

Conjectures on Solṭān'alīshāh, the *Valāyat-nāme* and Shiite Sufi authority

Abstract

Few concepts if any are more central to Shiite Sufism (as to Shiism generally) than *valāyat*, and the current essay briefly explores its significance in and around an Iranian treatise of the early twentieth-century named the *Valāyat-nāme*. Three perspectives frame the discussion: the modern theory of friendship generally, Christian mystical and Islamic concepts of Friendship with God, and (Sunni and) Shiite Sufi authority. It is proposed that typical Islamic formulations of Friendship with God are particularised from their mentioned Christian and secular counterparts by the Friend's conception as an initiatory patron, which provides a basis to Sufi authority. Given that Sufi claims to patronage remain contested in Shiite spheres, where legitimacy is predicated on subordination to the Imamate, ambiguous articulations of hierarchy are crucial to understanding Shiite Sufi authority. The *Valāyat-nāme* read thus sheds light on the downfall of its author, the Sufi master Solṭān'alīshāh (d.1909). The latter's projection of spiritual authority unravelled on interrelated religious, economic and political grounds, in the context of the Constitutional Revolution in early twentieth-century provincial Khorasan.

Keywords: friendship, *valāyat*, *Valāyat-nāme*, Shiite Sufi authority, Solṭān'alīshāh

In the library of Shiite Sufi writings in modern Iran stands an important, largely neglected treatise titled the *Valāyat-nāme* (Gonābādī 1384/2005-6 [1323Q/1905-6]), by the Solṭān'alīshāhī-Ne'matollāhī author Mollā Solṭānmoḥammad Beydokhtī, ›Solṭān'alīshāh‹ (1251Q/1835-1327Q/1909) (Tābande 1384/2006:19, 176). The present essay briefly examines the book - conscious of the need for a thorough critical edition - and the biography of its author, in order to explore what they tell us of Shiite Sufi authority. The discussion is contained in a larger reflection on Islamic friendship with God, *wilāya/walāya* (here rendered in the

Persian *velāyat/valāyat*), and the theory of (religious) friendship in general – invoking a broad comparative frame that extends beyond the Islamic context.

Contemporary friendship is defined more than anything else by its *sui generis* quality, contrasting the main, contractual order of society (Giddens 1991:90; cf. Silver 1989). Through this and related features associated with friendship, one traces an historical thread connecting Western early and late modernity. Michel de Montaigne wrote one of his famous sixteenth-century *Essais* on friendship, and three interrelated notions in this text are intuitive of friendship until today, namely, altruism, reciprocity and freedom from constraint (De Montaigne 1933 [1580-1595]:193, 202, 194). (Related conceptions of 'elective friendship' rigidly opposed to 'ascribed kinship,' however, are challenged by contemporary 'primordial' ethnographies, set in Western contexts and beyond. These anthropological cases claim kinship as a powerful idiom, generally, 'to express the power' of any binding social ties, which might include friendship, and show kin relations as friendship, entered into on the basis of volition (Bell & Coleman 1999)).¹

¹ The example given for the first case documents a close friendship between two Ndendeuli men in Tanzania, who treated each other as if kin and were presumed, based on their closeness, to be kin by their associates. The second case, set in London, holds that in 'open' societies with multilateral kinship organization, 'the number of possible kin to draw upon [...] is very large,' so that '[k]inship becomes like friendship' in being 'personal and to some extent a matter of choice' (Bell, S. and S. Coleman. 1999. "The Anthropology of Friendship: Enduring Themes and Future Possibilities," in *The Anthropology of Friendship*, ed. Bell and Coleman. Oxford: Berg Publishers Ltd., 6-7, 8).

Islamic discussions of *velāyat/valāyat* may similarly feature altruism, as in statements in the *Valāyat-nāme* regarding the necessity of giving to others. However, *īthār* – the Islamic concept – is not ultimately for other *humans*, but the greater love of *God*, from whom it also stems.² The element of reciprocity is often evident in Sufi views of interaction with the divine, for instance, where Sufis' divine interaction was conceived of – in kin terms – as a 'marriage'.³ Such communion, however, would often be appreciated in respect of doctrinal bounds, steered clear, for example, of concepts of *ettehād* and *vaḥdat ol-vojūd*, which were stated by Solṭān'alishāh among the 'corrupt beliefs' (Gonābādī 1384/2005-6 [1323Q/1905-6]:34). For altruism and reciprocity, Islamic mystical articulations abound, which do not show 'freedom from constraint,' however, but hierarchical religious embedding. This structural aspect more than others provides a key to understanding *valāyat* as a social and political relation in Islamic society.

² E.g., Gonābādī, *Valāyat-nāme*, 84 (on *īthār*), 67 (on the *sālek* and *khalq-e khodā*), cf. Gramlich, R. 1976. *Die schiitischen Derwischorden Persiens*. 2. Glaube und Lehre. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 309-10.

³ 'God's bride' has been recorded as a conception of Poles (Lindholm, C. 1998. "Prophets and Pirs," in *Embodying Charisma. Modernity, locality and the performance of emotion in Sufi cults*, ed. Werbner and Basu. New York: Routledge, 215), while for Bāyezīd Basṭāmī (d.#875) 'God's brides' more broadly referred to the Friends (*awliyā'*) (Gramlich, R. 1989. *Das Sendschreiben al-Quṣayrīs über das Sufitum*. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 360). In a chapter on 'Divine Love,' Nicholson stated of Sufis generally that '[i]n the bridal chamber of Unity God celebrates the mystical marriage of the soul' (Nicholson, R.A. 2002 [1914]. *The Mystics of Islam*. Bloomington: World Wisdom, 85).

For mystic Islamic articulations of altruism and reciprocity there exist equivalents in the Christian notion of *Gottesfreundschaft* - similarly a hierarchical idea of religious friendship. Corbin invokes *Gottesfreundschaft*, justifiably and to productive comparative use, in rendering *valāyat* (Corbin 1972a:396).⁴ But one will not, it seems, find concepts of friendship with God in this tradition that appreciate the Friend's role as a spiritual initiator within the religious community.⁵ Reports of two subsequent, related manifestations of Christian mystical organization, Van Ruusbroec's (d.1381) parish and later priory in Groenendaal near Brussels (Verdeyen c1994:22-3; van Ruusbroec 1981) and Grote's (d.1384) devotional movement, which spread out from Deventer beyond the Low Countries

⁴ The *Gottesfreunde* were 'the adherents of an informal movement of mystical piety, centring upon the Rhineland and Switzerland in the 14th century' ("*Gottesfreunde*". 1997. In *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. ed. Cross and Livingstone Oxford: Oxford University Press).

⁵ Modern scholarship disputes earlier views that the *Gottesfreunde* were either a church within the church, secretly led, or a brotherhood. Rapp accounts for 'the strong tie' between them, that prevailed over geographical and social distance, by their *Lebensauffassung* (Rapp, F. 1994. "Die Gottesfreunde am Oberrhein," in *Das Elsaß und Tirol an der Wende vom Mittelalter zur Neuzeit. Sieben Vorträge*, ed. Thurnher. Innsbruck: Universitätsverlag Wagner, 58). Charismatic 'masters' were revered (cf. Warnar, G. 2010. "Tauler's *Minnenlich Meister*. Charisma and authority in the vernacular mystical tradition of the Low Countries and the Rhineland," in *Charisma and Religious Authority. Jewish, Christian, and Muslim preaching, 1200-1500*, ed. Jansen and Rubin. Turnhout: Brepols, 58-9), but the leading *Gottesfreunde* seem to have perceived of spiritual friendship with others as a temporary 'mentoring relationship' only, especially in a conversion context (Webster, H. 2007. Tauler and Merswin. Friends in God? *Oxford German Studies* 36, no. 2: 218), as opposed to an enduring initiatory relationship - which is crucial to the concepts of the *valī* explored here.

and was posthumously named the *Zusters en Broeders van het Gemene Leven* ('Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life') (Post 1968:197; van Engen 2008), do not indicate either that disciples' spiritual progression was held dependent on the person of the spiritual founder, irrespective of the great esteem in which he would be held as the 'first exemplar of the New Devotion' (Grote-van Engen 1988:45) or as an illuminated teacher (Ruusbroec-cf. Verdeyen c1994:45-6; van Ruusbroec 1981:21; van Engen 2008:esp. 84-118). In the Islamic case, his friendship with God allows the Friend to be at once, a patron in the community of the faithful – *valāyat*, very often, involves a relationship of double religious patronage, of the Friend by God and flowing from there, the Faithful(-Initiands) by the Friend.⁶

Basic meanings of *velāyat/valāyat* are distinguished, but the terms are also used interchangeably (cf. Cornell 1998:xviii ff.). They render both 'friendship' or 'assistance,' and 'authority' or 'power' – a duality of meanings (Landolt 1987:316).⁷ The Sufi terms are often rendered as Friendship with God, which may

⁶ Landolt's discussion of Sufi *velāyat/valāyat*, for instance, mentions prophetic traditions, 'often in the form of *ḥadīth qudsī*[,]' which suggest the existence of Friends of God who 'stand under his special protection.' The *ḥadīth* 'known throughout the Ṣūfī literature' as that of of ʿAbd Allāh ibn Masʿūd quantifies the Friends, 'upon whom[, in turn,] life and death of all nations depends' (1987. *Walāyah*. In *The Encyclopedia of Religion*. ed. Eliade, New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 321).

⁷ It is not opportune for this relatively short text to discuss the extensive academic literature on *velāyat/valāyat* but pertinent in lieu of that to refer, for instance, to Landolt's comprehensive encyclopaedic entry (ibid.) and McGregor's overview of especially Sunni Sufi thought in this area (2001. The Development of the Islamic Understanding of Sanctity. *Religious Studies and Theology* 20, no. 1) – in addition to the sources mentioned elsewhere in this section in relation with Sufi

connote understandings from both sides of the divide such as nearness, Imamic love/love of the Imams (which is the core understanding of *valāyat* in Shiism (Walker 2002:209)), spiritual jurisdiction, or sanctity (Radtke 2000:109; Corbin 1972b:[vol. 3], 9-10). Chodkiewicz's parallel of Islamic sainthood with late Roman *amicitia* (1986:35), moreover, serves as an important reminder that the dual meanings of *velāyat* and *valāyat* are often implied in one another. Notions of *velāyat/valāyat* reveal embeddedness in socio-political life, and related to this fact are discerning questions over the spiritual authority of those who might claim or to whom might be attributed divine friendship. Among other categories, they might include caliphs, shahs, imams, sheikhs, jurists, mystics or the faithful at large.

Sufi thought on Friendship with God, whether in Shiism or Sunnism, often discusses the Friends, with implications for these other functions of Islamic society as well, by distinguishing *valī* and *valāyat* from, on the one hand, the Prophet and prophethood, *nabī* and *nobovvat*, and on the other, the Messenger and revelation, *rasūl* and *resālat* (e.g., cf. Corbin 1972b:171). Shiite theory is particular in its association of *valāyat* with the imamate.⁸ There has been a chain of four main Sufi

velāyat/valāyat, each of which also contain assessments of either parts or the full breadth of its intellectual history.

⁸ Amir-Moezzi's discussion of the term distinguishes two semantic levels, that concerning the *valī*-imam and that in relation with his follower; the first involving the imamate as spiritual leadership or the imam's ontological status as the site where God manifests himself, and the second love (*hobb*) and affection (*mawadda*) for or submission (*taslīm*) to him (2002. Notes À Propos De La *Walāya* Imamite (Aspects De L'Imamologie Duodécimaine, X). *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 122, no. 4).

discussants of *valāyat*: al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d.#907-12), Hojvīrī (d.#1072) Ibn ʿArabī (d.1240) and, the only Shiite contributor among these four, Āmolī (d. after 1385) (cf. Radtke 2000; Landolt 1987; Radtke & O’Kane 1996:1-9; Landolt 2000:91; Corbin 1972b:170-71; Chodkiewicz 1986).

Hojvīrī’s *Kashf ol-Mahjūb* presents *valāyat* as Sufism’s doctrinal core (Landolt 1987:321; Hojvīrī 1371/1992:265-311), based on a discussion of Tirmidhī’s thought (Radtke 2000:110), but omits the central aspect in his *Khatm/Sīrat al-awliyāʿ*, of ‘the seal’ (*khatm*) of the Friends of God (Chodkiewicz 1986:49). Ibn ʿArabī’s *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīya*, to the contrary, elaborates on Tirmidhī’s presentation of *valāyat*, including the doctrine of the Seal whilst distinguishing two kinds of *khatm al-awliyāʿ*, the universal or general (*ʿamma*) and the particular or Muhammadan (*muḥammadīya*), and explicating their identity (unambiguously Jesus in the first case and more complicatedly himself in the second) (see Chodkiewicz 1986:70; 148; ch. 9; Affifi 1979 [1939]:100).⁹ But only Heydar Āmolī wrote from a Shiite viewpoint, presenting the imams as mystical

⁹ A warning against false continuities in spite of Sufi discussions over centuries and continents about the Seal, Radtke points out that Ibn ʿArabī hardly took over any of Tirmidhī’s thought and used the latter’s terms to unfold his own system (see 1994. *Tirmidiana Minora. Oriens* 34: 277; 294-96, 297). Ibn ʿArabī discerned an additional ‘Seal of Children,’ which, however, was apparently marginal to his elaborations and need not concern us here (cf. Chodkiewicz, M. 1986. *Le Sceau des Saints. Prophétie et Sainteté dans la Doctrine d’Ibn Arabī*. Paris: Gallimard, ch.8).

guides while defining true Shiism as Sufism and true Sufism as Shiism.¹⁰ His *Jāmiʿ al-asrār wa manbaʿ al-anwār* incorporates and transforms the scheme of Ibn ʿArabī in the latter's *Futūḥāt*, identifying Imam ʿAlī with 'the seal of the universal (*moṭlaq*) *walāya*' and 'the seal of the particular (*moqayyad*), Mohammanan *walāya*' with the Twelfth Imam ((Kohlberg 2011 [1989]; Āmolī 1969 [#752Q/1351]:395-6).

Āmolī's view has become increasingly heterodox since the days of the late Safavid repression and the realignment of Shiism around a juristic core. More broadly, Sufis faced a recurrent rebuke of Sufism from among Shiite authors (including Āmolī), who did not necessarily oppose Sufism as a whole. To paraphrase Corbin, this blamed (Shiite) Sufism for 'forgetfulness of its sources' – that is, the 'Sunni' claim to a Friendship with God that followed the prophethood but did not subjugate itself amply to the Imamic cycle, claiming Friendship instead for itself (e.g., Corbin 1971:17-18).

One way in which Shiite Sufis contained such readings – which would bring *qoṭbiyat* (lit., poleship, i.e., Sufi spiritual authority) and imamate, and by extension, the class of religious jurists into collision - was through hierarchical demarcations. These would encompass the authority of the *qoṭb* in the spiritual dominion of 'the fourteen immaculates': the Prophet's authority, Fāṭima's *valāyat-e Fāṭemīya*, and that of the twelve imams. For instance, Shiite Sufis conceived of

¹⁰ 'Every true Shiite (referred to by Āmolī as *moʾmen momtaḥan*[,] 'a believer put to the test') is also a Sufi, and vice versa' (Kohlberg, E. 2011 [1989]. *Āmolī, Sayyed Bahāʿ-ʿAl-Dīn*. In *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. 1, Fasc. 9, London, 983-85).).

the Mahdī's realm in terms of the Universal Authority (*velāyat-e kollīya*) or Sun Authority (*velāyat-e shamsīya*), while Partial Authority (*velāyat-e joz'īya*) or Moon Authority (*velāyat-e qamarīya*) circumscribed the Pole's jurisdiction. Thus, Shiite Sufis posited *velāyat-e joz'īya* as a spiritual authority derived from that of the twelfth imam, but whom, in ambivalent terminology that reminds once more of Āmolī,¹¹ they might also conceive of as the Pole of Poles (*qoṭb ol-aqṭāb*), the *qoṭb-e shamsī* or the *pīr-e ḥaqīqat* (see Gramlich 1976:158ff).¹²

¹¹ E.g., cf. Nasr's reference to the latter holding that "[t]he Quṭb and the Imām are two expressions possessing the same meaning and referring to the same person" (1972. "Shi'ism and Sufism: their Relationship in Essence and in History," in *Sufi essays*. London: G. Allen and Unwin, 111).

¹² In a non-sectarian context in which scholars of discernment have at minimum suggested Shiite leanings (cf. Ridgeon, L.V.J. 1998. *‘Azīz Nasafī*. Richmond: Curzon, 190-99), such 'ambiguity in hierarchy' finds an exemplary illustration in 'Azīz Nasafī's treatment of one of the oldest Sufi controversies. *Kashf al-ṣirāṭ* contains an 'orthodox' spiritual hierarchy in which the Prophets rank higher than the Friends (ibid., 172). "On discussing the spiritual hierarchy[.]" however, "Nasafī suggests that the relationship is not as simple as it appears at first sight" (ibid., 173). This emerges, for instance, from Nasafī's view that "Friendship is the heart of Prophecy" (ibid.). The Friend, who is a guide, and knows of the realities of things, has greater knowledge than the Prophet, who is a warner, and knows of the qualities of things. Furthermore, the Prophet is also a Friend, but whose Friendship is superior to his Prophecy (ibid., 178; 180; 181). The 'first sight' also holds true, however, as "in another respect, Prophecy is superior to Friendship" (ibid., 181). This emerges in Nasafī's *Ketāb-e tanzīl* from Khidr's obeisance to Moses (ibid., 182) and Nasafī's statement that "[t]he Possessor of the Holy Law is an Establisher and the Possessor of Realities is an Unveiler. Each Prophet is not a Possessor of a Holy Law, but each Possessor of a Holy Law is a Prophet. Each Friend is not a Possessor of Realities, but each Possessor of Realities is a Friend." Although

In religious models of friendship such as the above, the relations of friends under God are often legitimate only in as far as they are hierarchically embedded – an instance of intricate family resemblances between hierarchy and religion (see Dumont (1966) 1980). Shiite Sufis often carve out a proper religious space *within* Shiism in modern discussions of Friendship with God, charting delicate balances of authority with imams and jurists (as in the Solṭān'alīshāhī case), or uphold such equilibrium in practice with other possessors of sanctity, such as sometimes rulers.¹³ Moreover, one is often struck by ambiguity in Sufis' claims to legitimate authority in Shiism: the *qoṭb* has partial authority but how distinctive is it when the Mahdī is conceived as *pīr*? Or, in relations with rulers, the *laqab* of *shāh* is held to

“an Establisher is the follower of an Unveiler in what is unveiled,” it is also the case that “[a]n Unveiler is the follower of an Establisher in what is established” (ibid., 183).

¹³ A strong case of religiously mutually charged Sufi-ruler relations concerns Moḥammad Shāh Qājār (r.1834-1848) and his premier, Ḥājji Mīrzā Āqāsī (#1783-1848). The Shah had been initiated into the Neṣmatollāhī order and accepted Āqāsī as its master (Calmard, J. 2004. *Moḥammad Shah Qājār*. In *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. Online Edition, New York, <http://www.iranicaonline.org>). The Shah was Āqāsī's 'sole disciple' and reportedly dependent on the latter's 'paternal care,' while Āqāsī was 'careful to enhance the Shah's image as Divine Viceregent (*Walī-allāh*)' (Amanat, A. 2011 [1986]. *Āqāsī*. In *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. 2, Fasc. 2, London, 183-88, cf. van den Bos, M. 2002. *Mystic Regimes. Sufism and the State in Iran, from the late Qajar era to the Islamic Republic*. In *Social, economic and political studies of the Middle East and Asia/83*. Leiden: Brill, ch. 2).

be symbolic but not always, as when Shāh Ne'matollāh stated that rulers had to spread the word of the *True King* by the sword.¹⁴

The theme of ambiguity in hierarchy is central to an essay in linguistic anthropology that explores accommodation in the face of hegemonic ideology. Corin's study (1995) explores Islamic and other cases where subordinates manipulate the definition of an ideological centre and its margins, allowing simultaneously for their adjustment to a hegemonic discourse and their retention of identity.¹⁵ Along these lines, one may similarly identify a 'central' Shiite duality of the exoteric and the esoteric, from which flow the mentioned triad of *resālat*,

¹⁴ The two examples derive from Pourjavady, N. and P.L. Wilson. 1978. *Kings of Love. The Poetry and History of the Ni'matullāhī Sufi Order*. Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 21, 117.

¹⁵ One of Corin's cases concerns a spirit possession ritual in the former Zaire called *Mizuka* and deemed Islamic, starting with 'the *Shaada*' (Corin, E.E. 1995. "Meaning Games at the Margins: The cultural centrality of subordinated structures," in *Beyond Textuality. Asceticism and violence in anthropological interpretation*, ed. Bibeau and Corin, *Approaches to Semiotics Series*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 183-84). *Mizuka* refers to a category of Muslim *jinns*, which, however, have 'servant spirits' named *Kilima* that are considered part of 'African tradition.' Paraphrasing, Corin argues that as ritual practice is particularly concerned with the 'African' side, this subverts the ideological centrality of Islam to the ritual (ibid., 184-86), hence, 'the cultural centrality of subordinated structures.' A similar praxis-ideology opposition is not implied for the Sufi case developed here (let alone a juxtaposition with Islam), but inspiration is drawn from the analysis of internal differentiation in a dominant discourse, which creates ideological space and legitimacy for subordinate groups (and may also turn against them in sufficiently hostile environments, as Solṭān'alīshāh's case will show).

nobovvat and *valāyat*, and Shiite Sufi 'homologies' of *sharī'at*, *ṭarīqat* and *ḥaqīqat* (Corbin 1971:259; cf. Antes 1971:11 for Āmolī's additional applications). Shiite Sufis might venture a further, 'marginal' subdivision from this construction, establishing Sufis or Gnostics (*ʿorafā*) and jurists (*foqahā*) as esoteric and exoteric agents of the esoteric Imamic authority. Such a division of spiritual authority between *ʿorafā* and *foqahā*, whether explicit or implicit, has been at the basis of Solṭān'alīshāhī doctrine and practice.

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Solṭān'alīshāh was a Sufī master of national renown from Beydokht who headed the order in his name, which was the largest modern offshoot of the Neʿmatollāhī path, in Khorasan. Unlike his predecessor and the first *qoṭb* of the Order, ›Saʿādat'alīshāh‹ (d.1293Q/1876), Solṭān'alīshāh pursued extensive and profound religious training. His teachers included the philosopher Hādī Sabzavārī in Sabzavār and before that, several Iraqi *marājeʿ*, one of whom, Mīrzā Ḥabībollāh Rashtī, in the late nineteenth century had granted him an *ejāze-ye ejtehād* (Pāzūkī 1387/2008-9:12). He thus became the Order's first *mojtahed-qoṭb* - of three to date. Reflecting his orthodox credentials, Solṭān'alīshāh is reputed for a *tafsīr*, *Bayān al-Saʿāda* (1314Q/1896-7). In his lifetime, the Order swelled in social and numerical importance and Solṭān'alīshāh himself grew increasingly wealthy. His conspicuous outward success helps explain why heresies were attributed to him,

and he was harassed and murdered on 26 *rabī^c al-avval* 1327Q/18 April 1909 (Tābande 1384/2006:170), but his vita and oeuvre provide other clues as well.

The *Valāyat-nāme* was completed in 1320Q/1902 (ibid., 242) and originally published as a lithograph in Tehran in 1323Q/1905-6. It occupies a unique place in the Solṭān^calīshāhī order's literary corpus. It is a very different work than both Solṭān^calīshāh's *tafsīr*, acclaimed by *olamā* contemporary with the Master such as Ākhūnd Mollā Moḥammad Kāshī (d.1333Q/1915), and its follow-up, *Majma^c os-Sa^cādat*, which is concerned with *aḥkā-m-e qālebī* (formal precepts) and *sharī^cat* rather than with *aḥkā-m-e qalbī* (ordinances of the heart) and *valāyat* (ibid., 221, 241). After Solṭān^calīshāh, moreover, it was particularly a juristic, *feqhī* emphasis that set through in the Order's writings, at first through his son and successor, ṢNūr^calīshāh (d.1297/1918).

The main text consists of forty-seven chapters in twelve parts that consecutively cover, primarily, the exegesis of *valāyat*; the meaning of 'obligatory' (*taklīfīye*) *valāyat*; differentiations of the revelation and Messenger, prophethood and Prophet and Friend and *valāyat*; classes of people in all eras among all peoples and religions and the purpose of creation; uses of *valāyat* in the language of the people of God; requirements for the Wayfarer (*sālek*) in relation to God; dealings of the Wayfarer with the people; dealings of the Wayfarer with the subjects of his country and his forces; habitudes of the soul (*kheṣlathā-ye naḥsānī*) that strengthen *valāyat*; the connecting thread of *valāyat* to the time of Adam; the people's need of a teacher and a guide; and the state (*hāl*) of the believer who

pledges allegiance (*bey^{at}*) and to whom the graft (*peyvand*) of *valāyat* has reached.

The *Valāyat-nāme* does not explicitly address Ibn 'Arabī (but rejects *vahdat ol-vojūd* – see above) or Āmolī's scheme (avoiding the term 'sufi' altogether) or more broadly, problems of the Seal (limiting use of the term to the common Islamic understanding of the prophet Moḥammad as the *ḥazrat-e khatmī*).

The treatise follows a 'central' Shiite tradition in discussing *velāyat/valāyat* in relation to the prophethood – namely, as its spirit ('*maqām-e valāyat ke rūḥ-e nobovvat ast*') (Gonābādī 1384/2005-6 [1323Q/1905-6]:33)¹⁶ - and in relation to the revelation (*resālat*). In these various explanations, the revelation is always the exoteric aspect (e.g., '*resālat ta'līm-e aḥkām-e qālebī ast*') (ibid., 27). The prophethood is presented under dual aspects, that of forewarning (*enzār*), which is dominant (*ghāleb*) and exoteric, and guidance (*hedāyat*) towards the afterlife and God (*ḥaqq*), which is subordinate (*maghlūb*) and concealed (ibid., 24). A similar duality obtains among the prophets' legatees (*owṣiyā²*) - i.e., the Imams -, but *hedāyat* dominates their mission, inverting the relation between the exoteric and the esoteric elements (ibid.). One of the strongest images of polarity between the exoteric and esoteric realms that is nevertheless complementary, the *Valāyat-nāme* elaborates on two forms of allegiance (*bey^{at}*), one relating to the revelation and

¹⁶ This has been a traditional conception in the Ne^{mat}ollāhī order since the times of its founder, Shāh Ne^{mat}ollāh Valī (see Algar, H. 1995. *Ni^{mat}-Allāhiyya*. In *Encyclopaedia of Islam II*. 8, Leiden: Brill, 45).

the (exoteric) ordinations of Islam, and the other concerning *valāyat* and faith (*īmān*) (ibid., 28).

The key issue connecting the general Shiite views of *velāyat/valāyat* to particular Sufi discussions of it, is the theme of these latter pacts or oaths of ‘allegiance’ (*bey[°]at-e valavīya*), although this does not appear immediately from the discussion of prophetic, imamic and sheikhal authority. The ‘general’ (*°āimme*) allegiance that Solṭān[°]alīshāh associates with the exterior ordinations is due to the Messenger, while the ‘particular’ (*khāṣṣe*) pact applies to the *owliyā[°]* (which term seems mostly to connote the *a[°]emme* but might also refer to the *anbiyā[°]*, in their esoteric aspect) (ibid., 29, 181, 25). Each of the ‘fourteen immaculates,’ continues the *Valāyat-nāme* in a Shiite view that crosses from a central into a ‘marginal’ realm, had their own sheikhs, and Solṭān[°]alīshāh traces his own line of authorisations to Imam *°Alī* (ibid., 129, 32, 33-4).¹⁷ During the life of Imam Ḥasan *°Askarī*, the sheikhs took *bey[°]at* from ‘seekers’ (*tālebīn*) on his behalf (ibid., 131). By the time of the Greater Occultation, however, the great sheikhs had died, and others with genuine knowledge of Shiism ‘strutted towards the *dār-e ākherat*.’ Their sons had only understood Shiism in name and without recourse to the sheikhs, the method of *ejteḥād* gradually became current among them [...] (ibid., 132).

The relation of general Shiite and particular Sufi views of *valāyat* through *bey[°]at*, emerges more explicitly from the discussion of interaction between sheikhs

¹⁷ See the first section of this essay for the specific understanding of ‘centre’ and ‘margin’ deployed here in relation with ambiguity in hierarchy and Shiite Sufi relations to the Shiite mainstream.

and the community of believers at large, and a more restricted category of initiated disciples. The text explains the need for a teacher (*mo^callem*), for instance, from the observation that 'man is like a sheep, before the patch of *valāyat*, endlessly perplexed and wandering in the wilderness' (ibid., 136). More specifically, the need for a sheikh (*eḥtiyāj be sheykh*), derives from the fact that he is the faithful's broker of *valāyat*. Through his oath of allegiance to the sheikh, the celestial graft (*peyvand-e malakūtī*, also the 'graft of *valāyat*') reaches the believer (ibid., 11). *Valāyat* will settle in the believer's heart, and it will be nourished there by such practices as *zēkr*, 'ritual greeting' (*moṣāfeḥe*) and 'bringing the image of the sheikh in one's mind' (*be naẓar āvordan-e ṣūrat-e morshed*). Invigoration of this graft leads to the Imamic illumination of the heart (ibid., part 9-chapter 2, 158, 10, 30).

There are several elements in these passages that religious commentators outside the Solṭān'alīshāhī confines have found controversial (see Zarrīnkūb—1369/1990:346). The cleric °Allāme Borqēī, for instance, stated à propos the *Valāyat-nāme* that evidence was utterly lacking for a religious instruction that *bey^cat* was to be given to someone during the *gheybat*, characterising this idea as an 'illegitimate innovation' (*bed^cat*). He found Solṭān'alīshāh's notion of *valāyat* as allegiance to the Hidden Imam but entering the heart 'through the celestial image of the sheikh,' to be clear in its 'invalidity' (*boṭlān*). Critiquing the *Sa^cādat-nāme*, Solṭān'alīshāh's earliest book, for ideas that the *Valāyat-nāme* also exposes,

Borqeī argued that rendering present the sheikh's image during worship was 'worse than idolatry' (*az bot-parastī badtar*) (? :168-69).¹⁸

*

Religious contestation was an important element in the confrontations that Solṭān'alīshāh had become involved in from an early stage and which ended in his murder in Beydokht. Before joining Sa'adat'alīshāh's Ne'matollāhī branch in about 1280Q (Tābande 1384/2006:62ff), for instance, - that would become the Solṭān'alīshāhī order -, he had been forced to abandon his teaching circle in Tehran, accused of Bābī leanings (Gramlich 1965:65). Biographical material also suggests, however, that political and economic differences were at stake in the events leading up to his murder. It is difficult to judge from these sources which elements were decisive, and there are, moreover, some indications of an intricate interplay between the religious, the political and the economic factors.

The *Valāyat-nāme* treats esoteric subject matter, except in a chapter on 'the administration of a country and the treatment of the subjects' (*mamlekat-dārī va ra'īyat-parvarī*). A later commentary in the Order's literature holds that in this chapter, Solṭān'alīshāh 'referred to the injustices [in Gonābād] of [a state functionary named] Mīrzā Āqā Khān Shokūh os-Solṭān and his friends and wrote that this behaviour causes the end of the state and the monarchy' (Tābande

¹⁸ A major source for criticism of Solṭān'alīshāh's religious practice and belief consists of the expansive oeuvre of Keyvān Qazvīnī (d.1938), which would best be treated in separate studies.

1384/2006:141). This phrasing suggests that Solṭān'alīshāh's larger concern besides the particular injustices of Shokūh os-Solṭān, was the preservation of national or regional order, fearing violence and anomie. If state authorities engaged in oppression, he wrote, they would not be able to keep the subjects in check and 'the people will release oppression on one another and the country will break down - as is witnessed in these times' (Gonābādī 1384/2005-6 [1323Q/1905-6]:88). Elsewhere in the treatise, the national state is related to Sufism: 'These days [...], the practice of *bey'at* has been removed from the people of the nation and no fame remains of it!' (ibid., 72).

One finds an indication in these passages, although critical of state functionaries, of Solṭān'alīshāh's support for the monarchy. There are other clues in and around the *Valāyat-nāme* of the importance to the Order of ties to provincial authorities representing the monarch, as protectors of life and good, especially as the Gonābādī Sufis had suffered injustices at the hand of state representatives. For instance, the Sufis welcomed the appointment of Nayyer od-Dowle as governor (*vālī*) of Khorasan in 1318Q/1901, in light of the anti-Sufism, and harassment in its wake, of his predecessor Rokn od-Dowle (Tābande 1384/2006:156). Gonābādī Sufis allege that Solṭān'alīshāh had foretold Nayyer od-Dowle's governorship, and the latter reportedly declared that during his tenure, he would grant all the Master's wishes (ibid., 157). When notables in Mashhad sought to prevent the festive welcome of the new governor, a military commander and disciple of Solṭān'alīshāh intervened. Made aware of his Master's prediction, he and his forces arranged their own celebratory reception with military honours (ibid.).

From late 1908, Khorasan was administered by a provincial constitutionalist *Anjoman*, rejecting monarchical authority.¹⁹ In early 1909, Nayer od-Dowle was reappointed as governor of Khorasan but clashed with the *Anjoman* in Nishabur, and faced with widespread popular hostility, returned to Tehran, deposed.²⁰ The cause of constitutionalism was a weapon, too, for the enemies of Solṭānʿalishāh. His local nemesis Abū Torāb Nūghābī was reportedly incensed at the journey toward Nishabur by one of Solṭānʿalishāh’s disciples, hailing the return of Nayer od-Dowle (*ibid.*, 158).²¹ Constitutionalist villagers in Beydokht – it is unclear when -, had confronted Solṭānʿalishāh, demanding a clarification of his political position. The Master, whose predecessor had wished Nāṣer od-Dīn Shāh Qājār dead and his ‘despotism’ to end (*ibid.*, 138), defended himself by saying, ‘I am only a village farmer and a dervish, and I do not know what ‘constitutionalism’ or ‘despotism’ mean. We have nothing to do with these matters and we obey the government, whether constitutional or autocratic’ (*ibid.*, 145).

Rather than plainly and simply a *zāre-e dehātī*, however, Solṭānʿalishāh was, more accurately, a wealthy landowner (cf. Miller 1923:345) who - although warning against worldly conceit - valued wealth positively (‘wealth itself, and its

¹⁹ *Revue du Monde Musulman (RMM)*, 1909, 7, 3, p.336.

²⁰ *RMM*, 1909, 8, 6, p.261; Tābande, S. 1384/2006. *Nābeghe-ye ʿelm va ʿerfān*. Tehran: Haqīqat, 157.

²¹ Going by the Order’s report, Abū Torāb was a local landowner of criminal pedigree (e.g., having in his youth killed his paternal cousin) who was at first well disposed toward the Sufis but became embroiled in a conflict over property with a Gonābādī affiliate. This he attributed to the influence of the Sufi’s Master, causing lasting enmity toward the Order (*ibid.*, 146, 151, 152).

spending in lawful ways and on charitable work and for developing the world, is not in any way inconsistent with dervishhood') (Tābande 1384/2006:203). In the *Valāyat-nāme*, he argued that 'usury' (*rebā*) did not, for example, refer to exchanging wheat for barley, or one currency to another, for too little or too much, but rather to the non-*sharī'a*-based practices of banks that were now common in Iran and in the West (Gonābādī 1384/2005-6 [1323Q/1905-6]:81). But his murder was related, in the area, to his refusing 'to give people grain from his storehouses' at a time of famine. It was claimed by people in the area that he then 'became so unpopular that he was killed' (Miller 1923:345).

A third aspect beyond the political and the economic involved in these confrontations of the Sufi master, concerned religious opposition. Complaints about Solṭān^oalishāh's teachings had reached the constitutionalist Āyatollāhs (cf. Hairī 1977:91; Tābande 1384/2006:513) Mīrzā-ye Shīrāzī the Second (Madanī 1381/2002 [1376/1997]:76) (d.1920) and Moḥammad-Kāẓem Khorāsānī (d.1911) (Tābande 1384/2006:513) in Iraq, allegedly via parties of visitors from, respectively, Kheybarī and Gonābād (Madanī 1381/2002 [1376/1997]:76-7). The latter *marja*^c had responded to his visitors' portrayal of the teachings of Solṭān^oalishāh by stating that they concerned *kofr*, and that their author was deserving of execution (*koshtanī*) (Tābande 1384/2006:513). The Order states that Khorāsānī had not, however, wished to proclaim his *fatvā* on Solṭān^oalishāh, not having read his work or met with him. The Master was later exonerated and the recipient of Khorāsānī's praise, the Order further claims, after the *marja*^c had been sent the former's *tafsīr* (ibid.). But irrespective of Khorāsānī's alleged restraint,

Solṭān°alīshāh's fate was still imperilled by the travelling Gonābādīs who, upon their return, spread the news of his alleged subjection to Khorāsānī's *takfīr* (Madanī 1381/2002 [1376/1997]:77).

In the absence, to my knowledge,²² of accounts detailing the charges levelled against the Master, one may conjecture about them from circumstantial evidence, beyond the contested religious reputation that Solṭān°alīshāh had brought with him to Beydokht. On various grounds, Solṭān°alīshāh constituted a source of rivalry for exoteric Shiite jurists. First, an account of the Order under the latter's grandson Šāleḥ°alīshāh, who emerges as of lesser stature than his grandfather, indicates that Sufi affiliates did not present *zakāt* 'to the mullahs,' but to their Pole (see Miller 1923: 345, 347). The issue of stature suggests that religious taxes would also have been presented to the Sufi master under Solṭān°alīshāh. Both Sufi leaders, moreover, were also *mojtaheds* - which gave an edge to their competition for religious funds with the exoteric °*olamā*. Second, there was a confluence of the Master's worldly and his spiritual authority, and thus, a challenge of the exoteric °*olamā* as leaders of the community. Hagiography mentions that 'in addition to his 'spiritual rule' (*salṭanat-e [...] ma°navī*), that noble man [...] became entangled in the 'exoteric leadership' (*reyāsat-e zāherī*) [...] of the people as well.' This fact had become a source of enmity against Solṭān°alīshāh (Jazbī-Eṣfahānī

²² Given the significance for the Order and in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century central Khorasan of the history in question, the existence of such documentation is very likely. Hence, future research will hopefully establish a fuller record of Solṭān°alīshāh's late religious confrontations in the region.

1372/1993:143). Third, heresiological literature asserts that resistance against the Master and the *esteftāʿ* requests had surfaced after Solṭānʿalīshāh had ‘stated his claims’ in the *Valāyat-nāme* (Madanī 1381/2002 [1376/1997]:76). What, then, did the *Valāyat-nāme* assert regarding Shiite Sufi authority?

As elaborated in the preceding pages, the *Valāyat-nāme* posits the mediation of the faithful and the divine through *beyʿat* to the sheikh. *Beyʿat* and *valāyat* are intricately linked in the treatise and have closely related meanings, as where the sheikh’s image is discussed as methodology. It is possibly such ambiguity that has sometimes led observers to unduly conflate the terms, as in the statement that ‘[t]he first pillar of the Gūnābādī branch of the Niʿmatullāhiyya is *valāya* or ‘allegiance’ to the *Quṭb*’ (Trimingham 1971:164; cf. Borqei ʿ?: 168-69). One hears perhaps an echo in this assertion of charges, strongly rejected by the Order, that Solṭānʿalīshāh would have claimed himself to be the Hidden Imam (Īzād-Goshasb 1362/1983:64, 66, 67). But sheikhal authority is emphasised in the *Valāyat-nāme*, as where it exhorts about ‘the need of the disciple-wayfarer (*morīd-e sālek*) [...] for the ‘perfect sheikh’ (*sheykh-e kāmel*)’ (Gonābādī 1384/2005-6 [1323Q/1905-6]:139) - intended, one assumes, was Solṭānʿalīshāh. Referring to the *Valāyat-nāme*, Zarrinkoob held Solṭānʿalīshāh’s mediation, as the ‘[G]reat Shaykh of the Gūnābādī Order,’ to be acting in the Hidden Imam’s name (Zarrīnkūb—1970:198).²³

²³ The claim has been highly contentious: ‘With Twelver Sufis the *Quṭb* is the representative of the Imām on earth; hence the hatred of the *mujtahids* for Sufis’ (Trimingham, J.S. 1971. *The Sufi Orders in Islam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 164).

A corroborating view of these readings appears indirectly from the Solṭānʿalīshāhī sheikh ʿEmād, the grandson of Solṭānʿalīshāh’s teacher Hādī Sabzavārī. The sheikh stated that the word *valāyat* in the *Valāyat-nāme* derived from *valī*, in the meaning of ‘vice-gerent’ (cf. Miller 1923:352) - one only of several meanings that the treatise expounds. ‘*Valī*’ was reserved especially for Imam ʿAlī but could also refer to the Order’s *aqṭāb*, as emerges from its application to Šāleḥʿalīshāh. Congruent with Neʿmatollāhī notions of Sufi spiritual authority in preceding centuries (e.g., cf. Algar 1995:46, referring to the views of Nūrʿalīshāh I (d.1797)), furthermore, the latter *qoṭb* was also seen by his contemporary affiliates as *nāʿeb-e emām* (Miller 1923:354).

In the exposé of *beyʿat* and *valāyat*, in other words, Solṭānʿalīshāh’s *Valāyat-nāme* harboured a new Neʿmatollāhī claim to spiritual deputyship. The Master’s was a delegate authority in the name of the Mahdī, that went together with his expanding economic power and political relations – and all three were resented. In the merger of these factors, one finds ambiguity in hierarchy leading up, not to accommodation and the retention of identity, as in Corin’s cases, but inversely, to hostile contestation.

In these developments, the Master was faced with a turning tide that foregrounded the principle of popular sovereignty in the shape of a national constitution, supported in its initial stages by charismatic and influential exoteric *ʿolamā*, and which allowed for expressions of rebellion and class conflict in its name. In these circumstances, Solṭānʿalīshāh’s ‘marginal,’ Shiite mystic articulations, contained within ‘central’ conceptions of *valāyat*, did not engender

the restoration of national order that he anticipated. Instead, they helped open a Pandora's box, casting him on the wrong side of legitimate Shiism to meet his end.

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