God, so they shall succumb to the sword; and their children will be snatched and the wombs of their pregnant

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[13] Ibid., 622.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid., 622-3.

[16] He mistakenly says *Hosea* 14

women will be ripped apart".[17] He argued that, just as this passage referred to the people of

Samaria and not to the walls, the alleys or streets of the city; the same applied to the statements

in *Sūrat al-Ḥajj*: one should understand the precise meaning of its metaphors and figures of

speech before attempting to draw a conclusion about the references to Allah, Satan, and the

Prophet in this verse.[18]

Our author then concluded that Jerome Xavier, in portraying Jacob bowing to his brother

Esau, had invited his audience to embrace Saint Paul's doctrines indiscriminately. Curiously, he

drew an analogy between these doctrines and those known to Sufism, particularly Ibn ʿArabī's

unity of existence (*waḥdat al-wujūd*). He saw a sign of adherence to this doctrine in the words

that Jacob uttered to Esau: "take this blessing [*raḥmat*] that God gave me at the time when he

gave me everything".[19] ʿAlī Qulī indicted Xavier for having his readers believe that God had

revealed all knowledge to Jacob to the point to which this prophet had become undistinguishable

from God. Such a view, he insisted, was tantamount to blasphemy.[20] This is all the more

significant because, as we will be able to see in the next chapter, our author would use similar

examples to link his criticism of Sufism with his anti-Christian writings.

1.4 Confronting Guadagnoli's attack on intra-Muslim sectarianism

In another section called *Ishkāl-i dīgar-i Filīp bih Musalmānān va pāsukh-i ān* (*Other*

Objections of Filippo and the Responses to Them) ʿAlī Qulī cited Guadagnoli reproaching

Muslims for the great number of internal conflicts that the Islamic world had experienced

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[17] Ibid., 623.

[18] Ibid., 623.

[19] Ibid., 624.

[20] Ibid.

throughout its history. Guadagnoli emphasized the successive struggles between ʿUthmān and ʿAlī, ʿAlī and Muʿāwiyah, and between the latter and Ḥasan, the son of ʿAlī.[21] ʿAlī Qulī did not try to deny the existence of such schisms. Rather, he embraced the "righteous" and "virtuous" struggles of the Shiites, exalting the merits of martyrdom and denouncing the corrupt faith of the first three caliphs and of the Umayyad dynasty. Furthermore, he equated the sacrifice of the Shīʿī martyrs with that of the "prophets of the Banī Isrāʾīl", such as Zacharias, John the Baptist, and Jesus. He also confronted the question of internal schisms effectively, comparing intra-Muslim sectarian violence with the past strife between Catholics, Jacobites, and Nestorians; or with the more recent altercations between Catholics, Lutherans, Calvinists, and Schismatics (Armenians).[22]

1.5 On the necessity of Muslim-Christian/Jewish Enmity

Another discussion that ʿAlī Qulī brought forward was that of the necessity of Muslim enmity against Jews and Christians (*Luzūm-i dushmanī-yi Musalmānān bā Yahūd va Naṣārā*). To justify his view he evoked the infamous *topos* of the blood-libel, whereby Jews would allegedly drink Christian blood on Passover. ʿAlī Qulī turned to a modified version of this ritual with the variant that, in his version, it was Muslim blood that the Jews would drink. He offered a detailed description of how Jews would hunt down Muslims to sacrifice them on the night of the Jewish Holy celebration (*ʿīd*), and claimed that if they could not find a Muslim to kill, their priests

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[21] Ibid., 640.

[22] Ibid., 641.

would authorize them to go and collect Muslim blood from any place where it might have been spilt.[23]

Another way in which 'Alī Qulī legitimized Muslim enmity toward Jews and Christians was by turning to passages like *Ecclesiasticus* 44:

Let us praise these glorious men and the sons of their kin, for it is upon [this kin] that God Almighty has bestowed his glory and his greatness; for since the beginning of times He created them to be rulers, so that they would bring His message [to humanity]. And having honored them with the robe of prophethood, He gave this Truth-bearing nation –that is, the Banī Isrā'īl– the power to rule. And He gave them understanding and power, and through [the prophets] He sent them many of His Holy words –that is, His books–, for these are the ones who have inquired [*taftīsh namūdan*] into all the sciences [*'ulūm*] through knowledge [*'ilm*] and through their own experience; and they are the ones who have interpreted the Holy verses for the people. Thus, they are the people who have all the good qualities of statesmanship, and all good endeavors are with them. They rule with justice in their houses and the glory befalls upon their dynasty. For this, they were praised in their time and whoever was born from them was given their good name so that others would praise them.[24]

Both Christians and Jews, he noted, asserted the authority of their preachers as the interpreters of the Holy verses, and those endowed with the power to rule. The sole fact that both Christians and Jews accepted this passage sufficed in 'Alī Qulī's mind to justify Muslim enmity against Jews and Christians, given that this passage would put the latter religions in a position of superiority over all others.[25] This passage is a Greek translation from Hebrew, which Jerome himself had rendered into Latin. 'Alī Qulī criticized Jerome Xavier for having included this passage in his text, stressing that it was a direct message from God to Solomon. Thus, our author addressed here once again the question of the legitimacy of accessing original sources. He reproached Jerome for not using the original Hebrew text, which would put into question the accuracy of his translation. Moreover, there would seem to be a contradiction between 'Alī Qulī unequivocal call for enmity between Muslims and the People of the Book and his reliance on their scriptures as

[23] Ibid., 655-6.

[24] Ibid., 656-7.

[25] Ibid.

indicators of the coming of Islam. However, it seems to me that what he sought to do was to divorce the scriptures from their adherents, and when he came across passages that were difficult to fit into his line of thinking and doctrine, he dismissed them as examples of *taḥrīf* or as inaccuracies in Jerome's translation, like in the case above.

Moreover, as we can begin to see in these passages, the attacks on Saint Paul began to surface, which would necessarily imply that our author did not consider the letters of Paul to share the legitimacy of the Hebrew texts of the Old Testament. Therefore, it would seem that in the treatment of Paul's text, ʿAlī Qulī would adhere to a definition of *taḥrīf* that was more in tune with the classical polemic tradition, namely that of considering the biblical text *itself* as a product of tampering, and not just the later translations of it. We should keep this in mind for all future references to Paul.

Section 2: Acts of Worship (*ʿibadāt)*

2.1 Iconoclasm versus Idolatry

ʿAlī Qulī then embarked on a critique of image-crafting and the rituals associated with it, in order to provide a proof of idolatry in Christianity. He addressed this issue in two sections of the *Sayf al-mū'minīn*, entitled respectively *Muqāyasah-yi but-parastī-yi Masīḥiyān va Hindiyān* (*Comparing Idolatry in Hinduism and Christianity*) and *Sūrat-sāzī dar Masīḥiyat* (*Image-crafting in Christianity*). As I noted in the introduction to this chapter, ʿAlī Qulī did not draw any real division between doctrine and practice when discussing objectionable acts. The following section is perhaps the best example of this feature: even when his critique was theologically framed, it extended to matters of ritual practice. ʿAlī Qulī started by accusing Christians of hypocrisy for condemning the Hindus as idolaters while espousing similar practices themselves:

[…] how come [Christians] curse other idol-worshipers like themselves, such as the Hindu tribes, while the Hindus curse them [in return]? And if a third [group], like the tribe of the Muslims, came forward to curse these two tribes [Hindus and Christians], neither of these would assume the curse for itself; but rather each one of them would accuse the other of having done the cursing and would deny having anything to do with it. This is equivalent to [an example in which] two dogs enter a house, and when the owner of the house notices them, in order to [prevent] them from contaminating [*najis kardan*] anything in the house, he shouts at them "chikh, chikh". Then the dogs look at each other and say "Chikh is your name, I have nothing to do with this". Each one replies to the other in the same way and they quarrel until the owner of the house explicitly says "both of you are Chikh". In the same way, every time that Muslims curse idolatry, Christians say that Hindus are the idolaters and Hindus say that Christians are the idolaters; but in reality the cursing that Muslims have pronounced –and continue to do so– against idolatry applies to both.[26]

And he then added that: " […] [Christians] turn a blind eye [to the fact that] keeping idols in their churches for the purpose of worship [*dar bāb-i ʿibādāt*] is very close to giving a good name to Hindu idolatry [*but-parastī-yi Hindū rā nīk-nām bikunand*]".[27]

Thus, ʿAlī Qulī attempted to equate Hindu and Christian practices. He rejected the justification that Christians give for their practices –namely, that such images are only representations of God–. In his mind, Christian arguments for their practices were no better than Hindu ones. Furthermore, he believed that image-crafting –whether in paintings or in statues– contravened one of God's mandates: "do not build anything that represents (or is similar) to anything else [*masāzīd barā-yi khūd shabīh-i hīch chīzī*], be it similar to anything in heaven or under it, to anything on earth or under it, or under the seas, and do not worship anything other than Me, for I alone am your God."[28]

Apart from the rather transparent nature of ʿAlī Qulī's arguments here, there is a rhetorical and logical dimension of his critique, which can easily be overlooked. ʿAlī Qulī's attempt to link together idolatry in Hinduism and Christianity followed an analogic line of reasoning that allowed him to compare the beliefs of both religious groups at large and to draw

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[26] Ibid., 440-1.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid., 442.

conclusions about Christianity based on what he claimed was present in Hinduism. This reveals

his familiarity with the structure of legal arguments and theological forms of reasoning. But, I

will delve into this later.

ʿAlī Qulī then analyzed Christian scriptural justifications for crafting images, in order to

prove Christians' confusion and error:

"[…] if image-crafting is forbidden somewhere [in our books], and yet it is ordered elsewhere, therefore they [Christians] do not understand the point of this chapter and [for them] image-crafting and maintenance would not be idolatry but rather an exemplification of God's mandate which their prophet spoke about."[29]

Thus, Christians justified image-crafting on the basis that both Moses and Solomon had edified

statues. ʿAlī Qulī proceeded to examine whether this view could be substantiated, turning to the

biblical passages quoted by Christians as alleged proofs of the permissibility of statue-building

and of painting. The first such passage came from *Exodus* 31:

I show you a character by the name of Bezalel son of Uri from the tribe of the Jews. And I have filled it with the Spirit of God and with knowledge and wisdom [*ʿilm va dānāyī*] in all the works so that it could pretend to possess everything that he wants to build out of gold, silver, copper, marble, gems or wood; and I have given him a partner by the name of Aholiab son of Ahisamach from the tribe of the Dan, and I have bestowed knowledge in the hearts of all of those who have been instructed to build the Tent of Meeting and the Ark of the Testimony so that the tent can cover the ark instead of a cloth.[30]

The second passage came from chapter 15 from the same book: "when you build the Ark of the

Covenant, place it over a golden pedestal so that it would be its headpiece, and on the two sides

of the pedestal put two [statues] of angels made of gold so that they adorn the flanks of the

pedestal with their poles".[31]

ʿAlī Qulī pointed to the apparent contradiction between these passages, and blamed it

once again on tampering by Jerome Xavier:

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[29] Ibid., 443.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid., 443-4.

So it is firmly established that in every one of the books that Jerome translated, in many places God Almighty unequivocally says 'do not build images'; and all the prophets that came to this world avoided image-crafting. [Thus] this is a contextual indication [*qarīnah*] that this [passages authorizing image-crafting] are forgeries of the accursed Jerome and the Pope of Rome.[32]

The use of terms such as *qarīnah* by ʿAlī Qulī reveal a will to incorporate in his polemical project the methods and tools of traditional Islamic disciplines. As Wael Hallaq has noted, the term in question in its ordinary use simply means a "verbal or non-verbal element clarifying a part of speech extraneous to itself".[33] However, in legal theory it is a technical term that alludes to "the linguistic interpretation of the texts, and the knowledge that these texts, especially prophetic traditions, impart".[34] Thus, while in some cases the word *qarīnah* refers only to the series of contextual indicators in a text that can help determine the intended meaning of an ambiguous term, in other cases it refers to indicators that can help in the evaluation of textual sources of the law, such as the hadith. The latter sense of the word *qarīnah* (pl. qarā'in) is known as *qarā'in al-aḥwāl*. A good example would be the sum of all the biographical data on a hadith transmitter that can help assess his reliability by the examination of his moral integrity, judgment, and knowledge. The presence of strong *qarā'in* of this kind are, for some jurists, a necessary condition to accept solitary hadith reports (*khabar al-wāḥid*) as sound hadith.[35]

What ʿAlī Qulī did in the passage above was to treat the Biblical text almost as if it were a hadith, and evaluate it with the same criteria. This allowed him to dismiss this particular passage given that all the *qarā'in al-aḥwāl* surrounding the figure of Jerome Xavier would render him unreliable. In a strange way too, we could say that the *qarā'in* surrounding the figure

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[32] Ibid., 445.

[33] Wael B. Hallaq, "Notes on the Term *qarīna* in Islamic Legal Discourse," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 108, no. 3 (July-September, 1988): 475.

[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibd., 178-9.

of ʿAlī Qulī can help us justify this reading and this legalistic interpretation of his subtle use of the word *qarīnah*.

Finally, ʿAlī Qulī concluded this section by saying that the only thing true to the text was God's prohibition of image-crafting.[36] Further, even if the above passages were to be recognized as God's message –ʿAlī Qulī argued–, this would still not justify the way in which Christians prayed to these images. This was because nowhere in the text did God order Moses or Salomon to craft images and statues of angels to be placed in altars for the purpose of worship. What was permitted –according to our author– was to adorn the Ark of the Covenant, and that was why –in abiding with this logic– a certain kind of ornamentation was later permitted in mosques.[37] Finally, our author closed his argument against images by bringing forward a passage from the *Second Book of Kings* 18 in which Hezekiah smashed the gold snakes made by Moses and removed the sacred poles and all other signs that could be used in idolatry.[38]

ʿAlī Qulī then addressed the Christian objection to Muslims prostrating before the Kaʿbah, a practice, which Christians saw as idolatry or, at least, as a ritual equivalent of praying to the images of saints. His reply was that such a comparison was not accurate because Christians named every image after the specific person (a saint) they were intended to resemble.[39] Further, when Christians justified their practice by saying that the prayers were not intended for the image itself but for the saint, they only made matters worse, insofar as they were admitting to praying to a mortal being.[40]

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[36] Jadīd al-Islām, *Sayf al-mūʾminīn*, 445.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid., 445-6.

[39] Ibid., 446.

[40] Ibid., 449.

2.2 What happens at the Church?

Having embarked on the rather abstract and general critique of what he saw as idolatry in Christianity, ʿAlī Qulī then concretized his attack in a section entitled *Dar kilīsā-hā chih mī guzarad* (*What Happens at Church?).* His critique here was about the way in which Christian girls were consecrated to monastic life in the Church. He described how, right after reaching puberty, some selected girls were sent to monastic schools where –ʿAlī Qulī claimed– priests indoctrinated them with their beliefs. He then provided a disapproving description of liturgical rituals, placing special emphasis on their chanting. However, he reserved some of his harshest critiques for the sacrament of communion, which he described thus:

[…] after they perform this libertine prayer [*namāz-i fārigh*], they bring a box full of [slices of] a paper-thin round bread, each of which measures five *shāhīs*, and in each of these there is an image that they identify as Jesus. Then, they take the box to a place where all the girls kneel down and place the box over a shrine built [specially] for this purpose. On it, they leave many candles of camphorated wax on gold and silver chandeliers, and around it they disperse flowers of different kinds. And since it is an obligation for each girl to be purified that day, each of them tells her sins of the [previous] week to the priests, who are appointed to listen to people's sins. Having told their sins to the priests, each group of girls is arranged by pairs and in a perfectly mannered way they go towards [another] priest and bow to the bread, which they believe to be the son of God. After this, they come near the priest and they kneel while the priest gives them one of the breads and says: 'this is the body and the blood of Jesus, [who is] both God and a real man'. After this, they teach the girls that when they are shown the bread they should say: 'we are not worthy of you entering the dwelling of our hearts, but a word of yours suffices for us to intercede for our souls. After this, the girls open their mouths and the priest throws a bread into their pharynx, and it is forbidden for them to touch the bread with their teeth, because the priests teach them that biting and chewing God would be unmannerly, and that if they bite [the bread], blood will split [from it].[41]

He then criticized the sacrament of confession, saying that every time a girl fell sick she was made to confess her sins. He noted how each of the priestly orders or lineages [*silsilah*] had a school and followed the customary manners [*ādāb*] and the dress code of their founders, and hinted at the similarity to Sufi orders, a comparison we will explore in detail in the next

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[41] Ibid., 437-8.

chapter.[42] Finally, ʿAlī Qulī described the three years of novitiate, in which the girls were isolated from the outside world. Yet, what he disapproved of the most was the symbolic marriage of the girls to "the idol which they named after Jesus" [*butī kih bih ism-i ḥaḍrat-i ʿĪsā tarāshīdah-and*].[43]

Section 3: Matters of orthopraxis and divine law

While it should be clear by now that ʿAlī Qulī's major intellectual preoccupations were indeed theological, it is inevitable to inquire (to the extent to which it is possible) about the depth of his exposure to other fields of Islamic knowledge. Although we know by his own admission that the famous jurist Fāḍil al-Hindī encouraged him to write the *Sayf al-mū'minīn*, and although the bishop Pidou de Saint Olon claimed that he had become a "doctor of the Qur'an", we know very little about his actual training in religious sciences. Furthermore, even though in both his *Sayf al-mū'minīn* and his minor treatises there are aspects that tangentially touch upon legal matters, none of his works deals explicitly with law (*fiqh*) or jurisprudence (*uṣūl* al-*fiqh*). However, given the centrality of the *sharīʿah* to the socio-legal organization of Muslim life in pre-modern Iranian society, the importance it acquires for a convert, and given his connection to Fāḍil-i Hindī –a major mujtahid– it is safe to assume that ʿAlī Qulī had studied the main Shiite legal manuals and iwa familiar with the main jurisprudential debates of his time. This much seems fairly obvious, but we need to ask specific questions regarding the level of his specialization in the law. Was he acquainted with the juristic methods and arguments of the major traditionist (*Akhbārī*) and rationalist jurists? Did he study the way jurists examined hadith

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[42] Ibid., 438.

[43] Ibid., 439.

to prove their points? Did he understand the forms of legal reasoning invested by the mujtahids to derive the law or how the sources of the law were approached, and how "certainty" and "certitude" were established about a transmitted scriptural text?[44]

The conventions of the genre in which he wrote (that is, *dalā'il al-nubuwwah*) and the written evidence that we have at hand only allow us to give an approximate answer to these questions. Quentin Skinner noted that it is rather risky to extrapolate from what a given thinker said about one particular topic to what he *could have said* about a completely different one.[45] But I am focusing on the structure of his arguments rather than his view about the topic of jurisprudence *per se*. To be sure, the types of pedagogical practices and commentarial approaches used by Muslim scholars in one Islamic discipline often appeared in other interconnected disciplines as well. As Rula Abisaab noted, the "collective and incremental legal-juristic activities" that formed the juristic tradition are confined by universal textual references and interpretive approaches." [46] In other words, certain pedagogies, terminology, and references

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[44] It is beyond the scope of the present chapter to provide a comprehensive outline about the *Uṣūlī-Akhbārī* debate, however the main difference between these two schools of legal thought is that the *Uṣūlīs* rely heavily on independent reasoning (*ijtihād*) to derive legal rulings, whereas the *Akhbārīs* restrict the scope of the law to what is clearly and explicitly indicated in the hadith. For further detail refer to Hossein Modarressi, "Rationalism and Traditionalism in Shīʿī Jurisprudence: a Preliminary Survey," *Studia Islamica* 59 (1984):141-58. Rula Abisaab provides a more detailed explanation about the debate on whether accounts transmitted by only one authority could lead to doubt (*zann*), and how some scholar considered that only traditions related by the just Imami could be upheld; see Rula Jurdi Abisaab, *Converting Persia,* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004),108-9; see also Rula J. Abisaab, "Shiʿi Jurisprudence, Sunnism and the Traditionist Thought (akhbārī) of Muhammad Amin Astarabadi (d. 1036/1626-7)," *IJMES* (forthcoming); *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. "Ejtehad," by Aron Zysow, accessed July 22, 2014, https://iranicaonline.org; Andrew J Newman, "The Nature of the Uṣūlī/Akhbārī Dispute in Late Ṣafawid Iran. Part 1: ʿAbdallāh al-Samāhijī's *Munyat al-Mumārisīn*," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 55, no. 1 (Jan 1992): 22-51; Juan Cole, "Shi'i Clerics in Iraq and Iran, 1722-1780: the Usuli-Akhbari Conflict Reconsidered," *Iranian Studies* XVIII, no. 1 (Winter 1985): 3-34; Robert Gleave, *Inevitable Doubt: Two Theories of Shīʿī Jurisprudence*, Studies in Islamic Law and Society 12 (Boston; London; Köln: Brill, 2000).

[45] Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," 13.

[46] Rula Jurdi Abisaab, "Shiʿi Jurisprudence, Sunnism and the Traditionist Thought (Akhbārī) of Muhammad Amin Astarābādī (d. 1036/1626-7)," forthcoming (no page)

were shared by multiple Islamic disciplines and reflected a common universe of discourse that assumed a common knowledge between its interlocutors and practitioners. This is what justifies overlooking –to a certain extent– Skinner's warning in this particular case.

Therefore, we will be assessing the structure of ʿAlī Qulī's arguments, his tools and methods, rather than his particular opinion on doctrine or ritual. He made explicit intertextual references to Calepino, Guadagnoli, and Jerome Xavier, as well as implicit references to Islamic scripture and foundational texts and scholars. However, these references were used in way that went beyond the mere quotation of authoritative texts to support his positions. He engaged them at a deeper level, questioning their internal logic and their doctrinal implications. Therefore, I am comfortable affirming that the sections we will analyze shortly do reveal a certain degree of knowledge of legal reasoning and juristic methods. As with other themes in the *Sayf al-mū'minīn*, these hints of jurisprudential elements were embedded within the analysis of biblical references. Let us proceed to some examples to examine how this was done.

3.1 (a) Islamic Ritual Purity and Slaughtered Meat

Within the *Sayf al-mū'minīn*, ʿAlī Qulī included a section called *Aḥkām-i gūsht-i ḥayvānāt dar Tūrāt va bāvar-i Naṣārā dar īn bārah* (*Rulings on Animal Meat in the Torah and Christian Beliefs on this Regard*). He introduced this discussion by noting that it was suitable [*munāsib*] to write it "so that these infidels [Christians] will not have any excuse [to justify their dietary practices]" [*barā-yi ānkih īn kuffār hīch ʿadharī nadāshtah bāshand*][47]. He began thus by referencing *Deuteronomy* 14, which he translated this way:

Do not eat impure [*najis*] animals. Instead, the [kinds of] animals that you should eat are the ox, the sheep, the deer, the goat, the ibex, the ewe, the gazelle, the bull –which is the male of the cow–, the *mūr* –which is a male camel–,

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[47] Jadīd al-Islām. *Sayf al-mū'minīn*, 173.

the *thaybil* –which is a kind of mountain cow–, and any animal with divided hoofs and which chews the cud. But among those with a divided hoof and which chew the cud, do not eat those from the family of the camel, the rabbit, or hyrax[48]

He then accused Jerome Xavier of having added the camel to the list of forbidden animals: "[…] and because Jerome was a liar who did not hide his lies, since he wanted here to forbid what was allowed [*ḥalāl rā ḥarām kunad*], and since the general rule [for prohibition] was forgotten [that is, the rule of the divided hoof], he rendered the camel, through his pen, inside the category of forbidden meat."[49]

He then noted how Moses had added pork to the list, precisely because of the criteria of the divided hoof, and how he forbade his community to eat aquatic animals without fins and scales.[50] Yet –ʿAlī Qulī noted–, Jerome Xavier chose to transpose a ruling from *Genesis* 9 –in which Noah is allowed to eat any terrestrial animal– to his reading of *Deuteronomy* 14: that is – in Jerome's view–, since Moses' ruling on water animals seemed to suggest that aside from animals without fins and scales, all other animals would be permissible [*ḥalāl*], and therefore all ground animals would be *ḥalāl*. Further, since in *Deuteronomy* 14 the word "impure" [*najis*] was used instead of the word "forbidden" [*ḥarām*], Jerome (and Saint Paul before him) –ʿAlī Qulī claimed– had taken advantage of this terminological distinction to render *ḥalāl* certain *ḥarām* animals. Thus, ʿAlī Qulī felt the need to refute this logic:

[…] a way of thinking aiming at removing this inconsistency [that is, the textual contradictions regarding the permissibility of eating certain animals] [is to say] that [the scriptures] say that [these animals] are impure [*najis*] instead of forbidden [*ḥarām*]. But he [Jerome] did not know that this way of reasoning would disgrace him further, since wherever in this passage [*Deuteronomy 14*] Moses says about an animal that one should not eat it because it is *ḥarām*, its being *ḥarām* is recorded [in writing] as "impure" [*najis*]. Thus, whatever is *najis* is *ḥarām*. Jerome continued this reasoning about [certain animals] being only *najis*, wanting to make *ḥalāl* every animal that he had added himself [to the list]. However, since this line of reasoning does not stand its ground, he himself transgressed

[48] Ibid., 173.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid.

what is forbidden [*khudash nīz ḥarāmzādah bīrūn amad*], because other than on [the question of] prohibitions [*bih ghayr az ḥarāmzādah*] nobody else has introduced any forgery into the Holy Books and into what they say.[51]

Here we see how the theme of *taḥrīf* began to acquire a deeper practical dimension to the one seen in the previous chapter. In our author's vision, Jerome tampered with the scripture in order to circumvent the law and –in this case– to endorse illegal dietary practices. But the argument became even more complex:

[…] the disciples [that is, when Christians] of this leader of men and jinni [Paul] [will] see that whatever God Almighty considered as impure [*najis*] and forbidden [*ḥarām*] in the Torah –which he brought through Moses– is also impure and forbidden in the book that this Paraclete [Christ] brought on behalf of the Creator . And, if there are reports in the books of the prophets about the impurity [*najāsat*] and the interdiction [*ḥaramat*] [of something], and if it is also considered forbidden and impure in the book of this Paraclete, it is then also considered as such in the Torah of Moses and in the books of the prophets. And although at certain times and for certain [Holy] persons it is permissible [*jā'iz*] to abrogate [*naskh*] divine rulings [*aḥkām-i illahī*], it is not proper of the essence of existing beings [*aʿyān-i mawjūdāt*] that certain animals that had been impure in essence [*najis al-ʿayn*] in the old days could become pure [*pāk*] in later times; or that an animal could have been *ḥalāl* before and become *ḥarām* after, because if such were the case it will all be a changing matter [*qalb-i ḥaqā'iq mī shavad*] and this does not make sense to reason [*īn nazd-i har ʿaqlī maḥāl ast*].[52]

Here we can see how ʿAlī Qulī refuted Jerome not only in terms of the accuracy of the latter's scriptural references, but also in terms of the legal rulings that Christians could potentially draw from them. Our author argues that Jerome Xavier used the term *najis* to avoid the use of *ḥarām* and thus render permissible to eat forbidden animals. ʿAlī Qulī responded that impurity [*najāsat*] was a sufficient condition to make an animal *ḥarām*. In this case our author seemed to point out implicitly towards the *ratio legis* –or in Islamic terms, the *ʿillah*– behind the prohibition of certain kinds of meat. Something similar seemed to occur when he noted that Moses ruled on pork being *ḥarām* because of the rule of the divided hoof. This seems to imply that ʿAlī Qulī acknowledged that certain judgments could be made by analogical thinking: if animal X is *ḥarām* and the reason for that is its divided hoof, then animal Y should also be

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[51] Ibid., 174.

[52] Ibid., 175.

ḥarām if it has a divided hoof. This kind of analogical reasoning is what is integral to the

derivation of Shiite law. Clearly, ʿAlī Qulī was making a case for *transferring the ʿillah* –namely,

the divided hoof– to other animals based on textual evidence. His quasi-legal presentation

conforms to the general approach of major Shiite jurists. However, there is no complex

syllogistic reasoning here, or an elaboration on rationalist procedures known to mujtahids.

Finally, ʿAlī Qulī added to the discussion a passage from *Deuteronomy* 12 in which God

proscribed the consumption of blood:

[…] Christians from this age have not only disbelieved with respect to God and the prophets, but they have also become disbelievers with respect to Paul and Jerome; for not only have Paul and his disciple Jerome authorized [the eating] of certain animals, both pure and impure, the eating of which God has forbidden; but they have also authorized [eating] the animals' blood which God has also forbidden. This is the sense of what Jerome has written, given that the word of God says that "you can take as food any creature that is alive and moves except those which have blood"; which Jerome interprets for them [Christians] the justification of the proscription of blood [which comes] from the tongue of Moses in *Deuteronomy* 12, saying: **Do not eat the blood of any animal, for in them their blood substitutes their souls, and therefore you should not eat their flesh and their souls. You should instead spill the blood like water on the ground**.[53]

As we can see here, ʿAlī Qulī constructed his refutation of Christian doctrine not by dismissing

its core beliefs as false, but by pointing out its internal contradictions and inconsistencies. What

mattered for him in this passage was not just that Christians authorized dietary practices that

would be forbidden in Islam, but mostly that in so doing they violated the logic of their own laws

–as understood by him in his interpretation of the text–. Furthermore, in this particular example

ʿAlī Qulī noted that the fault of drinking blood was so blatantly illegal that it would even

contradict the already tampered texts of Paul and Jerome Xavier.

Having thus established that Jerome's text itself pointed towards these prohibitions, ʿAlī

Qulī moved on to see how Christian practice betrayed this restriction:

These days, Christians make a snake's venom out of any animal they want [to eat] [*har ḥayvānī rā kih mī khvāhand zahr-i mār kunand*], since they never slaughter it properly and never spill its blood on the ground. Instead they choke it and eat it with its blood. And whenever they host a dear guest, when they kill a pig, a cow, or a sheep, they set

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[53] Jadīd al-Islām. *Sayf al-mūʾminīn*, 175.

apart the flank of [the animal's] throat [using] a bloody knife as long as a lancet, and they collect its blood in a vessel and they put salt and vinegar on some of it so that it will not rot, and then they cook a good quantity of that blood with spices and eat [it].[54]

However, the apex of this scandal was for ʿAlī Qulī –not surprisingly so– the sacrament of communion. In it he saw Christians violating the proscription of blood-eating to a further dimension, as they claimed to drink the blood of Christ. Even if he (or any Muslim) could of course question the physical reality of this transgression –insofar as they would not believe in the transubstantiation of the wine into blood– ʿAlī Qulī condemned the mere idea of it. He reserved for this practice his harshest words, saying about it that "there is no the higher [act] of enmity against God" [*dushmanī bā Khudā az īn bālātar namī bāshad*]."[55]

3.1 (b) Wine drinking

Another similar section in ʿAlī Qulī's book was *Ḥarramat-i sharāb-khvārī dar Tūrāt va Injīl* (*The Prohibition of Wine-Drinking in the Torah and the Gospels*).[56] He noted that the purpose of this section was to demonstrate that wine itself was prohibited in the scriptures regardless of the quantity. He started by referring to *Leviticus* 10:

[…] when He ordered the Children of Israel to abstain from wine, he did not say that they should abstain from drinking in excess, but rather, He issued an unconditional ruling [*muṭlaq ḥukm kardah*] that Aaron and his sons should not drink wine or any intoxicating substances [*mast-kunandah*], and He said that this shall be an everlasting ruling [*ḥukm-i ābadī*], which means that it cannot be abrogated [*kih dar an naskh nīst*].[57]

He then referred to *Deuteronomy* 6, where God also forbade any amount of wine or of any intoxicating substances. He complemented this by referring to *Luke* 1, where Gabriel announced

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[54] Ibid., 175-6.

[55] Ibid., 176.

[56] Ibid., 178.

[57] Ibid.

the birth of John the Baptist to Zacharias. In this passage, Zacharias abstained from drinking

wine to celebrate the news because he was filled with the joy of the Holy Spirit. ʿAlī Qulī then

presented the Christian view of this abstinence:

> […] based on this passage Christian books argue that anyone who was assisted by the Holy Spirit –such as John [the Baptist], Aaron and the those among his children who were leaders of the Tribe of Israel–, or anyone who was assisted by the Spirit of Faith [*rūḥ-i īmān*] –like the rest of Aaron's children– should abstain themselves not only from getting drunk, but from even tasting [wine]. So if God Almighty had said that drinking wine to the limit of not getting intoxicated was not an reprehensible practice [*qabīḥ nīst*], inasmuch as it could be beneficial for the body, he would have granted these benefits to His loved ones and ordered them [just] not to get drunk, and would have allowed them to drink wine in quantities that would not lead them to intoxication[58]

What ʿAlī Qulī did in this passage was to treat the biblical text in the same way in which Muslim

scholars treated the hadith. He took from the textual examples in which he considered that the

reason for the prohibition of alcohol were clear and uncontestable. Having done this, he

established that the reason wine was prohibited even in small quantities was because of its

intoxicating properties. Thus, ʿAlī Qulī was extracting here again the *ratio legis* of the ruling. We

will look into the implications of this into more detail later.

ʿAlī Qulī then brought about the passage of *Genesis* 9:21 where Noah drank wine to the

point of getting drunk and laid uncovered in his tent and was then discovered by his son Ham.

ʿAlī Qulī dismissed this passage as a forgery of Jerome.[59] In our author's view, the alleged

veracity of this passage would not have mattered much for Christians, given that –just as Sunnis–

they did not follow the examples of prophets or Imams as models of emulation. However, the

implications of a prophet getting drunk would have been more serious for the Twelvers, because

of the principle of pious emulation of the Imams (*taqlīd*). Thus, ʿAlī Qulī felt the need to expand

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[58] Ibid., 179.

[59] Ibid.

on the question of the moral authority and judgments of Old Testament prophets. For this

purpose he added:

[…] whoever is endowed with perfect reason [*ʿaql-i kāmil*] knows that the Creator exists, and whoever knows that the Creator exists would obviously acknowledge that He is just [*ʿādil*], and anyone who believes in Divine Justice should recognize that He does not act upon tyranny [*ẓulm namī kunad*]. Therefore, since Christians claim to believe in all these precepts, it would necessarily follow that whoever believes in God Almighty and in the fulfillment of his proof through his creation must refrain from engaging in reprehensible acts [*fiʿl-i qabīḥ*]. [This is] because if that person which God Almighty had placed as a proof for His creation engaged in reprehensible acts, then God Almighty's proof for His creation would not be fulfilled, because whoever sees a sin [being committed by] a prophet or deputy [*waṣī*] will not be convinced of his word because of the lack of trust[…][60]

ʿAlī Qulī argued here that God would not have allowed a prophet of his to engage in

reprehensible acts because that would have put into question the justice of his message and the

moral authority of the prophets he had chosen.

By touching upon this subject, our author applied to the Bible something which Muslim

scholars apply to the study of hadith. In the discipline of *ʿilm al-rijāl* (science of men), the

ʿulamāʾ scrutinize the lives of hadith transmitters in order to assess whether their moral integrity

and judgment rendered them reliable sources of the tradition. What ʿAlī Qulī did here was to

apply the same criteria to the prophets of the Old Testament. Thus, having decided *a priory* that

Jerome's text was not reliable, he concluded that Noah could not have been intoxicated because

that would have affected the latter's moral authority.

ʿAlī Qulī concluded then by going back to the linguistic foundation of the problem,

namely, that Jerome had purposely mistranslated the *Book of Genesis*, so that instead of referring

to Noah as "innocent or free-of-sin" (*maʿṣūm),* he had simply used the epithet "good-doer"

(*nīkū-kār*), a term void of any theological connotations, and which could be used to refer to any

well-meaning mortal who was not exempt from sin.[61]

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[60] Ibid., 180.

[61] Ibid., 182.

Thus, in the above discussions ʿAlī Qulī addressed issues that could be classified as pertaining to the scriptural and procedural sources of the law: on the one hand he evaluated the integrity and the reliability of the text, questioning the accuracy of Jerome's translation and of the plausibility and implications of Noah's alleged drunkenness. He dismissed this passage on *rijāl*-like grounds: if he were to admit that Noah had indeed engaged in such a sin, then he would have had to reject him as a prophet. Instead, he chose to question Jerome Xavier's reliability as a transmitter of Holy texts. This discussion would correspond to the debates on the nature of the scriptural sources of the law –that is– if Christian scriptures were to be taken as legal sources. On the other hand, his discussion on the internal logic of God's prohibition of alcohol would correspond to the procedural sources of the law, in that it addresses the way the texts should be treated in order to derive judgments from it. The presence of these two aspects of legal discussions suggests that our author could not have been unaware of such debates. But we will come back to this discussion in a later section.

3.1.1 Contextualizing ʿAlī Qulī's refutation

As I have noted in my introductory remarks to this part of the chapter, ʿAlī Qulī justified his condemnation of Christian dietary customs through the same discursive strategies he used in other places, namely the occasional accusations of *taḥrīf*, along with an overall insistence on the reliability and value of Christian scriptures (with the exception of the books of Paul). However, in applying this logic to topics of legal content, he gave a deeper dimension to the *dalā'il al-nubuwwah* genre: not only could the Bible foretell the coming of Muhammad and of Islam, but it also contained indications of the *sharī'ah* and of the methods that could be used to derive it.

But before turning to this point, let me make a brief note on the historization and contextualization these kinds of passages. It would be naïve to think that ʿAlī Qulī's treatment of the subject was intended merely as an assertion of the type of rituals and practices that Muslim rejected categorically, such as wine-drinking, and consumption of impure meat. However, the insistence on condemning the violation of such prohibitions allowed ʿAlī Qulī to assert his moral authority as someone who knew the law and who could guide and discipline the common believer and who could protect the "orthodox" rules and rituals of the *sharīʿah*. Further, throughout the Safavid period, the Shahs issued repeated edicts to close taverns. This seems to imply that they never actually eradicated them or that at times they turned a blind eye on them.[62] Thus, ʿAlī Qulī's admonitions might have also been directed to the monarch and the courtiers in accordance with the general (yet indirect) hints made by the *ʿulamāʾ*. Indeed, wine-consumption and debauchery were practiced by the monarchs, and high state dignitaries themselves. Well-known is the case of Shah Sulaymān's fascination with alcohol, and how he used to humiliate his Grand Vizir Shaykh ʿAlī Khān Zanganah (d. 1101/1691) by forcing him to get drunk.[63]

However, it might be more convenient to contextualize ʿAlī Qulī's quasi-legalistic use of the scriptures. Rula Abisaab has suggested that the recurrent treatment of wine-drinking and the licitness of meat slaughtered in Safavid legal manuals and treatises from the mid-seventeenth century might have very well been due to the growing (or more visible) presence of non-Muslim subjects in the empire, partly as a result of its expansion. For her, it was likely that as Muslims lived increasingly side by side with Armenians, after the relocation of the latter in Isfahan, they started to bring to the jurists questions about the permissibility of eating their meat. In another

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[62] Rudi Matthee has identified many instances in which the Shahs would explicitly issue orders to close taverns and brothels, but only at times when their credibility was at stake. See Matthee, *The Pursuit of Pleasure*, 75, 92, 170.

[63] Ibid., 91.

example, she noted that Bahā' al-Dīn al-ʿĀmilī, the Shaykh al-Islām at the time of Shah ʿAbbās, identified a series of food items consumed by Georgians and allowed Muslims living among Christians to eat them. Further, he forbade Muslims to stop Georgians from eating pork or drinking wine, and he even permitted Muslims to pretend to eat and drink these items for the purpose of pious dissimulation (*taqīyah*).[64]

In general, Shīʿī jurists held stricter views on ritually-slaughtered meat (*dhabīḥah*) than Sunnis –particularly, Ḥanafīs–, which led them to forbid the consumption of meat slaughtered by Christians and Jews.[65] Further, Abisaab observes that while earlier Shiite jurists had taken such strict views, their re-assertion and implementation under the Safavids was oftentimes politically motivated. For instance, Shaykh Bahā'ī forbade the eating of Armenian-slaughtered meat at a time when the Ottomans criticized the Shah for forging strong economic alliances with the Armenian merchants of New Julfa. Thus, his prohibition came about as a quest for religious legitimacy and as a response to accusations of being too permissive with this particular Christian community. In order to bring legal evidence to this strict ruling, Bahā'ī tried to solve the apparent contradiction between his position and that of the famous jurist and hadith scholar Ibn Babūyah [d. 381/991], who permitted the consumption of meat slaughtered by the People of the Book. Bahā'ī acknowledged that the latter had allowed Muslims to consume such meat on the condition that God's name was invoked at the moment of slaughtering the animal. However, he believed that it was not clearly established what "invoking God's name" meant, and that if a more accurate definition of this were to be given, Ibn Babūyah's position would be clearly

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[64] Abisaab, *Coverting Persia*, 67.

[65] Abisaab, *Coverting Persia*, 64-5.

revealed to be in accordance with the Twelver Shiite consensus against this meat.[66] Abisaab suggested that Bahā'ī could have chosen to support Ibn Bābūyah's position even if it was probably marginalized by later jurists, but that his tendency was linked to the pressures of the political context rather than to a pure repetition and emulation of older legal positions.[67] Still, it was the mujtahids who rejected legal emulation of earlier deceased jurists, and who also revisited the use of many Imami reports and their reliability in arriving at a legal opinion.[68]

In addition to the above variables, it is also possible to situate ʿAlī Qulī's interest in these kinds of questions in the context of Jerome Xavier's polemics at Jahāngīr's court. According to the testimony of Jerome's collaborator, 'Abd al-Sattār, whom we mentioned in the previous chapter, Jāhāngīr was keen on discussing the different dietary restrictions among Christians and Muslims. The theme of the scale-less fish and the animals with a divided hoof was indeed raised during these assemblies (*majālis*), and it was reported that both the *'ulamā'* and the Jesuits (presumably Jerome among them) participated in the discussions.[69] This may explain why our author decided to include this and other similar topics in his polemic. However, one must avoid a mechanistic reading of his work as if ʿAlī Qulī had been concerned with providing a response to every question raised by Jerome Xavier or Guadagnoli. As we saw with the case of the Paraclete, historical conventions of religious polemics accounted as much for the choice of passages in our author's work as did the specifics of the debate against Guadagnoli and his likes. Moreover, even if we were to read ʿAlī Qulī's choice of topics as responses to major European polemicists, we

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[66] Ibid., 65-6.

[67] Ibid., 66.

[68] Rula Jurdi Abisaab, Class Notes, Fall, 2010-Winter, 2011.

[69] Alam and Subrahmanyam, "Frank Disputations," 502.

still need to understand his specific choices and the conventions of the tradition he was

discoursing upon.

3.1.2 *The sharīʿah and fiqh*-like argumentation

As I have suggested before, ʿAlī Qulī's assertion of the truthfulness of Islam and the

prophecy of Muhammad was intertwined with the confirmation of the *sharīʿah*, hence his

discussion of meat and wine, and on what violates ritual purity. Here, we will also see how the

structure and form of argumentation of his work followed or drew upon forms of legal reasoning,

including the use of analogies and syllogisms. While it may be difficult to compare the

aforementioned sections of the *Sayf al-mū'minīn* to their equivalent in major legal treatises or

compilations, legal texts themselves come in different forms and legal materials also appear in

various kinds of texts. An exhaustive identification of such texts is of course beyond the scope of

this study, but it is useful to look briefly at some examples from the second half of the Safavid

period.

Let us start by considering Bahā'ī's *Jāmiʿ-i ʿAbbāsī*. Commissioned by Shah ʿAbbās I,

this work came to be a concise legal compendium in Persian (as opposed to Arabic), accessible

to non-specialists, which clearly listed the main legal obligations and prohibitions in Shīʿī

Islam.[70] Given the nature of this work then, Bahā'ī barely provided the reasoning or scriptural

evidence (either from the Qur'an or the hadith) behind acts of worship and social transactions.

To point out an example pertinent for our comparison with ʿAlī Qulī, he opened his section on

the sinfulness of wine-drinking by noting that children and madmen were not considered subjects

of the law and could not be thus held accountable if they to engage in wine-drinking. He then

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[70] Abisaab, 58

added that in cases where no water was available and life depended on drinking a mouthful

[*luqmah*] of wine, it was excusable to do so. The juristic principle behind that, which is not

included in the compendium, is that of "*al-ḍarūrāt tubīḥ al-maḥẓūrāt*" (dire need makes licit that

which was in principle prohibited). As for actual infractions by wine-drinkers who were

responsible before the law, he noted that some mujtahids argued that the culprit should be killed

after four infractions, while others said after three.[71] As for the atonement for drinking wine,

there were many conditions: if the culprit inadvertently thought that drinking or buying wine was

ḥalāl, it sufficed for him to do penitence [*tawbat*] to seek repentance. However, if he knew that it

was not permissible, he should receive a punishment.[72]

Even though ʿAlī Qulī asserted all the main legal prohibitions and obligations, which we

can find in a concise legal compendium like *Jāmiʿ-i ʿAbbāsī*, he did not bring about all the

details. However –and more importantly in terms of the structure of his arguments–, he did

provide the reasoning behind his own views and conclusions, which ranged from challenging the

linguistic basis of a term –looking at the semantics or philology– to the reliability of a scriptural

report and its authenticity. ʿAlī Qulī then seemed to have drawn on more specialized legal texts.

His line of argumentation can be compared to works such as the *Kifāyat al-fiqh* by Muḥammad

Bāqir Sabzavārī's (d. 1090/679).[73]

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[71] Bahāʾ al-Dīn al-ʿĀmilī, *Jāmiʿ ʿAbbāsī* (Tehran: s.n., 1328 [1910]), 422.

[72] Ibid., 422-3.

[73] I am using Sabzavārī's work as an example, but there are many other similar works. See for instance Fāḍil al-Hindī, *Kashf al-lithām* (Qom: Manshurat Maktabat Ayat Allah al-ʿUẓma al- Marʿashī al-Najafī, 1405 [1984 or 1985]); Muḥsin Fayḍ-i Kāshānī, *Mafātiḥ al-sharāʾi fī fiqh al-imāmīyah* (Beirut, Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī lil-Maṭbuʿat, 1969-?); Niʿmat Allah al-Jazāʾirī, *Manbāʾ al-hayat fi hujjiyyat aqwāl al-mujtahidīn min al-amwāt* (Microfilm, Princeton University Library); and for a slightly later example from an *Akhbārī*, see Yusūf al-Baḥrānī, *Al-ḥadāʾiq al-nāḍirah fi ahkām al-ʿitrāh al-ṭāhirah* (Beirut: Dar al-Aḍwaʾ, 1985-1987).

Sabzavārī's work was a more detailed assessment of legal questions, the debates

surrounding them, and the way he arrived at his own legal opinion on a particular question. It

was most likely conceived for the seminary-trained. He started his discussion on sea animals

noting that there were no discrepancies between Muslims regarding the permissibility of eating

animals with scales (*fils*). He briefly justified his position referring to the quasi-canonical work

al-Masālik, by the sixteenth century scholar from the Ottoman Levant al-Shahīd al-Thānī (d.

966/1558). He then cautioned the reader about legal disagreements (*ikhtilāf*) between scholars

regarding fish without scales: Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. al-Hasan b. ʿAlī b. al-Hasan al-Tūsī

(hereon Shaykh al-Tūsī, d. 460/1067) considered them "abhorrent but not forbidden" *makrūh*,

although –Sabzavārī noted– many hadith did point towards their prohibition.[74] His discussion

then transcended scale-less fish as he brought into the question animals like urchins, mules,

donkeys, bats, and horses. He then quoted a hadith from Tūsī's canonical collection saying that

"nothing is forbidden except what God forbade in his book [*laysa al-ḥarām illā mā ḥarrama

Allah fī kitābihi*][75], after which he provided another series of hadith saying that the Qur'an only

explicitly forbade pork and considered sea animals without scales as legally discouraged or

" disliked" [*makrūh*].[76] As the work got into further detail, similar questions were brought up

regarding the permissibility of eating insects or animals that had taken swine-milk during their

years of lactancy.[77] However, these details should not entertain us for now. What matters for our

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[74] Muḥammad Bāqir Sabzavārī, *Kifāyat al-fiqh*, vol. 2 (Qom: Mu'assasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī al-tabiʿah li-Jamāʿat al-Mudarrisīn bi-Qum al-Musharrafah, 1423 [2002 or 2003]), 596.

[75] Ibid., 598.

[76] Ibid., 598-9.

[77] Ibid., 599.

purposes is the structural and thematic similarity between this section of the *Kifāyah* and the

aforementioned sections of the *Sayf al-mū'minīn*.

If we were to substitute ʿAlī Qulī's biblical citations with hadith we would get a work

that would read similarly to a *fiqh* book. Both ʿAlī Qulī and Sabzavārī discussed the question of

sea animals with scales; the difference between them would only be that the for the latter it

sufficed to provide references within the Muslim (and specifically Shīʿī) tradition to justify his

position, while the former aimed to convince the reader that such well-known Islamic rulings had

their origin in the Bible, but that Christians had chosen to overlook its legal precepts.

Thus, as I mentioned before, through this ʿAlī Qulī added a richer dimension to the nature

of the *dalā'il al-nubuwwah* genre: he implied that, by foretelling the coming of Islam, Christian

and Jewish scriptures also implicitly foretold (or had some indications about) the *sharīʿah* itself.

3.2 Women and veiling in Christianity

ʿAlī Qulī also devoted a section to the issue of women's modesty (or lack thereof) in

Christianity. He denounced the fact that not only did Christians not feel the need to hide their

women from unrelated men, but they actually benefitted from showing their daughters in their

shops in order to attract clients. He also found it scandalous that, while men saluted each other

by lifting their hats, men and women saluted each other with a kiss. He disapprovingly described

the differences between Christians and Muslims regarding the way they introduced their fiancées

to their families: among Arabs and Persian the costume was to prepare a reception where fresh

perfume adorned the environment and lute (*ʿūd*) music entertained the guests, whereas among

Christians the most important thing was to select the best wine for the feast in order to arouse the most animalistic instincts among them.[78]

After denouncing the debauchery of Christian customs, ʿAlī Qulī cited Paul's *Letter to the Galatians* 4, where it was stipulated that whoever believed in the divinity of Jesus would be united with him, which as a consequence would erase the distinctions between Greeks and Jews, men and women, masters and slaves. To ʿAlī Qulī the only logical consequence of this would be that people would justify their promiscuous behaviors by saying that any man could be with any woman as they were all united in Christ.[79]

He then posed the question about the seemingly contradictory fact that, despite the idea of unity of all men and all women, priests were required to be celibate. He said that Paul had invented the idea of depriving himself from marriage on the basis that: "Someone who is single has no reference to the body or to what is related to it [*bā jasm va kār-i jasm rujūʿī nadārad*] and his body does not want to do anything obscene."[80] ʿAlī Qulī traced this idea back to *Ephesians* 4:

I implore you to accept this path and follow me on this path of humbleness, forbearance (*maẓlūmī*), and absolute patience; so all of you have to care for each other, for if all of you became single, you will be together in peace, and it is this belief that I want you [to accept] and one to which you shall arrive: you have become one body and one soul.[81]

He then referred to *1 Corinthians* 9, where Paul said: "Is it only I and Barnabas who do not have the choice not to work", and according to ʿAlī Qulī, the Arabic text of Jerome Xavier added: "[Am I and Barnabas the only ones] who do not have the choice [of taking] any woman that

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[78] Jadīd al-Islam, *Sayf al-mūʾminīn*, 478.

[79] Ibid., 479.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Ibid.

accepts our religion".[82] And further down the quote added: "[…] so if we have sown [the seed of] celibacy into you, would it be too much if we reap it from your flesh? And if others are entitled to your support, why would we not have a better right than others regarding your flesh?"[83] ʿAlī Qulī thus concluded that the reason why Paul instituted the doctrine of celibacy was so that priests could allow themselves to satisfy their lust with whatever women they wanted without the restrains of marriage. Thus, for our author, the Christian call for chastity was nothing but sheer hypocrisy.

3.3 A critique of celibacy in the *Favāʾid-i Izdivāj*

The passage above already reveals ʿAlī Qulī's deep interest in the question of celibacy. We can find similar discussions elsewhere in the *Sayf*, such as in the section called *Izdivāj va mamnūʿyat-i an barā-yi pādiriyān va dukhtarān-i kilīsā* (*Marriage and its Forbiddance for Priests and for the Daughters of the Church*).[84] However, most of his thought on the matter was better synthetized in the short *risālah* entitled *Favāʾid-i izdivāj (The Benefits of Marriage)*, and thus I judge it more useful to concentrate on the latter. I must emphasize that, as I mentioned in the first chapter, it is not possible to establish the date of ʿAlī Qulī's minor works. Yet, thematically and stylistically they seem to have been conceived as intellectual exercises in preparation for the *Hidāyat* and the *Sayf*.

ʿAlī Qulī began this *risālah* discussing a passage from *Genesis* 2 where God created Eve to accompany Adam and then ordered them to multiply.[85] He then quoted from *Surah al-*

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[82] Ibid., 480.

[83] Ibid.

[84] Ibid., 105-8.

[85] ʿAlī Qulī Jadīd al-Islām, "Favāʾid-i Izdivāj," in *Mirāṯ-i Islāmi-yi Irān*, vol. 2, ed. Rasul Jaʿfariyan (Qom: Kitāb-khānah-yi Ḥaẓrat Ayat Allah al-ʿUẓma Marʿashi Najafī, 1373-1374 [1994-1995]), 302.

Dhāriyat (51:56): "*wa mā khalaqtu al-jinna wa-l-insān illā li-yaʿbudūn*" [I only created jinn and mankind so that they would worship Me].[86] To him, this showed the direct link between the act of creation by God and the necessity of men's worship (*ʿibādah*) in order to fulfill their duties as creatures. Thus, our author considered the act of multiplying on Earth as a way of showing commitment to one's faith.[87] To complement this line of reasoning, he cited the well-known sacred (*qudsī*) hadith "*kuntu kanzan makhfiyyan fa-aḥbabtu an uʿrafa fa-khalaqtu-l-khalqa li-kay uʿraf*" [I was a hidden treasure and I wanted to be known so I created a creature who would know me].[88]

He then moved to anticipate the objections of Christian priests:

[…] but I know that the misguided foe [*khaṣm-i gum-rāh*] will not set his feet away from the path and will tell me that this kind of discourse it is not important [*īn qasm-i sukhanān kārī nīst*], claiming that "Christ's disciples had told me that it is permissible to take someone as a wife [*zan kardan jāʾiz*] but that it is better not to, and that because of this I knew that it was better not to have a woman, and so I did not".[89]

ʿAlī Qulī's response to this claim was that this was just one of many innovations introduced by Saint Paul, whose character was both questionable as an old sinner and as an enemy of Christ and who happened to live long after him:

 […] none of the twelve disciples said this, but it was rather [mentioned by] Paul, who led the nation of Jesus (pbuh) to perdition [*gum-rāh-kunandah-i ummat-i ʿIsā ʿalayhi al-salām ast*]. This guide who makes people go astray [*an ḍāll-i muḍall*] introduced this innovation [*bidʿat*] among the fearful [*tarsāyān*], and promoted it. This accursed [person] was not one of the disciples of Jesus, but rather an enemy of him and of his followers, who he put in great trouble and who he brought to the tribunal of the Jews to be punished. But even though Christians may argue that he repented from these kinds of acts and that even if his obscene disbelief-fostering actions [*aʿmāl-i shanīʿah-i kufr-amīz-i ū*] are clearly [written] in their books, he then uttered his repentance; it remains that this accursed [person] [Paul] did not even live at the time of Jesus.[90]

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[86] Ibid., 303.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Ibid., 304.

[89] Ibid

[90] Ibid, 304-5

As with previous examples from the *Sayf,* ʿAlī Qulī used here a criteria from *'ilm-al rijāl* to discredit Paul: firstly, he claimed that Paul could not be a reliable source of doctrine because he was not reputed to be a pious person, but rather someone who persecuted the Disciples of Christ. And secondly, Paul could not be part of the chain of transmission (*isnād*) of Jesus's doctrine because he did not coincide with him chronologically.

The second point of contention that ʿAlī Qulī entertained was the claim that celibacy would be required for people pursuing a monastic life. He disagreed by arguing that if this had ever been the case, Simon (later Saint Peter) would not have had a wife, nor would have Jesus cured her from a life-threatening fever at one point. He thus dismissed this idea as a later development of the Church of Rome.[91]

'Alī Qulī then explored the argument that celibacy could be a desirable way of following Christ's example. His answer to this was quite revealing:

[The fact that] Jesus (pbuh) did not take a wife does not make this [celibacy] a necessary command [*īn amr lāzim nayāyad*] because prophets are close to the Great [Holy] Ones [*muqarrabān dar gāh-i kubryā-yand*] and [thus] this only applied to them, according to what God Almighy mercifully ordered in the *maṣlaḥat*. So according to the *maṣlaḥat* not everything that was better for [the prophets] should therefore necessarily be better for their nation[s] [*ummat*] [as a whole]. Otherwise, it would be necessary [to accept] that whatever was forbidden to a nation, could have been rendered permissible [*mubbāḥ*] for them through the particular attributes [*khaṣā'iṣ*] [of a given prophet]. For example: Jacob (pbuh) married two sisters, [thus] it would be [permissible] for the people of this Holy man's nation to take two sisters in marriage if both of them are alive. Likewise, to the nation of David [it would correspond] a hundred wives; wanting a thousand would be better for the nation of Solomon (pbuh); and, in the same way, for the nation of the Messenger of the End of Times, Muḥammad Muṣṭafā (pbuh), it would be allowed [*mubbāḥ*] to want nine wives and to marry every woman upon whom their eyes fall and whoever they may like after divorcing; and thus anything other than what is explicitly mentioned as being particular to a given nation would be forbidden.[92]

For our author the answer to this challenge lied on the exceptional nature of prophets, as he then showed:

If [someone] asks "what is the reason [*chih ʿillat dārad*] why not having a wife was one of Jesus's particularities [*khaṣā'īṣ-i ʿIsā (as) būdah*] even though having a wife is better, and what is better is worthy of prophets?" The

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[91] Ibid, 305

[92] Ibid, 307-8

answer is that the *maṣlaḥat* in this issue was to prevent [*dafiʿ va rafiʿ*] any doubt from the Ummah and [it] was the completion of the proof [*ḥujjat*] [of his prophecy] upon them.[93]

However, what he saw as most problematic about this focus on the particularities of Jesus was that it was used to deny Muhammad's prophethood. To make this point he referred to a quote from *Micah* 7, which he then interpreted in accordance to this line of reasoning. The quote was: "do not trust your friends and do not believe them, and do not have any hope on your leader and hide your head from the woman that sleeps by your side, for your enemies can be [among] your family."[94] His interpretation of this passage was:

Had [Jesus] taken a woman [in marriage] and had he had children [with her], [this] would have cast a doubt upon [*mushtabah mī shud bih*] the Seal of the Prophets (peace and blessings upon him and his family), and it would have been said that the proof [*ḥujjat*] [of prophecy] would not be clear to the Christians. Because if someone were to ask a Christian why he recognized Jesus (pbuh) as the Seal of the Prophets but did not have faith in the Truth [*īmān bih ḥaqq nayāvardī*] and did not acknowledge the Messenger of the End of Times as the Seal of the Messengers, his answer would be that "the Lord of Lords said in chapter 7 of the *Book of Micah* –who is one of our prophets– that the woman of the Seal of the Prophets will nourish [*infāq kardan*] him, and this woman was not Jesus, and this friend that provided for the Seal of the Prophets was not ʿUmar, but rather the son of Jesus's wife; and that the insubordinate leader of the Seal of the Prophets was not Abū Bakr but Jesus himself, and that Almighty God said in the *Book of Isaiah* that that the Holy Spirit would not be separated from the Seal of Prophets until the Day of Judgment nor [would it be separated] from his sons nor from the sons of his son and so forth until the Day Of Judgment. And this Holy Spirit was inside Jesus and it will then be transferred to his sons and it will not be separated from the sons of his sons until the Day of Judgment. Thus, we are right in not having faith in prophets [that came] after Jesus (pbuh), for if the Holy Spirit was transferred from him to his sons and will not be withdrawn from them until the Day of Judgment, it necessarily [follows] that the Seal of the Prophets will not be the Messenger you talk about [Muḥammad], but rather Jesus. And thus the sons of Muḥammad (pbuh) are not the proof [of prophecy] to the creation until the Day of Judgment; instead, the sons of Jesus are that proof, and they are the leaders [*imāms*], and the Holy Spirit will be with them until the Day of Judgment".[95]

And the refutation of the above would be that this line of reasoning contained its own contradiction, because for it to hold true, Jesus would have had to marry, which he did not. So not only did ʿAlī Qulī thought it unjustified for Christians to make a case for the ideal of celibacy through the example of Jesus, but he also noted that by so doing, Christians undermined their own arguments against accepting the message of Muhammad.

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[93] Ibid, 308

[94] Ibid

[95] Ibid

Finally, our author addressed another common apology for celibacy, although this time from the Qur'an. Allegedly –he said– past scholars have thought that the fact that Yaḥyā (John the Baptist) did not marry should be taken as a sign of the desirability of celibacy. Those who adhered to this idea cited the *ayah* in which the birth of Yaḥyā was announced: "[…] *anna Allaha yubashshiruka bi-Yaḥyā muṣaddiqan bi-kalimatin min Allahi wa sayyidan wa ḥaṣūran*" [God gives you [Zacharias] the good news through Yaḥyā, who would confirm the word of God and will be a chief and will abstain [from women]".[96] For 'Alī Qulī, the term *ḥaṣūr* (chaste) here had to be dealt with carefully and should not be interpreted literally. For him, the term was just a way of praising John the Baptist for not engaging in frivolous pleasures (*lahū va la'ab*). To justify his interpretation, 'Alī Qulī referred to a narration in which, at age three, a group of children invited Yaḥyā to play, to which he responded "*mā rā az barā-yi bāzī khalaq nakardah-and*" [we were not created to play].[97]

Unfortunately, the *risālah* is truncated, so we can only speculate as to how far ʿAlī Qulī intended to take this argument, but this should suffice to give an idea of the nature of his repudiation of celibacy and of how he incorporated the same rhetorical strategies and the same theological themes that he would later incorporate into his major works and which we have discussed above. In the next chapter I will be dealing with another one of his short treatises as well as with other aspects of the *Sayf,* chiefly his discussions on Sufism. In so doing, I will revisit some of the questions on legalistic methodologies or influences that I have begun to explore here.

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[96] Ibid, 309; Qur'an 3:39

[97] Ibid, 310

Chapter 4
ʿAlī Qulī and the Sufis

Throughout the previous chapters I have explored the nature of ʿAlī Qulī's contentions

with Christian doctrine and practices, which constitute the dominant theme of his opera as a

whole. However, if we want to properly situate his work within the broader context of the

religious and intellectual polemics of his time, we should not neglect another key aspect of his

writings, namely his views on who he considered as unacceptably heterodox Muslims: Sufis. In

this, he shared some of the major preoccupations of the most influential *ʿulamāʾ* of the late

seventeenth century, although the way he articulated them was quite different as we shall see.

Section 1: Anti-Sufi sentiments in Safavid Iran

1.1 Sufis, the *ʿulamāʾ*, and the state in Safavid Iran

As it is well known, before becoming a fully-fledged political dynasty, the Safavid

movement emerged as a Sunni Sufi order (*tarīqah*) founded by Shaykh Ṣafī al-Dīn Ardabīlī (d.

735/1334) in the frontier region of Azerbaijan. During its early years the *Ṣafavīyah* order was in

essence similar to other orders of the post-Mongol period, with no more pro-Shiite inclinations

than the mild *ʿĀlid* devotionalism that characterized Sufism in that area in general.[1] It was not

until Shah Ismāʿīl became the leader of the *Ṣafavīyah* and until it was poised to become a

political dynasty that the order became openly associated with Shiism. However, even during the

first years of the sixteenth century, before Shah Tahmāsp (r. 1524-1576) pursued a systematic

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[1]For a comprehensive narrative of the early developments of the order, see Michel Mazzaoui. *The origins of the Safawids: Shi'ism, Sufism, and the Ghulat*, Freiburger Islamstudien 3. Rheingold-Druckerei. (Mainz: Franz Steiner, Wiesbaden, 1972), 41-7. Ata Anzali recently completed a dissertation on this topic; see Ata Anzali, *"Safavid Shi'ism, the Eclipse of Sufism, and the Emergence of 'Irfān"* (PhD diss., Rice University, 2012). He has chosen not to make it accessible as he prepares it for publication, so I cannot refer to its contents at the moment, but it will surely be a welcomed contribution on the subject.

institutionalization of 'orthodox' and legalistic Twelver Shiism[2], heterodox practices were

prevalent among the Qizilbāsh and possibly mixed with some *sharīʿah*-based rituals. Shah

Ismāʿīl's followers saw him as an immortal demi-god and even attached his name to the Muslim

profession of faith (the *shahādah*), stating that there was no god but God and that Ismāʿīl was his

custodian (*valī*).[3] As for their ritual practices, they had shamanistic features, as some of his

followers cannibalized the corpses of their enemies in battle and even drank blood out of their

skulls.[4]

    Under the impulse of establishing a Shiite state (at least nominally in the early stages),

Shah Ismāʿīl started a campaign of persecution against Sunni Sufi orders, such as the

Naqshbandīs, the Khalvatīs, and the Kāzarūnīs. In contrast, Shiite orders such as the Haidarīs and

the Niʿmatullahīs were favored by the state, and at times their adepts even intermarried with

members of the Safavid house.[5] Thus, anti-Sufi hostilities in this period were almost

indissociable from broader sectarian attitudes targeting Sunni-leaning groups at large. But they

were also related to Shah Ismāʿīl's need to monopolize spiritual leadership in order to legitimize

his rule as a fusion of temporal and spiritual power. He embellished his claim to authority on a

claim to *sayyid* status that the Safavids had asserted for themselves since the pre-dynastic period.

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[2] See Rula J. Abisaab, *Converting Persia: Religion and Power in the Safavid Empire*.

[3] Leonard Lewisohn, "Sufism and the School of Iṣfahān: *Taṣawwuf* and *ʿIrfān* in Late Safavid Iran (ʿAbd al-Razzāq Lāhījī and Fayḍ-i Kāshānī on the Relation of *Taṣawwuf*, *Ḥikmat* and *ʿIrfān*," in *The Heritage of Sufism, Vol. III: Late Classical Persianate Sufism: the Safavid and Mughal Period (1501-1750),* ed. Leonard Lewisohn and David Morgan (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999), 68.

[4] See Shahzad Bashir, "Shah Ismāʿīl and the Qizilbāsh: Cannibalism in the Religious History of Early Safavid Iran," *History of Religions* 45, no. 3 (February 2006): 234-256.

[5] Hamid Algar, "Naqshbandīs and Safavids: a Contribution to the Religious History of Iran and her Neighbors," *Safavid Iran and her Neighbors,* ed. Michel Mazzaoui (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2003), 6; see also Lewisohn, "Sufism and the School of Isfahān," 76-7.

The authenticity of this status has been a topic of heated debate among scholars, but for our purposes what matters is that, true or not, this alleged genealogy endowed Ismāʿīl with a kind of spiritual authority that neither the Ottomans nor the Mughals had.[6] However, since most Sufi orders could also claim varying degrees of genealogical connection to either the Prophet, ʿAlī, the companions, or the imams; the Shah saw the need to either suppress them or control them, as they could potentially threaten his legitimacy.[7]

By the mid-sixteenth century the dynasty had already assured its grip on political power. Legalistic Twelver Shiism was institutionalized and a substantial part of the population (whether or not the majority is unclear) adhered to this branch of Islam. Therefore, "converting" Iran to Shiism was no longer an issue; instead, the state was busy trying to appease the competing political factions represented primarily by the Qizilbāsh tribes. However, partisan confrontations extended as well to the Sufi orders, including the Shīʿī-leaning Niʿmatullahīs and Haidarīs.

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[6] For the "official" Safavid genealogy, see Roger Savory *Iran under the Safavids* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 3; Sholeh A. Quinn, *Historical Writing in the Reign of Shah ʿAbbās* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2000), 83-6. For the first attempt to disprove this claim, see Ahmad Kasravi, *Shaykh Ṣafī va tabārash* (Tehran: Jār, 2535 [1977]), 25-35. Jean Aubin agrees with the thesis that the genealogy was forged but he disagrees with Kasravi as to when the forgery first occurred. For details, see Jean Aubin. "Etudes Safavides I: Shah Isma`il et les notables de l'Iraq persan," *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient* 2, no. 1 (Jan, 1959): 43-5. Finally, in what is perhaps the most up-to-date study on the matter, by Kazuo Morimoto synthesizes all other research on the matter, and offers a nuanced thesis by looking at a series of manuscripts from the pre-dynastic period which showed that there might have been some basis to the Safavid claim to *sayyid* status or –at the very least– that the forgery of these genealogy was much older than what scholars used to think. For details, see Kazuo Morimoto, "The Earliest ʿAlid Genealogy for the Safavids: New Evidence for the Pre-Dynastic Claim of Sayyid Status," *Iranian Studies* 43, no. 4 (2010): 447-69.

[7] Sajjad Rizvi, "A Sufi Theology Fit for a Shīʿī King: The *Gawhar-i Murād* of ʿAbd al-Razzāq Lāhījī (d. 1072/1661-2)," in *Sufism and Theology,* ed. Ayman Shihadeh (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 83-4.

These orders became so powerful and influential that at some point most major cities in Iran became strongholds of quarreling factions controlled by either one of them.[8]

Shah ʿAbbās I is said to have fueled –without necessarily having started– the rivalry between these Shīʿī *ṭarīqahs*. Through this, he sought to curb the possibility of a political threat coming from them. To better domesticate their potential wrath and to prevent it from turning into a political movement, he allowed the adepts of the two *ṭarīqahs* to fight each other with sticks during Muḥarram ceremonies.[9] However, the Shah was less lenient towards other –especially non-Shīʿī– groups. By the end of the sixteenth century he suppressed the messianic Nuqṭavī movement,[10] he then massacred Lāhījānī Sufis in Qarājadāgh,[11] and he finally pursued a full-scale persecution of the Naqshabandī order, which traces its spiritual genealogy back to the first Caliph, Abū Bakr (d. 634).[12] By the end of his mandate, even the previously favored Niʿmatullahī order have fallen out of grace with him and was suppressed. Of all the *ṭarīqahs* active in Iran up to then, only part of the Kubravīyah managed to survive throughout most of the seventeenth century.[13]

Yet, even in this hostile environment, a certain kind of mystical tradition, *ʿirfān* –which Arjomand has called "high Sufism"–, was able to flourish, and at times was even favored by the

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[8] Jean Calmard, "Shi'i Rituals and Power II. The Consolidation of Safavid Shi'ism: Folklore and Popular Religion," in *Safavid Persia. The History and Politics of an Islamic Society*, ed. Charles Melville, Pembroke Persia Papers 4 (London; New York: I.B. Tauris; Centre of Middle Eastern Studies, University of Cambridge, 1996), 144-5.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid, 145.

[11] Lewisohn, "Sufism and the School of Isfahān," 83.

[12] Algar, "Naqshbandīs and Safavids," 26-7.

[13] Ibid.

court. This was in part the outcome of the collaboration between certain Turcoman tribal

elements (*uymaq*), the harem, and Persian-speaking (Tajik) *ʿulamāʾ*; an alliance which Kathryn

Babayan (and Andrew Newman after her) have called the "Shaykhāvand cabal".[14] Among the

clerics that were associated with this were many *ʿirfān*-oriented ones, such as Mīr Damād (d.

1640), Bahāʾ al-Dīn al-ʿĀmilī (d. 1621), and Ṣultān al-ʿUlamāʾ (d. 1654).[15] Further, Mīr Damād,

Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1640), Mīr Abū al-Qāsim Findiriskī (d. 1640-1), Muḥsin Fayḍ-i Kāshānī (d.

1680), and ʿAbd al-Razzāq Lāhījī Gīlānī (d. 1661-2) constituted what would become known *a

posteriori* as the School of Isfahan, an umbrella term used to group together many philosophers

who sought to reconcile a certain degree of rationalist methodology with mystical concepts.[16]

However, the thinkers of the School of Isfahan too had to distance themselves –whether out of

conviction, due to institutional pressure, or both– from *ṭarīqah*-based practices and doctrines,

many of which were either condemned as extremist (*ghulūw*) beliefs or were associated with

early Safavid folk devotionalism.[17]

Roughly after the reign of Shah ʿAbbās I, under Shah Ṣafī (r. 1629-1642), another faction

known as the "Rustam Beg cabal" acquired influence at the expense of the Shaykhāvands.

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[14] Kathryn Babayan, "The Waning of the Qizilbāsh: The Spiritual and the Temporal in Seventeenth Century Iran" (PhD Dissertation, Princeton University, 1993), 202ff; Andrew J. Newman, "Clerical Perceptions of Sufi Practices in Late Seventeenth-Century Persia: Arguments Over the Permissibility of singing (Ghina')," in *The Heritage of Sufism, Vol. III: Late Classical Persianate Sufism: the Safavid and Mughal Period (1501-1750),* ed. Leonard Lewisohn and David Morgan (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999), 137.

[15] Babayan, "The Waning of the Qizilbāsh," 202ff; Newman, "Clerical Perceptions," 137; Andrew J. Newman, "Sufism and Anti-Sufism in Safavid Iran: the Authorship of the Ḥadīqat al-Shīʾa Revisited," *Iran* 37 (1999): 96. For a discussion of Shaykh Bahāʾī mystical tendencies and for a discussion on how his Sufi tendencies were used by his opponents to critique him, see Andrew J. Newman, "Towards a Reconsideration of the "Isfahān School of Philosophy": Shaykh Bahāʾī and the Role of the Safawid `Ulamā',"*Studia Iranica* 2, no.15 (1986): 188-9.

[16] Lewisohn, "Sufism and the School of Isfahān," 84-8.

[17] Rizvi, "A Sufi Theology," 85; Lewisohn, "Sufism and the School of Isfahān," 67.

Composed mostly of middle-ranking ʿulamā', this group fiercely opposed any sort of Sufi

tendencies and denounced certain forms of philosophical inquiry, as well as the proliferation of

the *Abū Muslim-nāmas*, a folk-literary tradition honoring the early Abbasid figure Abū Muslim

al-Khurasānī (d. 755).[18] However, Ṣafī's successor, Shah ʿAbbās II (r. 1642-1666), sought to

reverse this tendency by patronizing ʿirfānī scholars.[19] His enthusiasm for this latter movement

was such that it earned him in chronicles the epithet of the "dervish-loving Shah" (*shah-i

darvīsh-dūst*).[20] Around the year 1654 he invited two major figures of this tradition to the court,

namely Fayḍ-i Kāshānī and Muḥammad Taqī Majlisī (d. 1659).[21] The former went to great

lengths to justify his alliance with the crown by addressing historically contentious issues

regarding the extent to which an ʿālim could be associated with the state. Earlier in the Safavid

period, such influential figures like Shaykh Ibrahīm al-Qaṭīfī (d. after 1539) had criticized

Shaykh ʿAlī al-Kārakī's (d. 1534) ties with Shah Tahmāsp's government, and had decreed that it

was impermissible for the ʿulamā' to receive gifts from the rulers as al-Kārakī did.[22] Partly

seeking to dissociate himself from the controversy of his defense of the acceptance of land tax

(*kharāj*) revenue from the Shah, al-Kārakī compensated by saying that attending Friday prayer

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[18] Newman, "Clerical Perceptions of Sufi Practices," 137.

[19] Said Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam: Religion, Political Order, and Societal Change in Shi'ite Iran from the Beginning to 1890*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 48.

[20] Rizvi, "A Sufi Theology," 90.

[21] Andrew Newman, "Sufism and Anti-Sufism in Safavid Iran: The Authorship of the "Hadiqat al-Shi'a" Revisited," *Iran* 37 (1999): 99.

[22] Abisaab, *Converting Persia*, 17; Norman Calder. "Legitimacy and Accommodation in Safavid Iran: The Juristic Theory of Muḥammad Bāqir al-Sabzavārī (d. 1090/ 1679)," *Iran* 25 (1987): 96.

during Occultation was not compulsory, and if it were to be held, it should be led by a designated mujtahid as the sole legitimate deputy of the Hidden Imam.[23]

Debates like this, regarding the permissibility, the lack thereof, or even the obligatory character of congregational prayer during occultation were tied to legal discussions concerning the legitimacy of temporal rule during the Imam's occultation and the legal meaning of terms such as *al-sulṭān al-muḥiqq al-ʿādil* (the rightful and just ruler) in opposition to *al-sultān al-ẓālim* or *al-sulṭān al-jā'ir* (the tyrant or the oppressor).[24] Thus, that Fayḍ-i Kāshānī would accept remuneration from the political establishment and would consider Friday Prayer as obligatory (*ʿaynī*) implied to a significant extent an endorsement of authority.[25]

A further example of ʿAbbās II's patronage of the *ʿirfān* tradition was that he commissioned ʿAbd al-Razzāq Lāhījī Gīlānī with the writing of the *Gawhar-i murād*, in which the author explored such mystical themes as the existence of an esoteric (*bāṭin*) path to acquire knowledge of God. Works like this considered Islamic theosophy (*kalām*), scholastic philosophy (*falsafah*), and Sufism (*taṣawwuf*) as complementary rather than as antithetical, a position that would of course provoke a passionate reaction from the thinkers of the Rustam Beg cabal.[26]

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[23] Andrew J. Newman, "Fayd al-Kashani and the Rejection of the Clergy/State Alliance: Friday Prayer and Politics in the Safavid Period," in *The Most Learned of the Shiʿa: the Institution of the Marjaʿ Taqlid*, ed. Linda S. Walbridge (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 35-6; See also *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. "KARAKI: Nur-al-Din Abu'l-Ḥasan ʿAli b. Ḥosayn b. ʿAbd-al-ʿĀli, known as Moḥaqqeq al-Ṯāni or Moḥaqqeq ʿAli (1464-1533), a major Imamite jurist," by Rula J. Abisaab, accessed July 22, 2014, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/karaki.

[24] Calder, "Legitimacy and Accommodation," 91, 96.

[25] Newman, "Fayd al-Kashani and the Rejection of the Clergy/State Alliance," 41-3. It is important to note here that another important question, which is not entirely clear, is whether Fayḍ would have allowed the sermon (*khutbah*) to be read in the name of the Shah. Had that been the case, the endorsement of the Shah's authority would have been absolutely clear. Unfortunately, to my knowledge, there is no way to verify this. I am grateful to Professor Rula Abisaab for this insight.

[26] Rizvi, "A Sufi Theology," 91-2; Lewisohn, "Sufism and the School of Isfahān," 103-12.

However, the influence of the *'irfānīs* would not go unchallenged in this period, as the old anti-Sufism of the Rustam Beg cabal continued to influence Shahʿ Abbās II's court.[27] Some members of this faction were even able to attain major posts; chiefly among them Ḥabīb Allah al-Kārakī (d. 1063/1652-3), who served as *ṣadr* and ʿAlīnaqī Kamrāʾī (d. 1059-60/1650), who became the Shaykh al-Islām of Isfahan.[28] But perhaps the best-known figure of this anti-*'irfān* movement was Muḥammad Ṭāhir-i Qummī (d. 1099/1687-8), who wrote one of the most famous anti-Sufi *risālas* of its time and who might have even been the author of other misattributed works, as we will see later.[29] What this shows is that both *'irfānī* and anti-*'irfānī* scholars were patronized by the court at different moments. Further, this shows that any attempt to consider Sufis, however broadly defined, as essentially anticlerical would be mistaken, as many *'ulamā'* of the time (and from other periods for that matter) held mystical views.[30]

In the final decades of the seventeenth century, anti-Sufi ideas became more accentuated. After the enthronement of Shah Sulaymān in 1666, previously acceptable forms of "high Sufism" started gradually to lose courtly patronage,[31] while staunchly anti-Sufi figures rose to prominence: in what has been described by Andrew Newman as a "striking" career ascent, Ṭāhir-i Qummī was appointed Shaykh al-Islām in Qom.[32] Further, if these anti-Sufi tendencies

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[27] Lewisohn, "Sufism and the School of Isfahān," 115.

[28] Newman, "Clerical Perceptions of Sufis practices," 138.

[29] Newman, "Sufism and Anti-Sufism in Safavid Iran," 98-103.

[30] In general terms, we may here concord with Rula Abisaab's assertion that during the reigns of ʿAbbās II and Ṣafī the *'ulamā'* associated with the court adhered by and large to an "individualized and elitist" kind of Sufism. See Abisaab, *Converting Persia*, 119.

[31] Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, 211.

[32] Newman, "Sufism and Anti-Sufism in Safavid Iran," 102.

gained terrain at this time, it was partly because of the political and intellectual influence of one of Tahir-i Qummi's students, Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī (d. 1110/1698-9). Quite ironically, Majlisī was the son of the famous mystical philosopher Taqī Majlisī and studied with Fayḍ-i Kāshānī.[33] It seems though as if his thought on the Sufi question developed more in continuity with Ṭāhir-i Qummī.[34] In any case, around the time when he became the Shaykh al-Islām of Isfahan, the hostility between Sufis (especially of the *ṭarīqah* kind) and more legalistic *'ulamā'* increased and at some point Majlisī appeared to have convinced Shah Sulṭān Ḥusayn to expel the Sufis from the capital.[35]

Allthough he was surely the most politically influential anti-Sufi scholar of the late seventeenth century, he was by no means alone. The famous hadith collector and jurist Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. al-Ḥusayn al-ʿĀmilī (hereon referred to as al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī) (d. 1104/1693) included several anti-Sufi traditions in his collections, while one of Majlisī's most prominent students, Niʿmat Allah al-Jazāʾirī's (d. 1112/ 1700-1), devoted many passages of his work *Al-Anwār al-nuʿmaniyah* to attacking popular practices of dervish Sufism (particularly Qalandarīs), as will be seen shortly.[36]

The reasons why the anti-Sufi camp prevailed are not exactly clear. Perhaps the best clues can come from Arjomand's statement that, although *'irfān* is by its very nature politically quietist, it nonetheless "undermines hierocratic authority –lessening the importance of the

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[33] Turner, *Islam without Allah?*, 157.

[34] Ibid, 158; see also Andrew J. Newman, *Safavid Iran: The Rebirth of a Persian Empire* (New York; London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 100.

[35] The details about this expulsion are not entirely clear as Arjomand notes. See Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, 191.

[36] Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, 153; see also Abisaab, *Converting Persia*, 134-6.

hierocratic action and thereby strengthening the hand of the state –and consequently the preponderance of state-initiated acts in the overall pattern of societal action."[37] This seems to imply that the main issue at stake was that the *ʿulamāʾ* felt that their capacity to influence state politics was threatened, and this became particularly problematic at times when the state was run by famously vicious rulers, like the wine-loving Shah Sulaymān[38] or the rather weak Shah Sulṭān Ḥusayn. It thus seems that the decline of the *ʿirfānīs* was not a consequence of stronger state control but quite possibly the contrary: the weakening of the state favored the rise of a certain kind of *ʿulamāʾ*, and it was under their pressure that most forms of Sufism were suppressed or directly attacked.

1.2 Anti-Sufi treatises and literature in late Safavid Iran

As we hinted above, in the second half of the Safavid period, the *ʿulamāʾ* harboring diverse doctrinal tendencies produced anti-Sufi writings. In consequence, the nature of these texts varied significantly depending on the author's social and intellectual background. Also, as a general rule, texts produced earlier –around the reign of ʿAbbās II, for instance– were more likely to leave some room for "high" intellectual Sufism, whereas as we got closer to Shah Sulṭān Husayn's times, the *ʿulamāʾs* writings tended to become more hostile to most expressions of Sufism. But one needs to be careful not to generalize this broad tendency, given –as we have seen– the presence of the Rustam Beg cabal also at the courts of Shah Ṣafī and ʿAbbās II.

Let us start by considering *ʿirfānī* critiques of *ṭarīqah* practices. As I noted above, a number of the mystically-inclined philosophers commonly associated with the "School of

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[37] Ibid., 174.

[38] Matthee, *The Pursuit of Pleasure*, 57.

Isfahan"[39] were critical of *ṭarīqah*-Sufism and other aspects of popular piety. For instance, ʿAbd al-Husayn Zarrinkub has pointed out Mīr Dāmād's disdain for what he saw as classical Sufism's refusal to engage in "dialectical mysticism" (*ḥikmat-i baḥthī*). In contrast, Shaykh-i Bahāʾī had mixed approaches to Sufism, as his biography and writings show.[40] In another example, Mullā Ṣadrā wrote his *Kasr aṣnām al-jāhiliyah fī-l-radd ʿalā al-mutaṣawwifah* (*Smashing the Idols of Ignorance* (*or paganism*) *through the Refutation of Pseudo-Sufis* (or *Sufi-Pretenders*)) with the aim to disassociate himself from certain practices of folk religiosity. However, he was nuanced enough to use the term *mutasawwifah (*Pretending to be Sufi*),* which allowed him to present his work as an actual apology of classical Sufism by singling out *ghulāt* practices as deviant. His book as such was a response to clerical attacks that failed –in his view– to acknowledge the differences between the popular –deemed heterodox– practices of the dervishes and the mystical thought of theosophers like himself.[41] Thus, we can see how the question of the relationship between the *'ulamā'* and Sufism is complex one: certain positions that get oftentimes labelled as

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[39] The umbrella term "Isfahan School of Philosophy" was first used in the 1950s by Henry Corbin and Seyyed Hossein Nasr. See Henry Corbin, "Confessions Extatiques de Mir Damad: Maître de Théologie à Ispahan (ob. 1041/1631-1632)," in *Mélanges Louis Massignon* (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1956), 331-78; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "The School of Isfahan," in *A History of Muslim Philosophy*. Vol. 2, ed. Mian Mohammad Sharif (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1963-6), 932-61; see also Newman, "Towards a Reconsideration of the "Isfahān School of Philosophy," 166. More recently, some scholars have question the validity or the usefulness of speaking of the "School of Isfahan" as a unified group either institutionally or intellectually, or have argued that Corbin and Nasr presented a picture that essentializes mystical though and exceptionalizes both Shi`ism and Persian culture. For an overview of the debates, see *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. "Isfahan School of Philosophy," by Sajjad Rizvi, accessed on August 4, 2014, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/isfahan-school-of-philosophy. Finally, Reza Pourjavady has noted that other localized schools of thought existed in the Safavid realm, chiefly among them the "School of Shiraz". See Reza Pourjavady, *Philosophy in Early Safavid Iran: Najm al-Dīn Maḥmūd Nayrīzī and his Writings* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2011).

[40] `Abd al-Ḥusayn Zarrinkub. *Dunbālah-i justujū dar taṣavvuf-i Irān* (Tehran: Mu'assassah-i Intishārat-i Amīr Kabīr, 1366 [1987]), 246-7; Lewisohn, "Sufism and the School of Isfahān," 93.

[41] Ibid., 95-6.

anti-Sufi were responses to particular philosophical, legal, doctrinal, or even socio-political issues that arose at specific moments rather than to Sufism and mystical thought at large.

In another case, one of the most interesting critiques of dervish practices from an *ʿirfānī* perspective is to be found in the work of Fayḍ-i Kāshānī. While he devoted his *Sharh-i ṣadr* to defend Sufism from what he saw as unjust attacks from the "worldly scholars" (*ʿulamā'-yi dunyā*),[42] he too drew a distinction between different doctrines and practices within the mystical tradition. He denounced the kind of pantheism of those who saw God incarnated in everything – that is, a kind of interpretation of the concept of unity of existence (*waḥdat al-wujūd*)–; however, he did not blame the classical poets for such ideas, but rather those who interpreted them erroneously. Further, in his *Al-Muḥakamah*, he considered a division between the people of knowledge and wisdom (*ʿilm va maʿrifat*) and those of asceticism and worship (*zuhd va ʿibādat*) –corresponding respectively to the exoteric *ʿulamā'* and the Sufis–, in which both represented complimentary approaches to the same truth.[43] In one of his *risālahs* he engaged in a similar discussion regarding whether knowledge should be regarded in higher esteem than worship, which he denied. He supported his position with a hadith that reads thus: "Do not draw away from you those who want to be close to their Creator every morning or afternoon and who seek His satisfaction".[44] Further, in his *Al-Inṣāf* he severely criticized a tendency among some *ʿirfānī*

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[42] Ibid., 117-8.

[43] Ibid., 119-20.

[44] Muḥsin Fayḍ-i Kāshānī, *Dah Risālah-yi Muḥaqqiq-i Buzurg-i Fayḍ-i Kāshānī*. Ed. by Rasul Jaʿfariyan (Isfahan: Markaz-i Taḥqīqat-i ʿIlmī va Dinī-yi Imām Amīr al-Mū'minīn, 1371 [c. 1993]), 3.

scholars who considered that the study of books by Sufi poets and philosophers was necessary to access a kind of knowledge that could not be found neither the Qur'an nor the hadith.[45]

A contentious issue for him was that of chanting (*ghinā'*) and musical audition of Sufi poetry. In his own poetry he reproduced some of the common metaphors of chanting and drunkenness of classical Sufi poetry. For this reason, Lewisohn –following Bertels– has seen in him a favorable attitude towards this practice.[46] Yet, it might very well be that he only used such themes as a literary recourse. In another of his ten *risālas* he classified Sufi groups and practices that he disapproved of. He mentioned that certain groups recurred to chanting given the Qur'anic mandate to all believers to remember God in their souls. However, he quoted many hadiths in which chanting out loud was discouraged. In one of them, the Prophet told Abū Dhar Ghafārī to practice instead the *dhikr-i khāmil* which was not chanted out loud (*avāz bih buland nashavad*). And he quoted another report saying: "Oh, people, be calm and do not chant out loud in remembrance [*dhikr*], because you do not want someone [as in: a God] who is not [present] nor someone who is secluded, but rather someone who listens, and who is close to you and with you."[47]

Thus, Fayḍ-i Kāshānī's main objection to chanting was still profoundly apologetic of mysticism: for him there was nothing objectionable about such Sufi ideas like *fanā'* (mystical union with the divine) *per se*. He only disapproved of rituals that seemed to contradict the possibility of reaching this stage. He condemned chanting because it implied the inaccessibility

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[45] Lewisohn, "Sufism and the School of Isfahān," 125; also Newman, "Fayd al-Kashani and the Rejection of the Clergy/State Alliance," 44.

[46] Ibid., 129-30.

[47] Fayḍ-i Kāshānī, *Dah Risālah*, 104.

of God: if the believers needed to raise their voices to be listened by Him, then God had to be distant by nature, which would render futile any attempt to unite with Him.

Needless to say, Fayḍ was not alone in his critique of *ghinā'*. The notable jurist Muḥammad Bāqir Sabzivārī –to whom we have already referred in our previous chapter, who rose to prominence during the pro-*ʿirfānī* times of Shah ʿAbbās II, and who in many respects shared the mystical inclinations of Taqī Majlisī and Fayḍ-i Kāshānī– was an ardent opponent of this practice.[48] Andrew Newman has noted that Sabzivārī sought to find a middle ground between what he saw as legitimate criticisms of Sufi rituals by scholars like Mīr Lawḥī and Ṭāhir-i Qummī and the complete rejection of mysticism.[49] Sabzivārī admitted that Sunni scholars had historically disagreed on the question of *ghinā'*, but he contended that there were no doubts about its condemnation from the Shiite side and presented evidence from the hadith to back his stance. He acknowledged that both the Qur'an and the hadith seemed to leave some space for the use of "good voice", but he believed that this should not be confused with chanting. He argued that many of the more permissive hadith had weak chains of transmission and that oftentimes good-willing believers had engaged in such practices for their safety as part of pious dissimulation (*taqīyah*). He also recognized that under certain circumstances Shiite scholars had allowed forms of chanting that were not related to acts of worship, such as hiring female singers for a wedding, provided that no acts of fornication were committed with her.[50] Newman noted that Sabzivārī resorted to Uṣūlī-style arguments to justify his views, as he recognized that there were often points of contention within the hadith that required the ordinary believers to consult

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[48] Newman, "Clerical Perceptions of Sufi Practices," 154-5.

[49] Ibid., 154-6.

[50] Ibid., 156-8.

with the mujtahids to verify the permissibility of certain practices.[51] In any case, the most important thing here is that, like Fayḍ, Sabzivārī limited himself to condemning only some ritualistic practices of the dervishes, but not mysticism as a whole.

However, there was another radically different trend of anti-Sufi criticism, one which went beyond the critique of mere dervish rituals. Let us begin with the example of the *Ḥadīqat al-Shīʿah,* a text written in the Deccan in Southern India towards 1648 and widely circulated in Iran. For centuries, this work had been mistakenly attributed to Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Ardabīlī (d. 993/1583)[52], but –as Muḥammad Taqī Dānish-pazhūh and Andrew Newman believe– it could very well have been written (at least partially) by Ṭāhir-i Qummī.[53] This work attacked, among other things, doctrines such as that of the divine incarnation (*ḥulūl*) and union (*ittiḥād*), which the text linked to the likes of Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922), Abū Yazīd Bisṭāmī (d. circa 261/874), and Muḥī al-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī (d. 638/1240). It also dedicated considerable space to attacking the aforementioned tradition of the *Abū Muslim-nāmah*, which was associated to the heterodox and messianistic practices of the early Safavids.[54] Such criticisms were shared by some of the major thinkers of the Rustam Beg cabal, chiefly among them Mīr Lawḥī, a fierce foe of Taqī Majlisī's promotion of the *Abū Muslim-namah*.[55]

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[51] Ibid., 161-2.

[52] Andrew J. Newman, "Sufism and Anti-Sufism in Safavid Iran: the Authorship of the Ḥadīqat al-Shīʾa Revisited," *Iran* 37 (1999): 95; according to Rizvi, it was Mīr Lawḥī who first attributed this work to Ardabīlī, see Rizvi, "A Sufi Theology," 87

[53] Newman, "Sufism and Anti-Sufism," 102.

[54] Rizvi, " A Sufi Theology," 86; Newman, "Sufism and Anti-Sufism," 96-7

[55] Abisaab, *Converting Persia*, 134; Rizvi, "A Sufi Theology," 87; Newman, "Fayd al-Kashani and the Rejection," 40.

Whether or not the *Ḥadīqat al-Shī'ah* was written by Ṭāhir-i Qummī, what is certain is

that he did engage in a comprehensive critique of Sufism in his *Risālah-yi radd-i ṣūfiyah*, which

he conceived partly as an exchange with Taqī Majlisī.[56] In this work, he considered *taṣawwuf* as

being, by its very nature, antithetical to Twelver Shiism. To prove it, he resorted to the canonical

Shiite hadith collectors. He noted how Ibn Bābawayh (d. 381/991), Shaykh al-Tūsī (d. 460/1067),

and Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022) disapproved of al-Ḥallāj.[57] He also quoted an anecdote in

which ʿAlī b. Bābwayh al-Qummī (d. 327-8/939) –the father Ibn Babwayh the hadith collector–

had helped expel al-Ḥallāj from Qom.[58] He then went to great lengths to criticize other famous

Sufi poets such as Farīd al-Dīn Aṭṭār (d. 627/1221), Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273) and Bāyazīd

Bisṭāmī (d. 877-8/1473). He reserved his harshest comments for the latter, who he censored for

claiming to be exempted from the duty of prayer.[59]

Further, for Qummī, the fact that no Sufi *khānqahs* were ever established near any major

Shiite centers like Qom, Astarabad, Sabzavar, Jabal ʿAmil, and Hillah sufficed to demonstrate

how alien the Sufi tradition was to Shiism.[60] He also condemned Sufis for abstaining from eating

meat for forty days or more, a sin which he associated also with Sunnis, and which was

proscribed in many hadith narratives cited in al-Kulaynī's (d. 329/941) *Kitāb al-Kāfī*.[61] In fact,

the only time when Qummī recognized any truth in a Sufi's speech was when he cited ʿAlā' al-

[56] Newman, "Sufism and Anti-Sufism," 99.

[57] Muḥammad Tāhir Qummī. "*Risālah-yi radd-i Sūfiyah*" in *Mirāth-i Islāmī-yi Irān*, ed. Rasul Ja`fariyan (Qom: Kitāb-khānah-yi Ḥaẕrat Ayat Allah al-'Uẕma Mar'ashi Najafī, 1373-1374 [1994-1995], 4: 134-5.

[58] Ibid., 135.

[59] Ibid., 137.

[60] Ibid., 137-8.

[61] Ibid., 141.

Dawlah al-Simnānī (d. 787/1336) allegedly confessing that, after twenty-three years of practicing

Sufism, he discovered that it had been the devil who had been whispering to him all that time.[62]

Finally, Qummī went to great lengths to list and describe various "deviant" Sufi groups. In

analyzing them, Newman has observed that most of these descriptions were suspiciously similar

to those contained in similar sections of the *Ḥadīqat al-Shīʿah,* a detail that might help support

the hypothesis that Qummī was also the author of the latter work.[63]

      Another major figure from the late Safavid period, the jurist al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī (d.

1104/1693), focused his critique on the Sufi concepts of *ḥulūl* and *ittiḥād*, much like the author

of the *Ḥadīqat al-Shīʿah*. In his case, the reasoning of his refutation can be traced back to al-

ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī's (d. 726/1325). In his study on *Akhbārī* anti-Sufism, Robert Gleave stressed the

epistemological division between scripture-based knowledge and reason-based opinion, and

situated al-Ḥurr, within the former camp.[64] Gleave noted that al-Ḥurr's refutation of Sufism

included quotations of *akhbār* (or hadith) of the Imams that helped him refute the concepts of

ḥulūl (the incarnation of God in the human body), *ittiḥād* (unity with God), or *waḥdat al-wujūd*

(unity of existence). However, Gleave's categorization seems not to be all that significant in this

case, at least from a purely epistemological perspective, given that mujtahids too relied on Imami

reports to refute Sufism. Gleave argued that the overall epistemology of al-Ḥurr's critique was

based on the idea that the *akhbār* "contain an indication of how to conduct valid reasoning which

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[62] Ibid.

[63] Newman, "Sufism and Anti-Sufism," 99, 104.

[64] Robert Gleave, "Scriptural Sufism and Scriptural Anti-Sufism: Theology and Mysticism amongst the Shī'ī Akhbāriyya," in *Sufism and Theology*, ed. Ayman Shihadeh (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 159.

demonstrate the invalidity of these doctrines"[65]. Here too, there is an overlap with the mujtahids on these particular doctrinal questions of the relationship between Sufism and Imamism. The epistemological distinctions between *uṣūlīs* and *akhbārīs* appear however in other areas of Shiite law and doctrine and less so in Sufism.[66]

Gleave is not the only one to have partly attributed to Akhbarism some of the anti-Sufi hostilities of this period. For instance, when referring to Majlisī's anti-Sufi attitudes, Arjomand believed that he wanted to "absorb the popular *Akhabārī*-inspired devotional component, and to isolate the gnostic mystical/philosophical outlook and single it out for fatal attack"[67]. The problem with this view is that it assumes that Sufism and Akhbārism were monolithic entities. However, there were several *Akhbārī* scholars who cultivated Sufi traditions. And indeed Gleave recognized also that there were *Akhbārī* figures who were sympathetic to Sufism, such as Ṣadr al-Dīn b. Naṣīr al-Dīn b. Mīrzā Ṣāliḥ al-Tabātabā'ī al-Yazdī (d. 1152-3/1740).[68]

To the above *risālas* we should add another genre used to express anti-Sufi ideas, namely exemplary stories like the ones contained in Niʿmat Allah al-Jazāʾirī's *Al-Anwār al-nuʿmaniyah*. As Sajjad Rizvi noted, al-Jazāʾirī attacked Sufis for denying the rights of the family of the Prophet and for the carnivalesque nature of their practices. Further, he denounced how some Sufis, while in a state of trance, claimed to be ʿAlī or Husayn and jumped into the fire to prove

[65] Ibid., 162.

[66] [For more on the epistemological foundations of early *akhbārī* thought and its exchange with particular Sufi and Sunnite Shafiʿi ideas see Rula Jurdi Abisaab, "Shiʿi Jurisprudence, Sunnism and the Traditionist Thought (Akhbārī) of Muhammad Amin Astarābādī (d. 1036/1626-7)".

[67] Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, 152.

[68] Gleave, "Scriptural Sufism and Scriptural Anti-Sufism," 167.

their invulnerability. He also criticized Ibn ʿArabī for claiming that he had ascended to heaven, just like the Prophet in his *miʿrāj*.[69]

Sajjad Rizvi argued that despite these criticisms of the Sufi tradition, al-Jazāʾirī did not seem to object to the state of ecstasy *per se*, a position that would bring him closer to Fayḍ-i Kāshānī and the pro-ʿirfānīs.[70] However, this seems to be contradicted by the fact that he severely criticized earlier Safavid scholars whom he associated with that tradition. He attacked Muḥammad Taqī Majlisī and Shaykh Bahāʾ al-Dīn al-ʿĀmilī for drawing on Sufi literature in their works.[71] Further, the nature of his critique of Sufism, although expressed in the genre of popular short stories, was nonetheless profoundly grounded on legalistic principles. Like Qummī, he went back to al-Tūsī and al-Mufīd to show how allegedly incompatible Shiism and Sufism were; and like Fayḍ-i Kāshānī, he pointed out the ʿulamāʾs universal condemnation of chanting and wine consumption among Sufis.[72] In the latter case, there was a specific objection to practices that ran counter to the *sharīʿah* in the view of the jurists, but not a rejection of various facets of Sufism. But to this standard and formulaic critique he added anecdotes of later Shiite authorities like al-ʿAlāmah al-Hillī (d. 1325).

In one of these stories, al-Ḥillī encountered a group of Sufis, one of which refused to perform his Maghreb prayer with the group and preferred instead to pray alone an hour later. Al-Ḥillī asked them what the reason for this was and what sort of relationship this character had

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[69] Sajjad H. Rizvi, "Sayyid Niʿmat Allāh al-Jazāʾirī and his Anthologies: Anti-Sufism, Shiʿism and Jokes in the Safavid World," *Die Welt des Islams* 50 (2010): 237-8.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Abisaab, *Converting Persia*, 134.

[72] Niʿmat Allah Jazāʾirī, *Al-Anwār al-nuʿmāniyah*, vol.2 (Tabriz: Matba'ah, Shirkat-i Chap [1959-]), 282.

with God. Their answer was that: "some of the people in their path [*sālikīn*] [attain] a higher

level and a perfect prophetic and Imamic rank".[73] It is thus clear that al-Ḥillī's critique was

against what he saw as deliberate and unjustified dismissal of times and manner of prayer. This

appeared as disruptive to the cleric's role in implementing proper rituals of worship.

In another story –al-Jazā'irī wrote– a group of Sufis were dancing, chanting, and –after a

while–, praying by the grave of Imam al-Riḍā. Some of them hit their heads so strongly against

the gravestone that they started to bleed and to spill their blood on it. But when they reached out

to clean the blood, their sheikh reprimanded them saying: "do not do this with such force [*lā*

taḥtālū bi-hadhihi al-ḥiyal], this blood does not cease [to flow] [*lā zālah hadhā al-damm*], for it

is blood of the lovers, and the blood of the lovers is [ritually] pure" [*ṭāhir*].[74] So in both of these

stories al-Jazā'irī denounced infractions to orthopraxis and *ʿibādāt* (acts of worship), discrediting

thus Sufi doctrine.

Section 2: ʿAlī Qulī Jadīd al-Islām's anti-Sufi polemics

2.1 Anti-Sufism in the *Sayf al-mū'minīn*

As with all other topics discussed so far, what set ʿAlī Qulī's anti-Sufi work apart from

other analogous ones was also what made the rest of his work so exceptional; namely, the use of

his expertise on Christianity as a claim of intellectual authority and the instrumentalization of it

for polemical purposes. As we have pointed out previously as well, it is likely that without such

expertise, it would have been more difficult for him to make a name for himself within the

scholarly circles of Iran. He had the natural disadvantage of not being a native speaker of neither

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[73] Ibid., 282.

[74] Ibid., 283.

Persian nor Arabic, and of having started his training in the Islamic tradition late in life. While this observation might seem a mere truism by now, we should still keep it in mind when reading his secondary works given that, even if attacking Christianity was not the main objective of them, they were nonetheless informed by his anti-Christian polemics. Although the *Sayf al-mū'minīn* does contain many passages addressing topics tangentially related to Sufism, the same arguments are by and large contained in his *Risālah dar radd-i jamāʿat-i ṣūfiyān*. For this reason, I will concentrate more on the latter text, which offers his position on this issue in a much more condensed and comprehensive manner.

Nevertheless, let us briefly introduce how this discussion was treated in the *Sayf al-mū'minīn*. The most important passage here would be the one entitled *Ṣufiyān-i mā Naṣārā-yi ummatand* (Our Sufis are the Christians of the Nation (or of the *Ummah*)). His main contention in it was that Sufis and Christians were essentially the same folk, and that both disregarded the law because they claimed that they could be united with the creator. He reproached them for believing that they possessed a secret knowledge that had to be uncovered or unveiled (*kashf shudan/ kardan*), and that in their quest for spiritual guidance "they clang to the robes of every ignorant old man that they find" [*har yak pīr-i jāhilī paydā kardah dast dar dāmān-i irādat-i ū mī zanand*][75].

He also utilized the sectarian factor, accusing Sufi orders of originating from the Sunni tradition in the same way as some Sunni scholars have accused Sufis of tracing their genesis to Shiism. But more importantly, he linked them to Christian doctrines by establishing a parallel between their belief system and certain precepts contained in Saint Paul's letters. He believed

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[75]Jadīd al-Islām, *Sayf al-mū'minīn,* 112.

that Sufis' disregard for the *sharīʿah* was akin to Paul's disregard for the Law of Moses in

Galatians 5, from which he quoted: "Oh disciples of mine! Be firm in what I have taught you so

that later your necks will not be bent by the heaviness of legal rulings; because I, Paul, can tell

you that if you circumcise yourselves, Jesus –who is God –will be of no benefit for you."[76] ʿAlī

Qulī saw this as an invitation to abandon the Law of Moses, which by extension would be a

departure from Jesus's own words in *Matthew* 5, in which he claimed that he had not come to

abrogate the Jewish Law.[77]

But more elaborate than this was ʿAlī Qulī's critique of the Sufi doctrine of "unity of

existence", for which he also blamed Paul's ideas. He dedicated a substantial discussion to this in

his section *But-parastī dar Masiḥiyyat va mas'alah-yi waḥdat al-wujūd* (*Idolatry in Christianity

and the Problems of "unity of existence"*). ʿAlī Qulī began with a cautious note on how Paul

was responsible for most doctrinal innovations –and occasionally even of forgeries– within the

canonical Christian tradition:

[…] but ever since, this plague [*maraḍ-i ṭāʿūn*] of idolatry and all other acts of disbelief have befallen the nation of Jesus by the offspring [*ṭufayl*] of the accursed Paul, who came from the dog-herding tribe and infiltrated the [tribe of] the servants of God in order to putrefy their environment, in such a way that today there is no one from within them [Christians] whose soul has been spared by this plague. But since the source of each plague is poisonousness and since each poison is a treatment for another poison, it is suitable that having taken a stance against the venom of this soul-murdering-viper [*afʿā-yi qātil-i arwāḥ*] that is Paul, we offer a structured response to protect us from the poison of the plague of Christianity with an answer to his speech which is a response to his speech mixed with fresh opium.[78]

Thus in order to respond to Paul's "venom", he quoted a passage from *1 Corinthians* 8 –

which he mistakenly located in *Timothy* 16– in which he saw the foundations of Christian

pantheism. In it, Timothy asked Paul whether it was permissible to eat the meat that was offered

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[76] Ibid., 112-3.

[77] Ibid., 113.

[78] Ibid., 430.

in sacrifice to idols. ʿAlī Qulī then quoted his translation of Paul's response: "Know that in this world no one thing is either an idol or God, but rather everything is one God".[79]

Our author then compared Paul's statement to a couplet from Shaykh Maḥmūd Shabistarī (d. 1340): "*Musalmān gar bidānastī kih but chī-st/ bidānastī kih dīn dar but-parastī-st* [If Muslims knew what an idol is/ they would know that religion is inside idol-worshiping]".[80] In ʿAlī Qulī's mind then, Saint Paul, Shabistarī, and Jerome Xavier became doctrinally undistinguishable. Thus, for him the refutation of one of them should be considered as the refutation of the three:

[…] and since every time that that we refute the words of Paul, the accursed hypocrite, we refute the words of his disciple Jerome, who –based on the words of this accursed one [Paul]– introduced all this disbelief into the Holy Books and from there he forged a book for the Christians; [thus], through the refutation of this deceiver who leads astray [*ḍāl-i muḍall*] we can also indisputably refute the words of Shabistarī and his followers.[81]

He then referred to a passage in *Baruch* 6:

Oh Children of Israel! The time will come when you will be scattered among the disbelievers because of the sins that you committed in the place of the Almighty, and as a punishment and in order to test you, the Praised One will mix you with them. Yet, out of kindness and goodwill he will make you aware that […] when you enter the land of the disbelievers you will see what you never saw in your own land: they build Gods out of gold, silver, stone and wood, which they carry on their shoulders; and they then take them over so that the disbelievers would fear them. So be warned lest you fear the idols as those crowds do. Therefore, in order for you not to fear them when the time comes, I now teach you that as soon as you notice that a group of people either in front or behind them –that is, the idols –[82], is bowing to them and worshiping them, at that point you will cry out at the place of the God of the Worlds [*Khudāvand-i ʿālamiyān*] and say "oh, Lord of the Worlds, only before you I bow and only you shall I worship".[83]

We should finally add that attacks on the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* were anything but new by the late seventeenth century and they were certainly anything but exclusive to Shiism.

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[79] Ibid., 430.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Ibid., 431.

[82] This ellipsis is from ʿAlī Qulī himself, not mine, which is why it is not between brackets.

[83] Ibid., 431-2.

Perhaps the most memorable example of a polemical text linking *waḥdat al-wujūd* to Christianity would be Ibn Taymiyah's *Al-jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ lī-man baddala dīn al-Masīḥ*, where the author accused Christians of worshipping idols and engaging in *shirk* (polytheism).[84] He contrasted this with the genuine affirmation of the unity of God (*tawḥīd*), and with the idea – contained in *Sūrat al-Ikhlās*– that God was *al-Ṣamad*, a concept which Thomas F. Michel has defined as "the supremely independent, self-sufficient being endowed with all the attributes of perfection to which all else turns in need"[85]. The most important distinction between the *waḥdat al-wujūd* of the Sufis and the more orthodox *tawḥid* would then be that in the former God is indistinguishable from his creation and thus a somehow vague entity, whereas in the latter God is an autonomous being, clearly differentiated from the universe.

2.2 *Risālah dar radd-i jamāʿat-i ṣūfiyān*

Having analyzed the most relevant passages of the *Sayf al-mū'minīn* regarding Sufi doctrine, let us now move to his anti-Sufi monograph, the *Risālah dar radd-i jamāʿat-i ṣūfiyān*. ʿAlī Qulī started his *radd* by comparing the charismatic authority of Christian priests to that of Sufi sheikhs:

So know dear [brothers] that your humble servant [found] through the exploration of Christian books and the discourse of the religious authorities [*pīrān*], the positions [*awḍāʿ*], and methods [*aṭvār*] of this sect [*madhhab*] that this sect of Sufism [*madhhab-i taṣavvuf*] has been linked to Christianity since ancient times and that the two have continued to mix with each other until this day. Christians have supported [the idea] of the unity between their priests –through laborious study [*riyāḍat*] and acquisition [of knowledge] [*kasb*]– with the Holy Spirit, who they consider as one of the persons of the Trinity. Likewise, Sufis now believe that after somebody follows the mystical path under the supervision of the major Sufi guide of the order (*pīr-i kāmil*), he can be united with the Divine.[86]

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[84] Michel, *A Muslim Theologian's Response to Christianity*, 5-14.

[85] Ibid., 6.

[86] Jadīd al-Islām, "Risālah dar radd-i jamāʿat-i ṣūfiyān," 896.

Once again, this comparison between Christian priesthood and Sufi *pīrs* was not ʿAlī Qulī's innovation. Ibn Taymiyah had also criticized the way in which Sufis, Christians, and –in his critique – Shīʿīs had ascribed the attribute of infallibility to people other than the prophets (namely their *pīrs*, priests, and the Imams).[87] Needless to say, our pro-Shiite author would not accept applying this analogy to the Imams, nor would his critique focus on any alleged infallibility of priests and *pīrs* (at least not here). But otherwise, ʿAlī Qulī's line of thinking was in agreement with the ultimate implication of Ibn Taymiyah's argument, namely that acknowledging any special relationship between Christian priests and the Holy Spirit or between Sufi sheikhs and God would be akin to polytheism (*shirk*). Thus, while the inclusion of this theme in his *radd* was no longer a novelty in ʿAlī Qulī's times, his choice to emphasize it did set his work apart from the anti-Sufi opera of most of his contemporaries (and near contemporaries), like the abovementioned Muḥammad Tāhirī-yi Qummī and Niʿmat Allah al-Jazāʾirī.

ʿAlī Qulī then moved on to explore the (false) etymology of the term "Sufi". For this, he referred to Ambrodgio Calepino's lexicographical work, which we already encountered in previous chapters. He noted that, since European languages could not distinguish between the sounds of "s" and "ṣ", Calepino had amalgamated *ṣūfī* with *sūfī*; the latter term referring to the sophists, or the pre-Pythagorian Seven Sages of Greece: Thales of Miletus (d. 546 b. C.), Solon of Athens (d. 558 b. C.), Chilon of Sparta (d. 6th century b. C.), Pittacus of Mytilene (d. 568 b. C.), Bias of Priene (d. 6th century b. C.), Periander of Corinth (d. 627 b. C.), and Cleobulus of Lindos (d. 600 b. C.).[88] He thus linked sophists and Sufis this way:

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[87] Michel, *A Muslim Theologian's Response to Christianity*, 37-8.

[88] Jadīd al-Islām, *Risālah dar radd-i jamāʿat-i ṣūfiyān*, 897-8.

So it thus happens now that a group of Muslims, the majority of whom are poor and needy –for as Sufi *pīrs* show that men can reach a state in which the yoke of slavery has fallen from people's necks and yet be enslaved by others– have joined Sufi groups. And in order to prevent their many transient worldly duties from distracting them from learning about their religious obligations, and hoping to reach a state in which those obligations will be halted, they gather in a place to chant and recite poetry, just as evil-doers like [Muḥammad Shīrīn] Maghribī (d.1407/8) and [Farīd al-Dīn] ʿAṭṭār did. And [by practicing] sometimes ritual remembrance [*dhikr*], sometimes in ecstasy [*wajd*], and sometimes in chanting [*simāʿ*], they deprive themselves from listening to lectures on the remembrance of the family of the Prophet [*manāqib- va faḍāʾil-i ahl-i bayt-i rasūl*]. And in the same way that people of ancient evil sects would rejoice before their idols and recite poetry [for them], this other group [Sufis] would play melodious music for a beautiful boy who would be at such assemblies [*majlis*], and they would consider this kind of movements as acts of worship [*ʿibādāt*]. And thus, when Pythagoras appeared amongst the [old] philosophers [*ḥukamā*] and the people of the evil sect [*mardum-i bad-madhhab*], for our benefit he called himself a philosopher [*fīlusūf*], meaning "one who loves knowledge".[89]

Having established the connection between Sufism, paganism and pre-Pytagorian philosophy,

ʿAlī Qulī then condemned Sufis for being, in his mind, "worse than the Christians":

But these Christians of today –that is, Sufis– are worse than those [other] Christians, because the divine grace [*lutf-i illahī*] was infused into them and they were born into Islam and they knew of its existence; and yet they have extended their hands [reaching out] to the robes of the speeches of the [old] philosophers [*ḥukamā*] and of the ignorant Sufi *pīrs*, and they have closed their eyes to the sayings (*hadith*) of the Prophet's family, and have taken a newly-lit path which is not indicated in any *hadith*, and have adopted ritual practices [*ʿibādāt*] like dancing, whirling, chanting, love-making, and other customs in which they engage among each other.[90]

In addition, our author noted how, for a minor sum of money, the needy would host Sufi

gatherings at their houses, and how this helped the dissemination of their ideology.[91]

He then denounced the Sufis' appropriation of the term *awliyāʾ Allah* (friends of God),

saying that this title should be reserved only for the companions of the Prophet, and for those

who believed in their words and deeds, but "not [for] those ignorant *pīrs* which at the beginning

of the path stepped away [*pā az dāʾirah-yi bandigī bīrūn gashtah*] and went out saying "I am the

Truth" [*anā al-ḥaqq*]".[92]

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[89] Ibid., 898-9.

[90] Ibid., 899.

[91] Ibid., 900.

[92] Ibid., 901.

Following these criticisms, ʿAli Qulī sought to strengthen his case by reaffirming the

alleged links between pagan idolatry and Sufi practices. He disapprovingly cited Muḥyī al-Dīn

Ibn ʿArabī [d. 638/1240] saying that God did not prevent Samarians from worshipping calves

because He wanted to be worshipped in all forms.[93] This took our author to compare Sufis to

Greek pagans:

[…] [Pagans] build idol temples into which they carve faces of men and women, which they in turn worship, and to whom they vow and offer sacrifices. [They do so] believing that these gods will bring them whatever they need. And when the demons enter in the mouth cavities of these idols and speak to them, then they associate many beliefs with these faces. They believe that the people they have deified were brought into the world by women who had relations with deities. And [they believe] that these deities have often fought each other over women and their children or over government; and that they have dominated each other. And thus the victor and the defeated have been portrayed in whatever image they have chosen [for them], saying: "these trees and stones and animals are all deities who other deities have carved."[94]

To elaborate more on the pagan belief system, ʿAlī Qulī then briefly discussed some aspects of

Greek Mythology. He recurred once again to Calepino's lexicon, from where he cited an entry

on Saturn. He focused on the latter's relationship with Opis and the eventual birth of Jupiter and

Juno, and on how Opis left Jupiter alone in the island of Crete for fear that he could be eaten by

his father. ʿAlī Qulī explained how Greek mythological deities were said to have procreated with

mortals and how whenever a person excelled in a given skill he would be considered as the son

of a god, who should –after his dead– be worshipped as a fully-fledged god. This led to a

confusion of "new" deities associated with "older" ones, and that is why Cicero referred to three

different gods, all known by the name of Jupiter.[95]

Alī Qulī saw in the Christian concept of the Trinity the continuation of this pagan

trifurcation of Jupiter, and he reproached Sufis not only of failing to condemn such an idea, but

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[93] Ibid., 901.

[94] Ibid., 902.

[95] Ibid., 902-4.

of going even further by staying "everything is God" (*hamah chīz Khudā-st*).[96] He warned that such doctrines have had consequences at the level of orthopraxis and ritual observance, as certain Sufi *pīrs* neglected their fast under the excuse that they have reached a superior spiritual state, which exempted them from these requirements.[97]

At this point in his treatise ʿAlī Qulī anticipated the question of how he could know about the content of Sufi doctrine and the relationship between the *pīrs* and their spiritual followers (*murīds*). His answer was simple: he once again claimed that no substantial differences existed between priesthood (*pādidrī-garī*) and pīrhood (*pīrī*), and that his experience within the Catholic Church was tantamount to what Sufis lived in the *ṭarīqahs*. He says: "I, who for a moment was myself a priest [*pādirī*] and a *pīr*, had spiritual followers [*murīdān*]."[98] And he closed the statement by linking together explicitly his anti-Christian and his anti-Sufi works: "I thus now write a refutation of the Christian faith hoping that those who were at the time [my] spiritual followers [*murīdān*] will see it and read it; and that upon seeing that I was disgusted by the religion I once followed and have chosen the Truth [Islam], they too will follow my steps and turn into the Truth."[99]

He then moved on to challenge those (conceivably *ʿirfānī* philosophers) who saw no harm in the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd,* claiming that this term had to be understood at a symbolic level and that it had more to do with Hellenistic philosophy than with the practices of

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[96] Ibid., 904.

[97] Ibid., 905-6.

[98] Ibid., 906.

[99] Ibid.

ṭarīqah Sufism.[100] He quoted a series of hadiths from Kulaynī, including one in which the chain

of transmission went back to the sixth Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, who said: "whoever thinks about the

nature of God's substance becomes ruined" [*har kas fikr dar dhāt-i Khudā-yi taʿālā kunad kih*

chih gūnah ast, halāk mī shavad].[101] He then censured Sufi philosophers' disregard for hadith-

based methodology:

> […] they [philosophers] will say here that "we are not concerned [*kār nadārīm*] with the *hadith* of the Prophet (saw) and we know everything that the philosophers [*ḥakīmān*] and our guides [*muqtadāyān*] in the art of philosophy [*ḥikmat*] –such as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and the rest of them– have written for us in their books. And they have firmly written about *waḥdat al-wujūd* and other intellectual questions [*masāʾil-i ʿaqlī*], and therefore we follow them".[102]

He disapproved of those sympathizers of Greek philosophy who failed to condemn philosophers

as pagans under the excuse that they had lived before the time of the Qur'anic revelation. For our

author, this justification was not sufficient, given that from the time of Adam to the time of

Moses God had provided every nation with prophets for their guidance, but that Greek

philosophers were not among them. He noted that philosophy was not taught during the time of

the Prophet Muhammad, and that it only started to flourish in Baghdad after the arrival in the city

of thousands of enemies of God [*mulḥids*]. He compared this with the situation in Isfahan in his

time. He claimed that unbelievers had come to the city and were being treated "with great esteem

[*bā iʿtibār-i ghalbah*]", and that "many of them [were] ʿulamāʾ, jurists, and followers of the

family of the Prophet".[103]

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[100] Ibid., 906-7.

[101] Ibid., 907.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Ibid., 908-9.

He then dismissed some non-Shīʿī hadith that Sufis referred to when justifying the practice of ritual remembrance and –with it– the authority of their spiritual "axis" (*quṭb*). In response, he quoted an anecdote in which ʿAllāmah al-Ḥillī encountered a group of Sufis and asked why their leader was not praying. They replied that the *pīr* was connected (*wāṣil*) to the divine and that physical prayer was for him like a veil (*ḥijāb*) that obstructed his special relationship with God. ʿAlī Qulī saw in this the deviant influence of Sufi poetical tropes –like those used in Jalāl al-Dīn-i Rūmī's *Mathnavī* – rather than any legitimate religious doctrine.[104]

He also denounced the financial and institutional support given to philosophy through pious endowments (*waqf/awqāf*), which had led to the building of madrasas where scholars spent more time reading Plato and Aristotle than studying hadith. He cited a conversation he once had with one of these *ʿulamāʾ*. He asked the scholar why he studied philosophy at the expense of more conventional religious sciences, to which the latter replied that he had no choice but to do so if he wanted to secure his employment and that his duties did not leave him much time for the study of scripture.[105]

This forced ʿAlī Qulī to address the reasons often advanced by apologists of philosophy to defend their intellectual inclinations. He started by denying that the introduction of philosophy into the Islamic world was inevitable due to the contact between Muslim and Christian scholars, especially outside the *Dar al-Islām*.[106] He claimed that this could not have been the case, given that the reclusive nature of Christian monastic life would not have been conducive to such exchanges. He engages in a detailed description of priestly routines, which bore some

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[104] Ibid., 910-1.

[105] Ibid., 912-3.

[106] Ibid., 913.

resemblance with some of the sections of the *Sayf al mū'minīn* discussed in previous chapters and which even incorporated some of the themes of his *Favā'id-i izdivāj*. For instance, he mentioned how priests were prevented from marrying so that they would not get distracted by the burdens of family life. He also compared the leaders of monastic orders to *pīrs* and noted how the adherents of each order wore distinctive religious garments.[107] But more importantly, he contrasted the dissemination of knowledge within the Christian monasteries with that of the madrasas. He said that teachers in the monasteries did not bring their books with them to their seminaries. Rather, students spent approximately two years reading philosophy books on their own, taking notes, and preparing the questions they would pose when they finally attended a class.[108] The tacit implication of this would of course be that intellectual exchange between monks and outsiders were significantly constrained.

ʿAlī Qulī then entertained the rhetorical question of why, after having converted to Islam, he did not discourage people from the pursuit of reason (ʿaql) and philosophy (ḥikmat) in a more active fashion. His answer was that reason and philosophical reflection were not necessarily harmful in and of themselves. But he qualified this by saying: "ʿaql is that which leads to grace [tawfīq] and [saying that he would encourage people] to get acquainted with the [kind of] ḥikmat that God and his Prophet have given [to humanity]".[109] He concluded by saying: "the real ḥikmat are the hadiths and [therefore] following the hadiths would lead [you] through the path to heaven. And this makes the difference between the Shīʿī and the infidel [kāfir]".[110]

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[107] Ibid., 913.

[108] Ibid., 915.

[109] Ibid., 916.

[110] Ibid., 916-7.

He then addressed the argument that studying Greek philosophy would allow Muslims to refute it better. He did not believe that Muslim scholars should dedicate so much time to this discipline for that sole purpose. If one were to do so –he argued – why not then consecrate the same amount of time to other equally problematic ideologies? It would have sufficed for him to know what religion and which prophets each doctrine followed. When considering the argument that philosophy could help people understand better what might happen during the Day of Judgment (*qiyāmat*), he dismissed it on the grounds that the Holy Books already contained everything that could be known about this issue and that "Satan-inspired" philosophers had nothing relevant to ad. To prove that Socrates was indeed inspired by the devil he cited Calepino's entry on Socrates, which included many anecdotes of the latter abusing his wife.[111]

After expounding thus the alleged pagan (Hellenistic) roots –or at the very least, the pagan connections– of Sufi doctrine, ʿAlī Qulī focused on the latter's ties to Christian scripturalism. He first quoted a passage from Saint Paul's *Letter to Timothy* 3:

All of you are sons of God with faith [in the fact] that Jesus is God […] Jesus embodies God in himself and in [his] religion there is no more reason among you to differentiate each other and to say that "I am Jewish and he is Greek, I am a slave and he is a master, I am a man and that one is a woman"; since all of you are made one in Jesus, who is God, and all of you embody Him [*ū rā dar khūd pūshānīdah-īd*].[112]

He complimented this with a fuller version of the same quote from *1 Corinthians* 8 which we have encountered above in the *Sayf;* namely that in which Paul was asked whether it was permissible to eat the meat that had been sacrificed to idols, to which he answered:

There are no idols in this world and nothing is God but the one God. And no matter how many people on Earth and Heaven are said to become gods, it is not true that there are many gods and lords. For me there is only one God [who] is [our] father, and everything comes from Him, and we are all in Him; and there is one lord Jesus Christ [who is]

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[111] Ibid., 917.

[112] Ibid., 920-1.

God, and we are all together with him Him. But not everybody knows this, and as a consequence, some people whose hearts have fallen ill to [Satan's] whispering [*waswās*], have become impure [*najis*] because of this.[113]

Our author saw in this quote the origin of the idea that men could be united with God and that everything on Earth could share God's substance. This would be the genesis of the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, which had influenced Sufis and which had led them to spent entire days performing *dhikr* while reciting Rūmī's poetry.

ʿAlī Qulī then discussed further the Christian belief of Jesus's two substances (*dhāt/ dhawāt*) –namely human and divine–, which would of course imply that humans would share their creator's substance. He said he had already refuted this in his *Hidāyat al-ḍāllīn*.[114] He believed that Paul's mistake was to logically link together the clauses "there are no idols in this world" and "nothing is God but the one God". Our author thought that if the first clause were to be taken literally, then it would clearly be a lie, since idolatry had existed from the beginning of times. To prove this, he made a short parenthesis where he quoted a passage from *Isaiah* 44 where God said to the people of Israel: "I am the first and the last, the one who did not have a beginning and will not have an end. No one is God other than me. If there is someone who is similar to me, let him say it out loud and lay it out to me [*khūd rā binamāyad*]".[115] Here, ʿAlī Qulī saw the acknowledgement that God had permitted (not in the sense of morally authorized but in the sense of allowing it to happen) his imitators to express their claims. ʿAlī Qulī also argued that, while in Isaiah's book it was Jacob who received this message, this must have been

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[113] Ibid., 921.

[114] Ibid., 922.

[115] Ibid., 923.

another case of tampering from Jerome Xavier, and that it must have been Muhammad who was chosen to reveal this prophecy.[116]

As for the second statement in Paul's letter –that of there being no gods but the one God–, ʿAlī Qulī believed that Paul misinterpreted it and intended it to mean that all those things that had been traditionally worshipped by pagans –the stars, the moon, trees, etc. – should be understood as constituting parts of the one and only God rather than as being each of them individual deities.[117] This would obviously be consistent with the kind of pantheism defended by the proponents of *waḥdat al-wujūd* but not with the more orthodox sense of the unity of God (*tawḥīd*) implied in the *shahādah*.

ʿAlī Qulī thus found it hypocritical of Sufis to try, on the one hand, to dissociate themselves from Christians by saying that they were Muslim, and on the other hand to adhere to their same belief-system.[118] He reproached them of freely interpreting the Qur'an in order to justify these kinds of readings, and in responding to them he brought forward an *ayah* which we have already encountered in the previous chapter, namely: "*wa mā yaʿlamu tāʾwīlahu illā Allahu wa'l-rāsikhūn fī'l-ʿilm*" [only God and those who are firmly rooted in knowledge know its [i.e. the interpretation of the Qur'an].[119] Clearly for him, after the passing of the Prophet, only the Imams could be considered to be among those who were "deeply rooted in knowledge". He thus

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[116] Ibid.

[117] Ibid., 926.

[118] Ibid., 927.

[119] Ibid.

condemned those who called themselves Shiite while at the same time recognizing the likes of

Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Rūmī (let alone Paul) as their spiritual guides.[120]

2.3 Concluding remarks

As we can see, in this treatise, our author was mostly preoccupied with the refutation of

the philosophical and doctrinal aspects of Sufism. There are of course some references to

chanting and *dhikr* in this work, but the bulk of it was not directed against popular piety. If

anything, his major social denunciation was against the institutional advantages of *ʿirfānī*

scholars in Isfahan, towards whom he displayed no sympathy. As we have seen in our historical

review, this should barely be a surprise coming from an author of his time. Throughout large

passages, the treatise even seems more like an attack of scholasticism at large (understood as the

study of Hellenistic philosophy) than simply a refutation of *ʿirfān*. To be sure, our author did

take the time to distinguish between the pre-Pythagorian *ḥikmah* and the later *fālāsifah*, but he

did not elaborate on what aspects of *ḥikmah* he would consider retaining. If anything, his most

interesting argument was that the pursuit of *ʿaql* and *ḥikmah* should not be condemned in and of

itself as long as the only the *ḥikmah* followed was that of the hadith..

This brings us to a critical question not only about ʿAlī Qulī's refutation of the spread of

the teaching of *ḥikmah* but also about the religious politics and court dynamics during the late

Safavid period. We can now revisit the view that the attack on the *ʿirfānī* trends was nurtured by

Shah Sulṭān Ḥusayn and his courtiers through the *Akhbārī ʿulamā'*. How can we interpret the

implications of the main views presented by ʿAlī Qulī in his treatise? If our most immediate

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[120] Ibid.

instinct is to look for coherence within our author's historical portrait, then we would immediately be faced with a problem: we know that it was an *Uṣūli* –namely Fāḍil al-Hindī– who encouraged him to write his *Sayf al-mū'minīn*. This would seem to imply that the latter must have mentored ʿAlī Qulī at least to a certain extent. Further, the fact that in this treatise ʿAlī Qulī mentions the *Hidāyat al-ḍāllīn* but not the *Sayf al-mū'minīn* and the fact that he says that he will later present a refutation of Christianity seems to imply that this work preceded the writing of the *Sayf al-mū'minīn*. This should entail that Fāḍil al-Hindī would had had to approve of this work (assuming that he knew it) before encouraging him to write the *Sayf*. Based on this it would be difficult to attribute pro-*Akhbārī* sympathies to our author. Unfortunately, the fact that Fāḍil al-Hindī remains understudied –even though he was one of the major mujtahids of the late Safavid period– makes it difficult for us to draw more conclusions about the implications of our author's engagement with him. For instance, Rula Jurdi Abisaab has noted that of the 150 works attributed to him around thirty-five are extant covering areas of law, jurisprudence, foundations of religion, exegesis, logic, philosophy, Arabic grammar and rhetoric. However, we still do not know much about his exegetical methods and his approaches to logic and philosophy. The latter issue would have to be studied apart as it cannot be inferred from what he said in other kinds of works. For example, other major mujtahids of previous generations, such as al-Shahīd al-Thānī (d. 965/1558), used forms of logic and analogical reasoning in *ijtihād* but did not approve of the widespread study of *kalām* and philosophy in Iran.[121] So the picture is quiet complex and ʿAlī Qulī's views on Greek philosophy may very well be an expression of the *Uṣūlī* make-up of al-Fāḍil.

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[121] Rula Jurdi Abisaab, "Shakl-i Ghīrī Akhbārī Gharī," *Iran Nameh*, forthcoming.

On the other hand, scholars from this generation exhibited both *Akhbārī* and *Uṣūlī* traces in their works. Rula Abisaab and Andrew Newman have both pointed out how this was the case even with Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī.[122] This proves that the *Uṣūlī/ Akhbārī* tags are often insufficient to describe the complexity of certain scholars' opera. Further, throughout history, scholars of different tendencies have studied and engaged scholars of other schools of thought, even the most antithetical to their own views. But more importantly, as Gleave has showed in his analysis of al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī's references to al-ʿAllāmah al-Ḥillī in his anti-Sufi works, scholars could approve of someone else's theological thought while rejecting his views on legal methodology.[123] In this sense then, ʿAlī Qulī's relationship with Fāḍil al-Hindī should not be taken as a definite proof of his *Uṣūlī* allegiance. To begin with, we should keep in mind Skinner's warning against attributing coherent doctrines to thinkers who did not explicitly developed one, or against attributing to them opinions on topics they did not sought to address. However –as we have also repeatedly said throughout this study–, the interdisciplinarity of Islamic learning allows us to infer that theologians necessarily had knowledge of law and vice versa. Thus, more research should be done to assess the extent to which we can have a fuller idea as to the depth of ʿAlī Qulī's knowledge of the law and of how it can be derived –hence, jurisprudence–. It would be also important to know whether he knew in detail how the hadith is assessed and whether he endorsed the *dirāyā* (sifting of hadith) upheld by leading mujtahids such as al-Karakī and Shaykh-i Baha'ī. Knowing this would allow us to determine whether he had a particular stand on it in order to assess better his position –if he had one– on the *Uṣūlī/ Akhbārī* debate, given that the mere advocacy for the use of hadith in his work is not sufficient to give us

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[122] Abisaab, *Converting Persia*, 132; Newman, *Safavid Iran: the Rebirth of a Persian Empire*, 98-9.

[123] Gleave, "Scritpural Sufism and Scriptural Anti-Sufism," 162.

an idea. For instance, Husayn b. ʿAbd al-Samad (d. 984/1576), the father of Baha'ī, was a passionate advocate of the study and spread of hadith despite being an *Uṣūlī*.[124] There is nothing contradictory about this since the mujtahids themselves rely on the categorization of hadith and encouraged its study.

In ʿAlī Qulī's case, it seems reasonable to argue that al-Fāḍil al-Hindī (or Fāḍil-i Hindī) might had been permissive regarding ʿAlī Qulī's legal and theological positions due to his attempt to refute Christian theology. By the same token, we should be careful not to attribute his affinity for certain *Akhbārī* positions as a coherent and an uncompromising support for *Akhbārīsm*. Rula Jurdi Abisaab, in her study of Mullā Muḥammad Amīn Astarābādī (d. 1037/1627), argues that the *Akhbārīs* did not constitute a monolithic group and thus held very different opinions on law, hadith, and *kalām*.[125] She and Sayyid Hasan Ansari have noted that a number of mujtahids, who defended the use of *ijtihād* in the derivation of the law, nonetheless, drew upon *Akhbārī* methods in their approach to hadith.[126] She distinguishes between Astarābādī's approach to the use of reasoning in *kalām* and his rejection of it in the approbation of hadith. She compares it to al-Muqaddas al-Ardabīlī's (d. 993/1585), who disapproved of *kalām* discourse because it dealt with God's attributes but who nonetheless cultivated independent forms of reasoning in the derivation of the law. As such, we cannot make generalizations on this matter and we have to specify the particular problem or set of problems, which a particular scholar is addressing.

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[124] Abisaab, *Converting Persia*, 32.

[125] Abisaab, "Shiʿi Jurisprudence, Sunnism and the Traditionist Thought (Akhbārī) of Muhammad Amin Astarābādī (d. 1036/1626-7)"; class discussions.

[126] Ibid.

That said, does the actual *structure* of the treatise's arguments and the *methods* used to

defend its main ideas reveal any *Akhbārī* traits whatsoever? There are many reasons to say yes,

the most compelling of which would be the significant amount of effort that ʿAlī Qulī devoted to

the defense of hadith as the first and final basis for interpretation and arrival at conclusive

evidence for the support or refutation of an act. On the other hand, for instance, the

condemnation of those who privileged the study of Greek philosophy over strictly Muslim

scripture was *not* an exclusively *Akhbārī* position. In his study of al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, Gleave

believes that what made the latter's anti-Sufism truly *Akhbārī* was that he used hadith not just as

an *aṣl* from which to make legal or theological inferences (which mujtahids also do) but as a

self-sufficient epistemological tool that shed light on the very nature of the sources of law (*uṣūl

al-fiqh*).[127]

So we should ask once again: does anything like this occur in ʿAlī Qulī's treatise? He

certainly quoted some hadith when refuting certain Sufi practices, but his *risālah* was not heavily

hadith -based in his examples. However, and perhaps even more importantly, he did repeatedly

make the case for the self-sufficient nature of the study of hadith. When he criticized the

philosophical obsessions of the madrasas in Isfahan and when he responded to the many claims

that philosophy could shed light on questions such as the nature of *qiyāmat*, he did so through a

passionate defense of the self-sufficient nature of scripture. What to make then of his statements

on the *ʿaql* and the *ḥikmah* of the hadith? Is that an implicit acknowledgement that a certain kind

of philosophical enquiry could be amalgamated with the study of hadith (and scripture in

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[127] Ibid., 159-62.

general)? Or is it a recognition that all possible knowledge that mankind can acquire is contained in it? I am inclined to believe that it is the latter rather than the former.

I would argue that ʿAlī Qulī's advocacy for the *ḥikmah* of the hadith has more in common with another subtle nuance that Gleave has correctly pointed out. In his comparison between the great *Uṣūlī* thinker Muḥammad Bāqir Bihabahānī (d. 1206/1791) and the *Akhbārī*-inclined Yūsuf al-Baḥrānī (d. 1186/1772), Gleave argues that the *Akhbārīs* did not reject the principles of *taqlīd* and *ijtihād* in and of themselves, but rather believed that the Imams were the ultimate mujtahids. In other words, *Akhbārīs* saw themselves as the *muqallids* (those who practice *taqlīd*) of the Imams.[128] Thus, by referring to the *ḥikmah* of the hadith, ʿAlī Qulī would be doing something similar: he would be acknowledging the principle of the need for the use of reason, but believing that everything that the believer needed to know, along with a preliminary or basic level of interpretation, was contained in the hadith. This seems to be further confirmed by his rejection of *ʿirfānī* interpretations of scripture through the reference to the "*rāsikhūn fī-l-ʿilm*", and by restricting this epithet to the Imams. We can conclude therefore that a certain degree of affinity for *Akhbārī* ideas does seem to have permeated this particular *risālah* of ʿAlī Qulī.

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[128] Robert Gleave, *Inevitable Doubt: Two Theories of Shīʿī Jurisprudence*, Studies in Islamic Law and Society 12 (Boston; London; Köln: Brill, 2000), 244-5.

Conclusion

Throughout this study, we have been able to assess the relevance of ʿAlī Qulī Jadīd al-Islām's works on the fields of Shīʿī apologetics and polemics and their distinct connections to Shīʿī doctrinal and legal literature of the late Safavid period. These works were situated within a broad socio-political context tied to changes in the Safavid state and in the *ʿulamāʾ* approach to non-Muslim and non-Shiʿite groups in Iran, as well as within the context of intra-Christian rivalries between Catholics and Armenian Orthodox and of European power struggles as reflected through the activities of the missionary orders in Iran. While there were signs of growing suspicion against non-Muslims –and in some cases against non-Shīʿī groups– throughout the seventeenth century AD as a whole, these attitudes increased in the last decades of the century mostly due to the weakening of the state. The rulers needed to consolidate their legitimacy as rightful protectors of the *sharīʿah*, and for this they often resorted to scapegoating certain groups. Perhaps due to this vacuum of political authority as well, a strand of powerful *ʿulamāʾ* –with Majlisī at the head– managed to shape the politics of the court. Overall, the main target of Majlisī and his likes were "heterodox" Muslim groups and Sunnis, who were perceived as a direct challenge to their doctrinal and legal teachings and to the integrity of the state. However, non-Muslims also suffered the consequences of this shift in power. Previously protected groups like the Armenians began to fall out of grace with the state. Others, like the Jews, who had already suffered from repression in earlier decades, were used as scapegoats more frequently. However, the scope of this repression is hard to assess, as the evidence from the sources suggests that most measures were temporal and restricted to specific geographic areas.

More importantly for our purposes –and as Reza Pourjavady and Sabine Schmidtke have rightly noted– for all the challenges that the Jews and the Orthodox Armenian Christians could

represent, they did not pose the same intellectual challenge that Catholic missionaries did.[1] In the early decades of the 1600s the Safavid monarchs tolerated –and in certain cases even favored– the establishment of missions, mostly to be in good terms with the European powers could become potential allies against the Ottomans. However, towards the end of the century things started to change: the Ottoman wars were over and the state was facing a crisis of political control and moral legitimacy. Thus, no widespread attack on the Catholic orders occurred, but the intra-Christian conflicts between Orthodox Armenians and Catholics and the internal strife among the different Catholic orders themselves remained the main source of hardship for the missionaries. Meanwhile, the *ʿulamā'* close to the court felt the need to respond to the potential intellectual menace that the missionaries represented at a time of critical European expansion in the region. This can explain the court's interest in sponsoring projects of partial biblical translations and commentaries such as Khātūnābādī's and ʿAlī Qulī's, even if such authors – particularly the latter– framed their works as responses to decades-old debates; and even if they both drew upon an array of foundational texts, tools and methods in various fields of the Islamic sciences to advance their distinct positions and approaches.

The second aspect of the study addressed theoretical questions regarding conversion at ʿAlī Qulī's time and how his particular case shed light on the complexity of this phenomenon. We started by noting that the dearth of biographical data on him made it difficult to paint a detailed sociological picture of conversion in late Safavid Iran. We then brought about some examples of conversion by Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians to Islam, only to conclude that these cases were so diverse and deeply rooted in specific social and historical circumstances that any attempt to provide a "prototype" or overarching generalization about conversion based on

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[1] Pourjavady and Schmidtke, "Muslim Polemics against Judaism and Christianity in 18th Century Iran. The literary sources of Āqā Muḥammad ʿAlī Bihbahānī's (1144/1732-1216/1801) *Radd-i shubahāt-i al-kuffār,"* 71.

them would be reductionist and misleading. Indeed, I noted the factor of convenience or economic and social benefit ensuing from some conversions but I equally noted how in some cases non-Muslims were at times coerced into conversion as a way of surviving political oppression. However, I also pointed out that systematic cases of coercion for mass conversion were rare and motivated by economic and political factor despite their cruelty. The mass conversions reflected a convenient scapegoating of non-Muslim communities at times when the court and its leading *'ulamā'* were trying to reassert their power.

This environment with its multifaceted features led me to examine the cases of the two Augustinian missionaries who converted to Islam at this time and to question whether their conversions were forms of agentive intervention and strategic acting against repression. To begin with, cases of missionary conversions remained a marginal and anecdotal phenomenon. Secondly, as we noted above, the repressive regulations and punitive actions were not sustained throughout long periods of time, as the state apparatus was incapable of implementing them. Thirdly, despite the worsening of conditions of the religious minorities in this period, some communities exercised a degree of bargaining power. In the case of the Armenians they could count on the indispensable services their merchants offered to the Safavids, and on their role as strategic trade allies for the Shahs. Likewise, the Catholic missionaries remained important diplomatic links with the European powers, even if these links were undermined by the normalization of relations with the Ottomans. All these factors reduce the appeal of conversion among these privileged and well-supported groups, unlike non-Muslims in lower social strata who were more vulnerable to the state's pressures and politics. But more importantly, and in agreement with Snow and Machalek's work on the sociology of conversion, our more "classifiable" examples of conversion cases –such as the Georgian slave-soldiers– were also the

least likely to lead to a deep transformation of the subjects' conviction, as these cases usually

accounted only for façade changes of religious affiliation.[2]

Considering the above, the scanty biographical details surrounding ʿAlī Qulī's case are

compensated by the body of ideas, comments, references, and allusions, embedded in his

intellectual-political enterprise. His work being a series of polemical commentaries on biblical

excerpts seeking to prove the validity of his newly acquired faith offers a transparent lenses into

some of his core convictions. This distinguishes his case from most accounts of conversion in the

sources in that it bears witness to a deeply reflexive process leading to an actual doctrinal

transformation as opposed to a purely external change of religious affiliation. This brings us back

to Snow and Machalek, who have not only warned us of the importance of distinguishing

between change of affiliation and change of conviction, but who have also called our attention to

the fact that the degrees of commitment and participation of converts in their new faiths vary not

only from case to case but from time to time. Oftentimes a convert's degree of involvement in

his new community might not necessarily correspond to the commitment s/he had to his/her

previous faith. Therefore, the case of ʿAlī Qulī is particularly interesting, given that he was

publicly active in promoting his faith(s) before and after conversion, and sustained a steady

religious zeal for Christianity and Islam successively over long periods of time.[3]

A third aspect that I explored briefly was the question of authorship. The fact that ʿAlī

Qulī's works were all written within a span of a few years and towards the end of his life (even

though we cannot establish his exact date of death) made it nearly impossible to pursue an

analysis of the evolution and change in his style of writing and his Persian linguistic skills. This

would have helped us identify patches of texts that could have been possibly written by his

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[2] Snow and Machalek, "The Sociology of Conversion," 171-2.

[3] Ibid.

mentors or collaborators. In addition, the antecedents of previous missionaries involved in

translation projects of the Bible into Middle Eastern languages could lead us to believe that he

might have counted on the assistance of local "informants" and scribes. However, the very fact

that he managed to attract the court's attention and become an official translator to the Shah

seems to imply that any possible reliance he might have had on local scribes or on mentoring

'ulamā' must have been minimal. Therefore, his linguistic capacities in Persian (and to a lesser

extent perhaps in Arabic) must have been indeed sufficient for him to be able to write the bulk of

the work attributed to him. This allowed me then to attribute the framework of his writings and

the bulk of his presentations and arguments to his own efforts and studies.

The fourth aspect of the study was the expansion of the notion of context to the

intellectual tradition in which our author's work was situated. As I said before, the lack of

detailed information on ʿAlī Qulī's life shifted my attention to the textual materials themselves,

and thus I did not have to decide whether his ideas were mere enactments of his experiences

before and after conversion.[4] Treating the intellectual contributions of a thinker as mechanical

reflections of his life circumstances has by now become a historiographical fallacy against which

most intellectual historians are vaccinated. Nonetheless, I had to face the challenge of a total

absence of biographical data. This I did firstly by situating ʿAlī Qulī's work not only within the

social and political environment in which it emerged, but mostly within the tradition of *dalā'il*

al-nubuwwah genre, the debates with Jerome Xavier and Filippo Guadagnoli, and within the

Shiite scholarly tradition and the intellectual concerns of the leading *'ulamā'* in Iran at that time.

There remained the danger of isolating ideas and terms as units of analysis that could be

traced throughout history as self-sufficient entities in their own right. I thus resisted the

temptation of approaching in this manner certain aspects of the *dalā'il al-nubuwwah* genre and

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[4] Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," 7.

of its tropes in ʿAlī Qulī's work. I convene with Skinner that isolating terms represents an important risk of falling into historiographical fallacies, and as such I did not attempt to establish the particular legal doctrines, hadith methodology, or original juristic concepts of ʿAlī Qulī. Nonetheless, I felt it justifiable to connect our author's work to that of other scholars given that in the tradition of Islamic learning –as it might be true of other religious-scholarly traditions for that matter– a lexicon of terms, connotations, allusions, and forms of dialectical reasoning acquire distinct and at times, semi-independent features in different genres and fields of scholarship. I have also –again following Skinner– been careful not identify within our author's work any coherent doctrines or systematic views on certain questions which might have interested his contemporaries but which he did not explicitly address raised. Thus, while I highlighted the quasi-legal structure of ʿAlī Qulī's argumentation and the reference to textual and rational indicants in establishing his position, I nevertheless avoided attributing to him any specific coherent *Uṣūlī* or *Akhbārī* legal doctrine or epistemology.

The above considerations bring us to the fourth aspect of the study, which is perhaps the most substantive, namely the understanding of ʿAlī Qulī's contributions to the polemical debates of his time and to the history of the genre of *dalāʾil al-nubuwwah* more broadly. The first and most obvious was his use of his knowledge of Jewish and Christian scripture and of European languages as a claim to authority and to make himself attractive to the Shah's court. But there is a more subtle implication of this: the history of polemical writing and biblical translations into Middle Eastern languages throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries AD should have resulted in a wider and deeper familiarity with Christian sources by Muslim scholars. However, when we look at the detailed way ʿAlī Qulī used the Bible, the detailed nature of his commentary, and compare it to the short and rather formulaic treatises by Ḥazīn-i Lahījī for instance, it seems

that the overall familiarity of the ʿulamāʾ with the Christian tradition remained circumscribed to selective popular passages as it had been since the genre of dalāʾil al-nubuwwah emerged in the Abbasid period.

This seems to have remained so even in the subsequent period as Reza Pourjavady and Sabine Schmidtke have noted.[5] But more importantly, when we look at ʿAlī Qulī's specific contributions to the debates and to the genre we must highlight the following: firstly, his re-signification of the idea of taḥrīf. In general, this term was used in polemical contexts as a formulaic accusation against the allegedly corrupted nature of the Holy Scriptures of other religions themselves. ʿAlī Qulī did direct this kind of accusation to Saint Paul. However, he spared the rest of the Bible of this accusation and instead blamed any instances of tampering on the European translators of his time. By so doing, he opened a window for the use of the (original) Bible as a tool for theological hermeneutics and potentially as a legitimate and powerful source for confirming the law as it was derived my leading Shiite jurists. His choice of certain subjects such as dietary restrictions and his use of the Bible in a way that resembles the use of the hadith and the Qur'an by the fuqahāʾ add to his polemics a dimension that transcends the mere repetition of formulaic themes (like that of the Paraclete, for example). It brings an interesting synthesis between inter-faith polemics and the legal organization of human life. I argue that this allowed our author to implicitly present the Bible as a foreteller, not only of the advent of the Prophet Muhammad or of the Shiite Mahdi, but of the sharīʿah itself and of the methods to derive it. He may not have been the first scholar to shape such a discourse within the dalāʾil al-nubuwwah genre, but he was certainly very effective at it. In the future, it would be helpful to examine the extent to which quasi-legalistic approaches were used before him in this kind of literature.

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[5] Pourjavadi and Schmidtke, "Muslim Polemics against Judaism and Christianity in 18th Century Iran," 70.

Finally, we noted how in his work at large ʿAlī Qulī established a bridge between his anti-Christian polemics and his orthodox anti-Sufi sentiment. The fact that he harbored such feelings against Sufis is anything but surprising given the intense and multifaceted disputes with the Sufis at the end of the Safavid period. In this ʿAlī Qulī was just adhering to the publicized mainstream stand of the clerics of his time. His views can be situated within the historical process of gradual fall from grace of pro- Sufi/ʿirfānī factions at the court. If in the early 1600s there was room for high philosophically-bent mysticism even at the height of suppression of certain Sufi orders, by the turn of the century decades of inter-factional struggle between pro and anti-Sufi/ʿirfānī groups was resolved in favor of the latter. The evolution of anti-Sufi literature and treatises throughout the century reflects this trend as I show, albeit in a schematic fashion: earlier literature shows a relatively even struggle between pro and anti-ʿirfānī groups, whereas later doctrinal treatises became –as a general rule –more outwardly hostile to any trace of mysticism. What set ʿAlī Qulī's works apart in this regard however, was that at the core of his critique was the analogy and even the alleged genealogy linking Sufism to Greek scholastic thought (and therefore to paganism) and Christianity. By doing so ʿAlī Qulī could once again –as with the rest of his work– position himself as an authority on the promotion of Islamic Shīʿī doctrine and claim to have deeper knowledge on certain issues than did Muslim-born scholars who did not have access to contemporary European scholastic learning.

His anti-Sufi treatises also reveal how he used the topic as a platform to criticize early scholarly elites in Isfahan for their reliance on the "secular" sciences (broadly understood) and for neglecting the study of hadith in favor of Greek philosophy. Even though, this may seem close to an *Akhbārī* position, the *Usūlīs*, have also emphasized and expanded the importance of hadith. Rula Jurdi Abisaab noted the criticism of two ʿĀmilī mujtahids, namely, Husayn b. ʿAbd

al-Samad and al-Shahīd al-Thānī against the Iranian scholars' interest in philosophy, *kalām* and logic.[6] Again, following the recommendations of Skinner, I did not try to extract fully-fledged or coherent views from ʿĀlī Qulī's work. However, I tried to show that in his passionate defense of the epistemological value of hadith-based textual evidence and his criticism of scholastic philosophy we get a good sense of some of the juristic debates of his time, especially the *Uṣūlī-Akhbārī* controversy over the use of the hadith in the derivation of the law. The defense of hadith was not monopolized by the *Akhbārīs,* nor was a certain use of rationalism exclusively reserved to the mujtahids. Furthermore, jurists drew upon a wide range of sources, both rationalist and traditionist, in arguing different positions and also "transferred" significant discussions that existed in other disciplines such as *kalām* or *tafsīr*.

What the presence of the abovementioned themes in ʿAlī Qulī's work does suggest –at the very least– was that his training and scholarly awareness was advanced enough to go beyond his extraordinary philological skills. But more largely, it attests to the permeability of the polemical tradition as a whole, its intertextuality, and the fluid way in which it reshapes and revisits tools, methods, and ideas at the center of other scholarly disciplines. It also shows that, however timeless and formulaic certain genres and topics may appear to be at first glance, they are always shaped by the *esprit d'époque* of the milieu in which they are conceived. Thus, for a scholar of ʿAlī Qulī's time, bringing about the issue of hadith reliance over the study of Greek philosophy implied situating his discussion on a specific topic (Sufism) within a much larger intellectual context and within a frame of reference that could appeal to wider scholarly audiences. Furthermore, regardless of whether our author ever intended to position himself within the *Uṣūlī-Akhbārī* debate, addressing the question of hadith in his anti-Sufi treatise as well as in his treatment of the Bible as a foreteller of the *sharīʿah* ultimately served him in two ways:

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[6] Rula Jurdi Abisaab, "Shakl-e Gīrī Akhbārī-Garī," *Irān Nāmeh* (forthcoming).

as a way of cementing his authority as an ʿālim and as a means to frame his discourse within the Islamic tradition, complementing thus his already strong credentials on Christian-European scholarly culture. Therefore, perhaps the richest aspect of ʿAlī Qulī's work and his most significant contribution was his synthesis of methodological and conceptual features known to several scholarly traditions and commentatorial writings, a synthesis that relied not only on direct scriptural references, but on hermeneutical approaches to the text, integrated into the logical and rhetorical strategies of his arguments. And this represents as well what is perhaps the biggest irony of interreligious polemics: in seeking to discredit an alien tradition, polemicists end up being forced to engage it at a higher level than most of its adherents usually do.

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