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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Along the Shiite lines of sufi authority: revisiting Solṭānᶜalīshāh and the *Valāyat-nāme*

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Abstract

The oeuvre of the philosopher Leo Strauss (d.1973) pivots on the audacious thesis that political esoterism – the protective covering of truth through an exoteric shell – has been central to Islamic intellectual life. Strauss's work focusses on philosophy, but this article argues that it can be productively extended – while not applied integrally - to Sufism, Islam's similarly contested, primary esoteric tradition. It investigates the Straussian thesis in a Sufi discussion on valāyat, "spiritual authority" or "Friendship with God," which idea is central both to Shiite Sufism and Shiism generally. The discussion concerns the Valāyat-nāme, an Iranian treatise of the early twentieth century by the Neᶜmatollāhī master Solṭānᶜalīshāh (d.1909), revealing the dilemmas that Shiite Sufis have faced in simultaneously retaining identity and acceptance to the juristically dominated canon. Four sub-topics are elaborated to assess the validity of Straussian analysis in rendering the treatise and its author: persecution as a context for esoterism; esoterism as a veil for dangerous knowledge; the drive for epistemic subordination; and the political nature of religious knowledge. It is proposed that rather than as "between the lines" dissimulation, as per Strauss, the Neᶜmatollāhīs' political esoterism ought to be read more subtly as accommodation "along the lines" of Shiite orthodoxy.

Keywords: dissimulation and accommodation; Gonābādī-Neᶜmatollāhī order; Leo Strauss; political esoterism; Shiite Sufi authority; wilāya/valāyat

Introduction

It remains rare for scholars of Islam to derive generic socio-political theory from its primary materials, or methodically draw comparative benefit from other creedal traditions, let alone pursue both pathways in depth within a single career.[1] The oeuvre of Leo Strauss, whilst originating from other intellectual concerns, embodies such a mesmerizing project. Strauss was born in an orthodox Jewish family in Kirchhain (current-day Hessen) in 1899, but "was converted to [. . .] political Zionism" as a young man.[2] After the First World War, he studied mathematics, natural science and philosophy, and obtained a doctorate in philosophy in Hamburg (1921).[3] During his postdoctoral work, which firstly focused on Spinoza, he had also taken up the study of medieval Islamic Philosophy. In this Islamic

[1]This article originates from my presentation on 15 February 2016 for the conference 'Philosophy and Law: Islamic and Jewish Thought in the Shadow of Theology and Theocracy' at Friedrich-Alexander Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg. The text recasts, improves, and expands Van den Bos 2016.

[2]Tamer 2001, p. 39 (orthodox); Sheppard 2006, p. 13 (political Zionism).

[3]Tamer 2001, p. 39.

engagement lies the origin of Strauss's political thought, which has centred on "the theological-political problem" (see further below).[4] After sojourns in France and England, Strauss sought refuge in America, arriving in 1937 and taking up employment mainly as a professor of political science in, respectively, New York, Chicago (for the larger part of his career), Claremont, and Annapolis, where he died in 1973.[5]

While Strauss's initial writings "were treated respectfully," a prominent disciple's obituary mentions, later works "were considered perverse and caused anger."[6] Exception was taken to Strauss's treatment of hidden or "esoteric writing,"[7] which came central to his queries on how rational order could flow from religious revelation (i.e. "the theological-political problem"), and built once more on medieval Islamic philosophy. To Al-Fārābī was attributed the concealed view that philosophy incorporated as 'political science' (*ʿilm al-madanī*), i.e., the study of what achieves human happiness, religious disciplines legitimized by the Islamic revelation such as jurisprudence and theology.[8] Thus, in Strauss's Islamic queries, the bone of contention has generally been the soundness of his interpretations of medieval philosophers as atheist Platonists in disguise, besides the political implication of such readings in the here-and-now (with the émigré emerging as a conservative icon in Chicago) and his own alleged embrace of exotericism – i.e. in writing through commonly edifying but deceptive "foreground."[9] The implications for Islamic studies of Straussian method and theory, however, are much broader than on narrowly understood philosophy alone, extending also, for instance, to self-declared esoteric traditions. Their challenge, in other words, remains open irrespective of whether the book is closed on Strauss's examination of the *falāsifa*.

Others have previously pointed at Straussian applications to Shiite mysticism or religious expressions related to it, as in the association of Ṣadrā's "Wisdom of the Throne" with an "intentionally esoteric style of writing," but not, it seems, offered dedicated studies.[10] The current essay takes a leaf from the Straussian page and examines it in addressing questions of spiritual authority surrounding the Shiite Sufi leader Mollā Solṭānmoḥammad Beydokhtī, ›Solṭānʿalīshāh‹ (1251/1835–1327/1909), and his treatise on "Friendship with God," the *Valāyat-nāme* (1323/1905–6).[11]

Solṭānʿalīshāh led the Gonābādī-Neʿmatollāhī order, an important Shiite Sufi network based predominantly in the Khorasan region of northeastern Iran, in the late nineteenth, early twentieth century.[12] Gonābādī Sufism emerged in the late nineteenth century as the main lineage of the initially Sunni Neʿmatollāhī order, which was influential in Central Asia, India, and Persia and mostly remains today in Iran and Western diasporas. It goes back to Shāh Neʿmatollāh Valī, d.843/1431, a Syrian-born Sufi author who settled ultimately in Kerman, southeastern Iran.[13] Persecutions of the Neʿmatollāhīs and other Sufis under the last Safavid Shāh Solṭānḥoseyn (d.1722) led the leadership of the order to relocate to the Deccan.[14]

In the late eighteenth century, the order returned to Iran from India and its "revival" included widespread popular adherence and growing social influence.[15] After several renewed episodes of

[4]Ibid., pp. 39–40ff (postdoctoral studies), 39 (origin), 40 (theological-political problem).

[5]Sheppard 2006, p. 81; Bloom 1974, p. 373; Tamer 2004, p. 3.

[6]Bloom 1974, p. 386.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Tamer 2001, pp. 210–211, 325.

[9]Sheppard 2006, p. 1ff (conservatism); Townsend 2014, p. 10 (exoteric); Sheppard 2006, p. 5; Tamer 2001, pp. 24–26 (for a summary of the argument and the discussion).

[10]Morris 1981, pp. 44–45 (esoteric style). See further below for the significance of the theosopher Mollā Ṣadrā (d.1045/1635–36?) to Solṭānʿalīshāhī Sufism. Possibly the closest to 'dedicated studies' of Straussian applications in this field would be Tzfadya 2023, which stages Khomeynī as an 'unquestioned master' of theosophy and mysticism.

[11]Page references in this article are those of the third print edition (Gonābādī 1986–87/1365 [1323Q/1905–6], p. 49) unless specified otherwise.

[12]E.g., see Van den Bos 2013.

[13]E.g., see Algar 1995.

[14]E.g., see Algar 1991, p. 7; Van den Bos 2002, pp. 50–52.

[15]E.g., see Royce 1979; Algar 1991, pp. 721–722.

jurist-monarch collaboration in the repression of Sufism and persecution of Sufis, the court's institutional opposition came to an end with the third ruler of the Qājār dynasty, the Sufi initiate/patron Moḥammad Shāh Qājār (r. 1834–48).[16] The order was at the height of its power under the Neᶜmatollāhī master Zeyn ol-ᶜĀbedīn Raḥmatᶜalīshāh, who was deputy governor of Fars under Moḥammad Shāh Qājār,[17] but fragmentation set in upon his death in 1861. Two claimants to his succession were Monavvarᶜalīshāh (d.1884), heading the Monavvarᶜalīshāhī (or Ẕoᵓr-Reyāsateyn) order, and Ṣafīᶜalīshāh (d.1899), from whom the Ṣafīᶜalīshāhī order evolved. Moḥammad Shāh had nicknamed the third claimant, Ḥājj Moḥammad Kāẓem Eṣfahānī Saᶜādatᶜalīshāh (d.1876), *ṭāvūs ol-ᶜorafāᵓ* (peacock of the gnostics), on the basis of which his order is sometimes referred to as the Ṭāvūsiyya. Its common names, however, refer to Saᶜādatᶜalīshāh's pupil Solṭānmoḥammad Solṭānᶜalīshāh (d.1909), who was the larger personality, under whom the order greatly expanded - Solṭānᶜalīshāhī (Neᶜmatollāhī) or Gonābādī, referring to the latter's residence in Khorasan.[18]

Solṭānᶜalīshāh succeeded in creating the Shiite Sufi order per excellence despite facing recurrent challenges of his spiritual authority and meeting a tragic death.[19] Among the early allegations was his association with Bābism.[20] This points to the religious transformation of Shiite Islam in the nineteenth century, which often involved reinforced or independent articulations of mystical truth and spiritual authority. Among the early doctrines of the Sheykhī school was the concept of the Imams as "pre-existential divine beings" and "the cause of Creation," and that of the initiated "Perfect Shia" as the Deputy of the Mahdī.[21] The later Kermani radicalism is famously associated with the idea of the "fourth pillar" (*rokn-e rābeᶜ*), explicating much of what was implicit in the founders' words, which presented the Perfect Shīᶜa collectively as "rulers and instructors in this world" or in the singular, as "God"s governor on earth."[22] Bābism emerged as a rival movement to the Kermani Sheykhīs, through "almost identical, radical theories of leadership,"[23] antagonistic to jurist authority, and with the founder's claim to be the "gate" to the Imam's knowledge. But this movement developed into a new religion, claiming to supersede Islam,[24] accompanied by far-reaching ambitions to worldly rule and a violent uprising – lately causing alarm in the state.[25]

A parallel development in the nineteenth century was "the rise in discussions of *wilāya*," with treatises on the topic "establishing a genre."[26] *Valāyat* had also been expounded on by Solṭānᶜalīshāh's teacher, the philosopher Hādī Sabzavārī (d.1289/1873), whose discussion of the concept as that through which "being" (*vojūd*) is manifest, represented the Ṣadrian metaphysics.[27] A primary context for the broader ascent of *valāyat* thinking was the view of the mid-century "as the millennium of the occultation of the Imam [while] expectation of his imminent re-appearance was rife."[28] Millenarianism, however, produced an "intellectual reaction," which was "patronised by the dynasty" and "facilitated

[16]Algar 1991, p. 721.

[17]Shīrāzī 1966/1345 [1900–1902/1318–19], pp. 391–392. This reference corrects the attribution in Van den Bos 2002, pp. 62–63. 'Deputy governor' refers to *nāᵓeb oṣ-ṣadr*, a financial function involving the provincial management of crown moneys (Gramlich 1965, p. 55).

[18]This paragraph is closely paraphrased from Van den Bos 2013, p. 148. References to its various claims are found there.

[19]A striking indication of the transformation from his predecessor's "life of seclusion in Isfahan" (Algar 1995) and the "handful" of disciples the successor had started out with, Solṭānᶜalīshāh's mausoleum would make the remote, unassuming village of Beydokht "one of the most famous pilgrimage sites in the country" (Gramlich 1965, p. 66).

[20]Gramlich 1965, p. 65. Bābism was a millennial movement of the nineteenth century, formed around ᶜAlī Moḥammad Shīrāzī (executed in 1266/1850), who believed himself to be the 'gate' (*bāb*) to the return of the Twelfth Imam, which developed into a new religion with a separate legal system.

[21]Bayat 1982, pp. 47 (pre-existential; cause), 49–50 (Perfect Shia).

[22]Ibid., pp. 66 (implicit), 67 (rulers and instructors), 75 (governor).

[23]Ibid., p. 79.

[24]Ibid., pp. 79 (new religion), 103 (supersede Islam).

[25]Ibid., pp. 96 (worldly rule), 79 (violent uprising), 126 (state alarm).

[26]Rizvi 2005, p. 115.

[27]Rizvi 2010, pp. 67–68.

[28]Rizvi 2005, p. 115.

by [. . .] *ḥikmat*" – importantly including the work of Sabzavārī.[29] Except for royal admiration, the philosopher met with significant jurist approval, as evidenced by his influence on the leading *oṣūlī mojtaheds* of the age,[30] i.e. on the high clergy authorized in legal interpretation who aimed at the expansion of jurist authority. Thus, while both Sabzavārī and Solṭān^{c}alīshāh count as "key intermediaries" of (aspects of) *valāyat* theory between the Safavid and the modern era,[31] heated controversy was reserved only for the latter. In the midst of state breakdown, without the royal patronage which had bestowed the cognomen of "peacock of the gnostics" on his predecessor, or collegiate recognition during a time when the (exoteric) jurists' assertion was at a height, the master's Sufi pathway lay open to contestation at little apparent cost.

The first task at hand consists of assessing the net value of Strauss's writing for this essay's query of Shiite Sufism, of which the Solṭān^{c}alīshāhī order is the most important institutional representative in the modern day, focused on notions of persecution, dangerous knowledge, epistemic subordination, and political religion. Subsequently, the theme of Friendship with God, central to Solṭān^{c}alīshāh's *Valāyat-nāme*, is explored relative to adjacent secular and religious concepts in order to establish it, in Straussian terms, as a template for socio-political relations. The essay next turns to the interpretation of the *Valāyat-nāme* in relation to Solṭān^{c}alīshāh's contested life and teachings and assassination in the early twentieth century. His religious ambiguities are interpreted not as exoteric dissimulation but a subtler practice of rearticulation on the margins of a shared religious universe.

Straussian legacies

At first sight, it may seem doubtful whether Strauss's take on Islamic philosophy, from *Philosophie und Gesetz* (1935) to *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (1952), could elucidate queries of Shiite Sufism – found in a different clime, with a later zenith. While Strauss met with Louis Massignon, the renowned scholar of (Ḥallāj's) Sufism, in 1932, and reported his awe of the latter, the respect left no obvious traces in his intellectual endeavors.[32] Strauss's *political* establishment of *medieval* Islamic philosophy, evolving towards an evermore explicit exoteric reading,[33] seems almost paradigmatically opposed to Henry Corbin's perspective (i.e. that of Masssignon's foremost pupil), which interpreted Islamic philosophy, instead, as a *continuous illuminationist* tradition.[34] While few scholars nowadays credit Corbin's near recasting of Islamic philosophy as, by and large, Shiite theosophy,[35] it was the latter's great contribution to have laid bare a fount of (what he thought of as) post-Rushdian Islamic esoterism, which also fuels Shiite Sufism.[36] Through his philosopher-teacher, Hādī Sabzavārī, the connection extends to Solṭān^{c}alīshāh.[37]

[29]Ibid.

[30]Rizvi 2010, p. 63.

[31]Rizvi 2012, p. 396.

[32]See Tamer 2001, p. 94 (met; awe). Namazi cites Paul Kraus as an Arabist with whom Strauss collaborated closely in Paris in this period and does not extend the qualification to Massignon (with whom Strauss took several courses) or cite Massignon as an intellectual influence (Namazi 2022, pp. 20–21).

[33]Cf. Townsend 2014, pp. 27–28, 158.

[34]"The Orientalist approach [. . .] gave rise to two alternative ways of studying Arabic philosophy [. . .]. One is the illuminationist interpretation of Henry Corbin and the other the political esoteric interpretation of Leo Strauss" (Gutas 2002, p. 16). 'Illuminationist' refers to Sohraverdī's (d.587/1191) *ḥekmat al-ishrāq*; 'continued' is borne out, for instance, by Corbin's insistence on "l'influence extraordinaire de l'oeuvre de Sohravardî au cours des siècles" (Corbin 1999, p. 305; cf. Nasr 1996, p. 161). See note 36 for a critique of Corbin's 'esoteric' reading of Sohraverdī. See Elmarsafy 2021 for the wider French tradition occupied with 'esoteric Islam.'

[35]Cf. Marmura 1995, p. 347.

[36]E.g. cf. Legenhausen 2011, p. 70. While Corbin's emphasis on 'esoteric' as opposed to philosophical readings of Sohraverdī has been disputed (Marcotte 2016), it seems to be firmly accepted that Iranian sages did read him (also) in an initiatic illuminationist light (e.g. Rizvi 2009).

[37]"[Sohraverdī's] influence aujourd'hui en Iran est inséparable de celle des penseurs shî'ites qui l'ont assimilée, avant tout celle de Mollâ Sadrâ et de ses continuateurs (jusqu'à 'Abdollah [sic] Zonûzî, Hâdî Sabzavâri [. . . .]" (Corbin 1999, p. 305).

The intellectual situation in the Shiite-Iranian realm where philosophy has inclined towards mysticism poses a significant problem, moreover, for Straussian thought holding philosophy *bien entendu* in opposition to religion. The point is echoed in Wasserstrom's interpretation of Strauss's *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, venturing that the work *"famously suggests one kind of esoteric [writing,* while] kabbalah and Sufism are another." This means, in the author's assessment, that Strauss's "philosophical esoterism is a theatrical display of camouflage, [while] the other, mystical esoterism, is a sequestration of positive content."[38] The passage speaks to the current discussion in the observed contradiction between exoteric and esoteric readings in the "philosophical" variety, which is not implied in the "mystical" one. In this regard, it merits reiterating that Shiite esoterists have seldom taken "positive content" as an alternative to the revealed Law. Main works in the *ᶜerfānī* tradition, for example, define delicate complementary balances.[39]

Even while these first orientations are distinctly inauspicious, there are four larger Straussian themes related to the ideological tensions associated with revealed religion, that do present themselves as effective structuring devices to account for the spiritual authority invested in Solṭānᶜalīshāh and extolled in the *Valāyat-nāme*. The first of these concerns the notion of persecution as a context for exoterism – Solṭānᶜalīshāh had been forced to abandon his teaching circle and flee Tehran accused of Bābī leanings[40] and was often accused of hiding his true ideas.[41] He was engaged in writing the *Valāyat-nāme* while "already living under constant threat of assassination."[42] Closely related to but not interchangeable with the point of persecution is the conception of esoterism as a veil for dangerous knowledge – for the recipient as well as the presenter. The sting in the allegation that Solṭānᶜalīshāh maintained graded teachings for different audiences, from the general public to the "elite of Sufi disciples" (*akhaṣṣ-e khavāṣ-e morīdān*), lay especially in the specification of progressively more blasphemous teachings.[43] Despite complementarity, thirdly, Strauss's work reminds us of the drive to subordination that frequently arises in the encounter of Islamic traditions that emphasize different epistemic sources – reason and revelation in the case of the medieval philosophers; revelation and illumination here. In Shiism, a classical manifestation of complementary *ranking* comes to the fore in knowledge hierarchies scaled from exoteric to esoteric, *ẓāher* to *bāṭen*,[44] which similarly define Shiite Sufi thought, including in regard to other Shiite traditions.[45] The last element is the political nature of religious knowledge, established in Strauss's analysis through the privileging of Islam's law-giving features.[46] The scope for conceiving "political religious knowledge" is broader, however, "in light of the foremost transcendental goal" in Islam of divine guidance (*hudā*).[47] It follows that in the case study of this essay, "the politics of religious knowledge" has centred on "the effort to defend its value as divine guidance for the world."[48] Few religious concepts if any are more central to Shiite Sufism (as to Shiism

[38]Wasserstrom 1999, p. 33.

[39]Among these is Muḥammad Dārābī's (d.1130/1718) *Mirᶜāj al-Kamāl*, which restates a division of clerics based on their specialization in exoteric and esoteric sciences, surpassed in rank by clerics competent in both, echoing the Sufi trinity of *sharīᶜat*, *ṭarīqat* and *ḥaqīqat* (see Anzali 2017, pp. 125, 130; Anzali 2012, p. 115; cf. Legenhausen 2011, p. 69).

[40]See note 20.

[41]Among the many allegations of his estranged lieutenant Keyvān Qazvīnī, for instance, was the reproach that Solṭānᶜalīshāh did not state his claims 'from beginning to end and for all people in one tone' but instead adhered to 'three gradations' with ever more controversial content (see Parīshānzāde 1998/1377, p. 118).

[42]Cancian 2023, pp. 131–132.

[43]Qazvīnī alleged, but did not made plausible with reference to Solṭānᶜalīshāh's writings, that the first level teaching contained a claim to *marjaᶜiyat* during the absence of the Hidden Imam; the second the assertion that Solṭānᶜalīshāh was the Hidden Imam; and the third a claim to his divinity (*olūhīyat*) (which allegations have been fiercely contested by Gonābādī authors) (e.g. see Parīshānzāde 1998/1377, p. 118).

[44]Cf. Legenhausen 2011, pp. 69, 68.

[45]E.g., it is striking in Dārābī's case of complementarity (see note 39) that the superior class of clerics are referred to with ranking terms such as *pīr* or *morshed* (Anzali 2017, p. 130) – which are usually seen as deriving from the Sufi universe.

[46]See Tamer 2001, pp. 326, 330, 331–332; cf. Fradkin 1991, p. 50.

[47]Arjomand 2016, pp. 1, 97.

[48]Heck 2013, p. 300.

generally) than "*valāyat,*"[49] and its discussion – as in Solṭānᶜalīshāh's treatise - harbours claims to unique mergers of guidance, sanctity, and salvation.

Conceiving divine friendship socio-politically

The following excursus scans the surface of some adjacent secular and religious conceptions to shed comparative light on Shiite Sufi Friendship with God. It does so specifically to gain a better understanding of the Sufis' religious claims to worldly authority, before turning to the specific case of Solṭānᶜalīshāh and the *Valāyat-nāme*. While anchored firmly in Islamic *wilāya/valāyat* doctrine deriving either from the general Sufi, including Sunni, theory or Shiite thought stretching from the esoteric to the exoteric, that is, Shiite Sufi Friendship may be further particularised in light of certain Christian mystical writings as a template for socio-political relations. A Straussian case of political religion, "Divine Friendship" in Shiite mystical realms is equally contextualised by the themes of persecution, dangerous knowledge and epistemic subordination.

De Montaigne's sixteenth-century *Essai* on friendship contains three interrelated notions that remain intuitive of friendship: altruism, reciprocity, and freedom from constraint.[50] Altruism by the same token is central to Islamic mystical notions of *wilāya*, as in a statement by Solṭānᶜalīshāh in the *Valāyat-nāme* on the necessity of giving to others. However, *īs̲ār* – the Islamic equivalent - is not ultimately for other *humans*, but for the greater love of *God*, from whom it also stems.[51] The element of reciprocity is similarly evident in Sufi views of interaction with the divine that conceive divine interaction, for instance, as a "marriage."[52] Claims to orthodoxy often cover such views, however, separating Islamic mysticism from adjacent heterodox concepts such as *etteḥād* and *vaḥdat ol-vojūd*, which were stated by Solṭānᶜalīshāh to be among the "corrupt beliefs" (i.e. reflecting the rejection that they often faced in later Sufism).[53] Whereas Islamic mystical articulations abound for "altruism" and "reciprocity," in other words, these have expressed not "freedom from constraint" but hierarchical religious embedding. This structural aspect of the religious hierarchy provides a further clue to *valāyat* as a template for socio-political relations in Islamic society.

The mentioned mystic Islamic articulations of altruism and reciprocity have equivalents in other religious traditions, as for instance, Christian *Gottesfreundschaft*, which encompasses a similarly hierarchical model of religious friendship. In the perennialist-comparative margins of *En Islam iranien*, Corbin ingeniously invokes *Gottesfreundschaft* to render *valāyat*.[54] But one will not, it seems, find concepts of Friendship with God in this tradition that perceive the Friend's role as that of a spiritual initiator within the religious community.[55] Reports of two subsequent manifestations of Christian mystical organization, Van Ruusbroec's (d.1381) parish and later priory in Groenendaal near Brussels[56] and Grote's (d.1384) devotional movement, which spread out from Deventer beyond the Low Countries and was posthumously named the *Zusters en Broeders van het Gemene Leven* ("Sisters and

[49]See Tabatabaᵓi 1981/1360, p. 10 for one among the many authoritative statements of the idea.

[50]De Montaigne 1933 [1580–1595], pp. 193, 202, 194.

[51]E.g., 1986–87/1365 [1323Q/1905–6], (*īs̲ār*) 151, (*sālek* and *khalq-e khodā*) 118, cf. Gramlich 1976, pp. 309–310.

[52]Poles (*aqṭāb*) have been conceived as 'God's bride' (Lindholm 1998, p. 215); for Bāyezīd Basṭāmī (d.261/875), the term referred more broadly to the Friends (*awliyāᵓ*) (Gramlich 1989, p. 360). Treating 'Divine Love,' Nicholson stated of Sufis that '[i]n the bridal chamber of Unity God celebrates the mystical marriage of the soul' (Nicholson 2002 [1914], p. 85).

[53]For the general tendency, see, e.g. Baldick 1989, pp. 57, 121; Gonābādī 1986–87/1365 [1323Q/1905–6], p. 57 testifies to the views of Solṭānᶜalīshāh; but see Cancian 2023, pp. 212–214 for a nuanced interpretation.

[54]Corbin 1972a, p. 396. The *Gottesfreunde* were 'the adherents of an informal movement of mystical piety, centring upon the Rhineland and Switzerland in the 14th century' ("Gottesfreunde" 1997).

[55]Modern scholarship disputes earlier views of the *Gottesfreunde* as either a church within the church, secretly led, or a brotherhood. Rapp attributes their 'strong tie,' prevailing over geographical and social distance, to their *Lebensauffassung* (Rapp 1994, p. 58). Charismatic 'masters' were revered (cf. Warnar 2010, pp. 58–59), but leading *Gottesfreunde* seem to have perceived of spiritual friendship with others as a temporary 'mentoring relationship' only, especially in a conversion context (Webster 2007, p. 218), as opposed to an enduring initiatory relationship - crucial to *valī* concepts explored here.

[56]Verdeyen c1994, pp. 22–3; Van Ruusbroec 1981.

Brothers of the Common Life"),[57] do not indicate either that the spiritual progression of disciples was held dependent on the person of the spiritual founder, irrespective of the great esteem in which he would be held as, respectively, an illuminated teacher and the "first exemplar of the New Devotion."[58] In Islamic cases, to the contrary, his Friendship with God allows the Friend to be at once, a spiritual patron in the community of the faithful – *valāyat*, it seems without exception, involves a relationship of double patronage, of the Friend by God and flowing from there, of the Faithful(-Initiands) by the Friend.[59]

While the root meanings of *wilāya/valāyat* are distinct, the terms are also used interchangeably.[60] Their duality of meanings renders both "authority" or "power" and "friendship" or "assistance."[61] The Sufi concept is often rendered as Friendship with God, which may include understandings from each side of the divide such as nearness, devotion to the Imams (which is the core understanding of *valāyat* in Shiism),[62] spiritual jurisdiction, or sanctity.[63] The parallel drawn by Chodkiewicz between Islamic sainthood and late Roman *amicitia*,[64] moreover, serves to remind that the dual meanings of *wilāya* and *valāyat* are often implied in one another. In either case, the terminology reveals embeddedness in socio-political life,[65] prompting disconcerting questions over the referents for its spiritual authority. Among other historical categories, the claims to partaking in *wilāya/valāyat* might involve caliphs, shahs, imams, sheikhs, jurists, mystics, or the faithful at large.

Sufi elaborations on Friendship with God (including Solṭānᶜalīshāh's) have discussed the Friends, with implications for these other functions of Islamic society, 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*.[66] Shiite theory is particular in this realm of thought in grounding *valāyat* in the imamate.[67] There has been a chain of four main mystic theorists of *wilāya/valāyat*: al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d.#295/905–300/910), Hojvīrī/Jollābī (d.#465/1072–469/1079) Ibn ᶜArabī (d.638/1240) and, the only Shiite author, Ḥeydar Āmolī (d. after 787/1385).[68] Āmolī presented the Imams as mystical guides while defining true Shiism as Sufism and true Sufism as Shiism.[69]

[57]See Post 1968, p. 197; Van Engen 2008.

[58]Ruusbroec (illuminated teacher) - cf. Verdeyen c1994, pp. 45–46; Van Ruusbroec 1981, p. 21; Van Engen 2008, esp. pp. 84–118; Grote (first exemplar) - see Van Engen 1988, p. 45.

[59]E.g. Landolt's discussion of Sufi *wilāya/valāyat* recalls prophetic traditions, "often in the form of *ḥadīth qudsī*]" suggesting the existence of Friends of God who "stand under his special protection." The *ḥadīth* "known throughout the Ṣūfī literature" as that of of ᶜAbd Allāh ibn Masᶜūd quantifies the Friends, "upon whom life and death of all nations depends" (1987, p. 321).

[60]Cf. Cornell 1998, p. xviiff.

[61]Landolt 1987, p. 316. The latter's comprehensive encyclopaedic entry and McGregor's overview of especially Sunni Sufi thought in this area (2001) discuss the extensive literature on *wilāya/valāyat*. Each of the sources on Sufi *wilāya/valāyat* mentioned elsewhere in this section also contain assessments of either parts or the full breadth of their intellectual history.

[62]Walker 2002, p. 209.

[63]Radtke 2000, p. 109; Corbin 1972b [vol. 3], pp. 9–10.

[64]Chodkiewicz 1986, p. 35.

[65]Cf. Landolt 1987, p. 317.

[66]E.g., cf. Corbin 1972b, p. 171.

[67]E.g., cf. Amir-Moezzi 2002.

[68]Cf. Radtke 2000; Landolt 1987; Radtke and O'Kane 1996, pp. 1–9; Landolt 2000, p. 91; Corbin 1972b, pp. 170–171; Chodkiewicz 1986. Hojvīrī's *Kashf ol-Maḥjūb* presents *valāyat* as Sufism's doctrinal core (Landolt 1987, p. 321; Hojvīrī [1371/1992], pp. 265–311), based on a discussion of Tirmidhī (Radtke 2000, p. 110), but omits the central aspect in his *Khatm/Sīrat al-awliyāᵓ*, of 'the seal' (*khatm*) of the Friends of God (Chodkiewicz 1986, p. 49). Ibn ᶜArabī's *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīya*, to the contrary, elaborates on Tirmidhī's presentation of *valāyat* including the doctrine of the Seal, distinguishing two kinds of *khatm al-awliyāᵓ*, the universal or general (*ᶜāmma*) and the particular or Muḥammadan (*muḥammadīya*), and explicating their identity (unambiguously Jesus in the first case and more complicatedly himself in the second) (see ibid., p. 70; 148; ch. 9; Affifi 1979 [1939], p. 100).

[69]Kohlberg 2011 [1989], pp. 983–985. His *Jamiᶜ al-asrār wa manbaᶜ al-anwār* incorporates and transforms the scheme of Ibn ᶜArabī in the latter's *Futūḥāt*, identifying Imam ᶜAlī with 'the seal of the universal (*moṭlaq*) *walāya*' and 'the seal of the particular (*moqayyad*), Moḥammadan *walāya*' with the Twelfth Imam (ibid.; Āmolī 1969 [#752Q/1351], pp. 395–396).

While "the tendency toward the *rapprochement* between Sufism and official circles of Shiᶜite learning and piety" continued into the ninth/fifteenth century,[70] the prism of Sufism became increasingly suspect, even before the realignment of Shiism around a juristic core, since the days of the Safavid-era backlash. The theosopher Mollā Ṣadrā (d.1045/1635–36?) was highly critical of anti-intellectual pretenders to Sufism and, unlike his Sufi teacher Sheykh Bahāʾī,[71] does not seem to have identified distinct categories of the Friends in society (as opposed to as an ideal type only),[72] There was a "lack of fixed ontological categories below the level of the Prophet" in Ṣadrā's spiritual hierarchy, and *valī*, *ᶜāref*, *ᶜālem* [friend, gnostic, scholar] and *emām* were used as "multivalent terms."[73] These facts did not prevent intense attacks alleging his Sufism.[74]

Sufi responses to the anti-Sufi campaigns show religious hierarchy reforming, legitimising claims to spiritual guidance through their subordinate embedding. Khorāsānī's late seventeenth-century *Toḥfe-ye ᶜAbbāsī*, for instance, maintains the function of the *pīr* while downgrading its unmediated, exalted station. The work is thought to have played a major role in legitimising Sufism away from its Sunni roots with reference to Shiite *ḥadīth* collections.[75] Neyrīzī (d.1173/1759), another Ẓahabī master, not only rejects antinomians but dispenses with the term "*ṣūfī*" altogether (except in the negative), while retaining his appreciation for *salāsil ahl al-faqr* (i.e. Sufi orders) and reincorporating "high Sufis" under the wider mystic label of Twelver *ᶜerfān*.[76]

Whether or not Shiite authors opposed Sufism as a whole, it was a common thread in their critiques (including Āmolī's) to chide, paraphrasing Corbin, Shiite Sufism's "forgetfulness of its sources" – i.e. the "Sunni" claim to a Friendship with God that followed the prophethood but did not subjugate itself to the orthodox Imamic cycle, claiming Friendship instead for itself.[77] As previously indicated, Shiite Sufis might contain 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 - through hierarchical demarcations. These responses are another instance of "religious friendship," in other words, deriving legitimacy from recalibrated hierarchization. Specifically, Shiite Sufi discussions of Friendship with God have sought to carve out subordinate religious space within Shiism, in delicate balances of spiritual authority with Imams and jurists.

Solṭānᶜalīshāhī doctrine postulated a division of spiritual authority in the *gheyba* between Shiite jurists and mystics, *foqahā* and *ᶜorafā* (see further below). Shiite Sufis in Iran, into the twentieth century, encompassed the *qoṭb*'s ("Pole") authority under the spiritual dominion of "the fourteen immaculates": the Prophet's authority, Fāṭima's *valāyat-e Fāṭemīya*, and that of the twelve Imams. They generally conceived of the Mahdī's realm, for instance, in terms of the Universal Authority (*velāyat-e kollīya*) or Sun Authority (*velāyat-e shamsīya*), while the Partial Authority (*velāyat-e jozʾīya*) or Moon Authority (*velāyat-e qamarīya*) confined the Pole's jurisdiction. Thus, Shiite Sufis set forth *velāyat-e jozʾīya* as spiritual authority derived from that of the Twelfth Imam, but whom, in ambivalent

[70]Nasr 1972, p. 115.

[71]Sheykh Bahāʾī (1030–1/1621–2) (Kohlberg 2011 [1988]) was a practicing Sufi who "had written works praising the Sufis as the true friends of God" (Rizvi 2002, p. 189).

[72]Dakake 2010, pp. 33–34 disputes Corbin's introduction to Mollā Ṣadrā for restricting the category of the *awliyāʾ* to the Imams (e.g. Mollā Ṣadrā - Ṣadreddīn Shīrāzī 1964, pp. 14–15). While Corbin did insist famously on an Imamic concept of the *awliyāʾ*, the notes to his study also indicate classes of the Friends of God beyond the Imams alone, namely the "‹‹Quatorze Très-purs››, et par dérivation ceux de leurs shī'ites qui atteignent le degré de l'Homme parfait" (ibid., p. 96). If there is a referent to the Perfect Man or Men in this world, their identity remains undisclosed.

[73]Dakake 2010, p. 43.

[74]Newman 2001, p. 38. The attacks preceded but also continued – for instance by Moḥammad-Ṭāher Qommī (d.1098/1687) – long after Mollā Ṣadrā had completed his anti-antinomian *Kasr al-aṣnām* in 1027/1617–8 (Newman 1999, pp. 102, 105).

[75]Anzali 2017, pp. 87, 79.

[76]Ibid., pp. 154–6; cf. Nasr 1972, p. 116.

[77]E.g., Corbin 1971, pp. 17–18.

terminology reminding once more of Āmolī's theme,[78] they might also conceive of as the Pole of Poles (*qoṭb ol-aqṭāb*), *qoṭb-e shamsī* or *pīr-e ḥaqīqat*.[79]

Exoteric dissimulation vs. religious equivocation

The last part of this reflection expands on the noted ambiguity in Sufis' subordinate renderings of legitimate authority in Shiism. The conception of the Mahdī as *pīr*, for instance, begs the question of bounds to the Pole's partial authority. The common *laqab* of *shāh* is often deemed symbolic, unchallenging in their relations with rulers, but the Sufis' use of the term might sprawl, as when Shāh Neᶜmatollāh stated that rulers had to spread by the sword the word of the *True* King.[80] There appear to be clear applications for Straussian "truth between the lines"[81] in these examples – but importantly, ones in which the "lines" themselves are key constituents of truth. Just as al-Fārābī's portrayal as anti-religious has been rejected,[82] it would be ill-judged to project hostility to the Law in Shiism on Solṭānᶜalīshāh, who was an accredited Jurist as well as a Sufi master.[83]

The interpretive challenge in the master's biography, therefore, is arguably to account for something more subtle than dissimulation amounting to exoterism as an inversion of meaning. Rather, the case pertains to how religious subalterns face situations of domination whose terms, at least in important part, they accept. The shared religious universe requires religious subalterns, therefore, to accommodate while avoiding "conversion," as often has been the plight of Shiite Sufis in Iran. It has proven productive in trying to substantiate what "ambiguity in hierarchy" amounts to in the realm of Shiite Sufism to consult an essay in linguistic anthropology that examines accommodation in the face of hegemonic ideology.[84] Corin's study explores Islamic among other cases where subordinates manipulate the definition of an ideological centre and its religious margins, allowing simultaneously for their adjustment to a hegemonic discourse and the retention of religious identity.[85] Where the Straussian analysis builds upon the recognition of intentional obscurities, contradictions, or omissions,

[78]E.g., cf. Nasr's reference to the latter holding that "[t]he Quṭb and the Imâm are two expressions possessing the same meaning and referring to the same person" (Nasr 1972, p. 111).

[79]See Gramlich 1976, p. 158ff. Such 'ambiguity in hierarchy' finds an exemplary illustration in the non-sectarian but at minimum Shiite-inspired context (cf. Ridgeon 1998, pp. 190–199) of ᶜAzīz Nasafī's seventh/thirteenth century treatment of one of the oldest Sufi controversies. *Kashf al-ṣirāṭ* maintains at once that prophethood/prophets rank higher than friendship/Friends and that "Friendship is the heart of Prophecy" (ibid., p. 173; 178; 180; 181- see 183 for Nasafī's elaboration).

[80]The examples derive from Pourjavady and Wilson 1978, pp. 21, 117.

[81]"Persecution, then, gives rise to a peculiar technique of writing, and therewith to a peculiar type of literature, in which the truth about all crucial things is presented exclusively between the lines" (Strauss 1941, p. 491).

[82]E.g., see Leaman's argument to the effect that "it would not be correct to think of Farabi as having anything to hide that is opposed to Islam" (1980, p. 535ff) and Tamer's insistence that rather than politicizing religion in subservience to philosophy, al-Fārābī aimed at their religious harmonization (see 2001, pp. 325, 329, 332ff).

A second line of thought on Fārābī's negative appraisal of Islam rejects Straussian takes on his concealment of secular knowledge, while accepting esoteric writing in the political treatises. Vallat writes that "l'islam de Farabi n'est plus qu'une hypothèse chancelante, pour ne pas dire discordante ou contradictoire étant donné le peu d'estime qu'il lui montre" (Vallat 2004, p. 309). He agreed that "Strauss was right about Alfarabi using an esoteric art of writing in connection with the theologico-political question" (Vallat 2017, p. 344). The concealment served recruitment of the potential philosopher-rulers capable of seeing through it (Vallat 2011, p. 350) and, less than the foundation of civic values, "noetic felicity for some human beings" (Vallat 2017: 345).

[83]See Van den Bos 2016, p. 197 for details.

[84]See ibid., p. 196.

[85]Among the examples in Corin's essay is one involving a spirit possession ritual in Zaire called *Mizuka* and deemed Islamic, starting with '*the Shaada*' (Corin 1995, pp. 183–184). *Mizuka* refers to a category of Muslim *jinn*s, 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., pp. 184–186), hence, 'the cultural centrality of subordinated structures.' A similar praxis-ideology opposition is not implied for the Shiite Sufi case developed here (let alone a juxtaposition with Islam), but inspiration is drawn from the analysis of internal differentiation within a dominant discourse, which creates ideological space and legitimacy for subordinate groups (and may also turn against them in sufficiently hostile environments, as is demonstrated by the violent end of Solṭānᶜalīshāh).

the anthropology of "structural heterogeneity" observes subaltern meaning adhesion and its ritual articulation.[86] In the process, religious salience shifts from the sanctioned codes towards their graft.

Along these interpretive lines lies the "central" Shiite belief in an original esoteric-exoteric divide of religious meaning in Islam, from which flow the triad of *resālat*, *nobovvat,* and *valāyat* and Shiite Sufi "homologies" of *sharīᶜat*, *ṭarīqat,* and *ḥaqīqat*.[87] As previously suggested, Shiite Sufis might venture a further, "marginal" subdivision from this construction, establishing Sufis or Gnostics (*ᶜorafā*) and jurists (*foqahā*) as esoteric and exoteric agents of the esoteric Imamic authority. (It will be further analyzed below how Sufism might attain salience through ritual in this hierocracy). Such a division of spiritual authority between *ᶜorafā* and *foqahā*, whether explicit or implicit, has undergirded Solṭānᶜalīshāhī doctrine and practice. In January 1997, the Solṭānᶜalīshāhī master Majẕūbᶜalīshāh proclaimed a division of spiritual authority, beyond the realm of personal judgement – basing himself on his grandfather's (and Solṭānᶜalīshāh's grandson's) treatise *Pand-e Ṣāleḥ* - between the *mojtahed-e jāmeᶜ osh-sharāyeṭ* ("all-round jurist"), to whom the Gonābādī *foqarā* owed *taqlīd* in *sharīᶜa* rulings, and the "great one of the age" (*bozorg-e vaqt*), whose precepts of the *ṭarīqat* they were to adopt.[88] While the rules hint strongly who currently is the Great One, his identity is not spelled out.

Solṭānᶜalīshāh and the *Valāyat-nāme*

The oeuvre and vita of Solṭānᶜalīshāh often fit the Gonābādī pattern and may be read in a similar accommodationist and retentionist light. The phraseology in and around his *Valāyat-nāme*, however, ventured ominously beyond where other Poles in this Neᶜmatollāhī lineage have since gone. It thus remains to explore the socio-political history of the treatise and its author, as well as the text itself,[89] to examine whether a plausible relation exists between his (perceived) religious ideology and mysterious assassination on 26 *rabīᶜ ol-avval* 1327/17 April 1909.[90]

Solṭānᶜalīshāh assumed the order"s *qoṭbiyat* in 1293Q/1876 at the death of his predecessor, Saᶜādatᶜalīshāh. Through the former, the Gonābādī-Neᶜmatollāhis grew in social and numerical importance in Iran and his increasing wealth drew resentment.[91] As noted, various heresies were ascribed to the master and both resentment and heresiology have been suggested as factors in his fate.[92] A closer inspection of his late religious practice renders these elements in sharper profile.[93]

The *Valāyat-nāme* was originally published as a lithograph in 1323Q/1905–6 in Tehran. It was completed in 1320Q/1902 and work on it had commenced since at least 1898.[94] It is, reportedly, "the most widely read of the doctrinal works" by Solṭānᶜalīshāh and "second only to his (Qurʾānic commentary *Bayān os-Saᶜāda*) in its popularity."[95] It has been suggested that the *Bayān* "can be

[86]Strauss 1941, p. 496; Corin 1995, pp. 176, 184–86.

[87]Corbin 1971, p. 259; cf. Antes 1971, p. 11 for Āmolī's additional applications.

[88]E.g., see Van den Bos 2013, p. 150; 2002, p. 198. Golestaneh usefully captures *sharīᶜat-ṭarīqat* 'bifurcation' in the Solṭānᶜalīshāhī order as 'formative' – as opposed to 'primarily a shirking of power,' explained by the original context of persecution - but may overstate the case by rendering it as 'outsourcing' (Golestaneh 2023, p. 367 (bifurcation), 365 (formative), 366 (shirking), 373 (persecution, outsourcing)). Solṭānᶜalīshāh propagated the dualization of realms but as a trained jurist, also published juridical opinions (e.g. Cancian 2023, pp. 252–253). If bifurcation involved 'deferral of authority' to jurists, Golestaneh also notes Solṭānᶜalīshāh's hierarchization, which was privileging the Path (Golestaneh 2023, pp. 373 (deferral), 371 (hierarchy)). More than authority deferral, in other words, this article postulates Sufi-jurist roleplay ambiguity in the centre of the order's survival, both identitarian and physical.

[89]The treatment of the text in this article must necessarily remain cursory. Its importance to the definition of Shiite Sufism, Sufism-Shiism relations and Solṭānᶜalīshāhī doctrine, however, merits more comprehensive study than hitherto published, i.e. a critical edition.

[90]For the dating, see Gonābādī and Qazvīnī (1387/2008–2009), pp. six, 90.

[91]Gramlich 1965, p. 66.

[92]Ibid.

[93]See Cancian 2023, pp. 123–140 for a more elaborate treatment than given here of the actors and events involved in the (build-up to the) murder of Solṭānᶜalīshāh.

[94]Tābande 2006/1384 [1954/1333], p. 242 (completed); Cancian 2023, p. 132 (commenced).

[95]Cancian 2023, pp. 190–191 (most read), 132 (second only).

considered a commentary on *walāya*," to which the *Valāyat-nāme* constitutes a compact "companion" that is "central to [the master's] mystical thought."[96] Its reach beyond Sufi circles is indicated by the perhaps surprising reference to the regimist Āyatollāh Moṭahharī (d.1979) as "a keen reader of [. . .] the *Walāyat-nāma*."[97]

The treatise contains twelve parts and 47 chapters, an introduction dissecting the lexical meaning of *valāyat/velāyat*, and a closure, dedicated to the *ādāb* and conditions of *ẕekr*, with two supplements. The first three parts are concerned with laying out its key understandings of Islamic doctrine on *valāyat/velāyat*, focused on the relations between *valāyat*, prophethood (*nobovvat*), and revelation (*resālat*), and the elaboration of "prescriptive" (*taklīfiye*) *valāyat*, which is contrasted with the "engendering" (*takvīnīye*) type. Solṭānᶜalīshāh here follows the tradition, as expounded by Ibn ᶜArabī, that distinguishes the engendering and the prescriptive command (*amr*). The first pertains to all creatures, who are brought into existence willing or unwilling, and derives from the Name *Allāh*, which "comprehends the properties of all other Names;" while the second pertains to mankind, can be rejected, and derives from other, specific Names such as "the Guide" (*al-Hādī*).[98]

In the Ṣadrian framework that the *Valāyat-nāme* "closely follows," *valāyat-e takvīnīye* is associated with the Imam's cosmic function, namely as the "face of God."[99] *Valāyat-e taklīfiye* on the other hand, relates to "the love and devotion to the Imams" that allows the faithful to fulfil the obligations of the faith.[100] Humans partake in each of the two types of *valāyat*, which are also associated in Neoplatonic fashion with divine "descent" (*nozūl*) and "ascent" (*ṣoᶜūd*) towards God.[101] Whereas *valāyat-e takvīnīye* "occupies a privileged position in [Solṭānᶜalīshāh's] cosmology,"[102] the *Valāyat-nāme* devotes more dedicated discussion to *valāyat-e taklīfiye*, which, as specified below, involves the Sufi master's initiatory role.[103]

The treatise follows a "central" Shiite Sufi tradition in establishing Friendship with God in relation to the prophethood (*nobovvat*) – as its spirit (*rūḥ*)[104] - and in relation to the revelation (*resālat*). It holds that "Islam" is enabled through "general" (*ᶜāmme*) allegiance to the exterior ordinations (*aḥkām-e qālebī*) that the Messenger (*rasūl*) brings, while the "particular" (*khāṣṣe*) pact which enables "faith" (*īmān*), applies to the *owliyāᵓ* (which term seems mostly to connote the *aᵓemme* but might also refer to the *anbiyāᵓ* in their esoteric aspect).[105] While a necessary precondition, "Islam" does not exceed this world, whereas "faith" enables believers to attain the reward (*ajr*) of the hereafter.[106] Solṭānᶜalīshāh then addresses the "fourteen immaculates" and slides into a "marginal" conception where he claims that each had their own "sheikhs" (*mashāyeskh*), before tracing his own line of authorisation to Imam ᶜAlī.[107] While the sheikhs of "the Sufi path" (*ṭarīqat*) are sporadically distinguished from those of "narration" (*ravāyat*), and the latter are associated with the *ᶜolamā*,[108] the common reference in the *Valāyat-nāme* is unspecified. Except for locating the lineal interface of two separate traditions, that is, Solṭānᶜalīshāh here - as has been similarly observed of his earliest treatise, the *Saᶜādat-nāme* - "retrospectively employs Sufi technical terminology to describe the relationship between the imams

[96]Ibid., pp. 163 (commentary), 142 (companion).
[97]Ibid., p. 280.
[98]See Chittick 1991, pp. 60–61.
[99]Rizvi 2012, pp. 399 (follows), 395 (cosmic).
[100]Ibid., p. 400.
[101]Gonābādī 1986–87/1365 [1323Q/1905–6], pp. 30–32 (humans), part 1, ch. 3 (descent), part 1, ch. 4 (ascent); cf. Rizvi 2012, p. 399; Cancian 2023, p. 192.
[102]Cancian 2023, p. 192.
[103]See ibid., p. 192.
[104]'*Maqām-e valāyat ke rūḥ-e nobovvat ast*' (1986–87/1365 [1323Q/1905–6], p. 54). This has been a traditional conception in the Neᶜmatollāhī order since the times of its founder, Shāh Neᶜmatollāh Valī (see Algar 1995, p. 45).
[105]1986–87/1365 [1323Q/1905–6], p. 47.
[106]Ibid., p. 48.
[107]Ibid., p. 233ff. See note 85 for the specific understanding of 'centre' and 'margin' deployed here in relation with ambiguity in hierarchy and Shiite Sufi relations to the Shiite mainstream.
[108]See for instance, ibid., pp. part 10, chs. 1, 2 (distinction), 229 (association).

and their representatives." As a result, "[i]n his parlance [in this discussion], the latter in effect become Sufi masters."[109]

There are implications deriving from this view of Friendship with God for the interaction between Sufi sheikhs and the community of believers, and a more restricted category of initiated disciples. The *Valāyat-nāme* ventures that in general, there is always the need for a teacher (a *moᶜallem*) because, before *valāyat* mends the situation, "man is like a sheep [. . .], endlessly perplexed and wandering in the wilderness."[110] Specifically, the need for a sheikh (*eḥtiyāj be sheykh*) stems from the fact that he is the faithful's broker of *valāyat*. That is, believers attain contact with the divine through the "particular oath of allegiance" (*beyᶜat-e khāṣṣe*) to the "authorised sheikh" (*sheykh-e maᵓẕūn*).[111] The graft of *valāyat* will settle in the believer's heart and will be strengthened there by such Sufi practices as "ritual greeting" (*moṣāfeḥe*), the transformative "meditation of God" (*ẕekr-e khodā*), "reflection" (*fekr*) on the celestial face of the Imam, and particularly, the "taking of the image of the master in one's mind" (*be naẓar āvordan-e ṣūrat-e morshed*).[112] The invigoration of this graft then leads to the Imamic illumination of the heart.[113]

Shiite commentators outside the Solṭānᶜalīshāhī confines have found several elements in these passages controversial.[114] The Iranian cleric ᶜAllāme Borqeᶜi, for instance, found Solṭānᶜalīshāh's conception of *valāyat* as allegiance to the Hidden Imam but entering the believer's heart "through the celestial image of the sheikh," to be clearly invalid (*boṭlān-esh āshkār ast*). Critiquing the *Saᶜādat-nāme*, Solṭānᶜalīshāh's earliest book, for ideas that the *Valāyat-nāme* also adopted, Borqeᶜī argued that rendering present the sheikh's image during worship was "worse than idolatry" (*az bot-parastī badtar*). Evidence was utterly lacking for a religious instruction, Borqeᶜi stated, that *beyᶜat* allegiance was to be given to someone during the *gheyba*, characterising this notion as an "illegitimate innovation" (*bedᶜat*).[115]

While the *Valāyat-nāme* treats mostly esoteric subject matter, it also contains a chapter on "the administration of a country and the treatment of subjects" (*mamlekat-dārī va raᶜīyat-parvarī*). A later commentary writes that Solṭānᶜalīshāh "referred [here] 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."[116] The phrasing suggests that his larger concern was not the injustices of Shokūh os-Solṭān but 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."[117] Elsewhere in the treatise, the national state is related to that of Sufism: "These days [. . .], the practice of *beyᶜat* has been detached from the people of the nation and no fame remains of it!."[118]

[109]Cancian 2023, p. 180.

[110]1986–87/1365 [1323Q/1905–6], p. 248.

[111]Ibid., p. 14.

[112]E.g., ibid., pp. 286 (greeting), 178, 190 (transformative meditation), 194 (reflection); cf. Amir-Moezzi 2011, p. 363; Van den Bos 2013, p. 150.

[113]1986–87/1365 [1323Q/1905–6], p. 49.

[114]See Zarrīnkūb 1990/1369, p. 346.

[115]Borqeᶜī?, pp. 168–169. A major source for criticism of Solṭānᶜalīshāh's religious practice and belief consists of the oeuvre of the before-mentioned Keyvān Qazvīnī (d.1317/1938), from after his rejection of Sufism in 1926, which would best be treated in separate studies. Diametrically opposed to these writings stands Qazvīnī's hagiography of Solṭānᶜalīshāh, *Resāle-ye shahīdiye*, written in 1330Q/1911–12 (published in Gonābādī and Qazvīnī (1387/2008–2009), see from p. eleven for the dating) – i.e. before the rejection of Sufism – and deemed by the order to be among the best accounts of their master's martyrdom (ibid., p. 14).

[116]Tābande 2006/1384 [1954/1333], p. 141.

[117]1986–87/1365 [1323Q/1905–6], p. 159.

[118]Ibid., p. 129.

These passages also indicate that Solṭānᶜalīshāh, while critical of state functionaries, supported national order in the shape of the monarchy. They echo *akhlāq* and statecraft literature.[119] Other clues in and around the *Valāyat-nāme* indicate that the Gonābādī guide was well connected with provincial authorities representing the monarch (Moẓaffar ed-Dīn Shāh in the period 1896-January 1907; Moḥammad ᶜAlī Shāh until July 1909) and valued them as protectors of life and good - especially as the Gonābādī Sufis reportedly 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 harassment they claimed had been unleashed by his predecessor Rokn od-Dowle and the latter's local emissaries.[120] Gonābādīs allege that Solṭānᶜalīshāh had foretold Nayyer od-Dowle's governorship, and the latter reportedly declared that during his tenure, he would grant all the master's wishes.[121] When notables in Mashhad sought to prevent the festive welcome of the new governor, a local military commander and disciple of Solṭānᶜalīshāh reportedly intervened. Made aware of his master's prediction, he and his forces arranged their own celebratory reception with military honours.[122]

At the time of the Constitutional Revolution, the constitutionalist cause became a weapon for the enemies of Solṭānᶜalīshāh. His principal local nemesis, Abū Torāb Nūghābī, found support in his clashes with the Sufis in the Mashhad-based constitutionalist council that administered Khorasan from late 1326Q/1908,[123] and reportedly was incensed at the journey toward Nishabur by one of Solṭānᶜalīshāh's disciples, hailing the attempted return in early 1327Q/1909 of Nayyer od-Dowle.[124] Villagers in Beydokht confronted Solṭānᶜalīshāh in the name of the Constitution, likely around the same time, demanding a clarification of his political position.[125] The Sufi master, who had previously wished for the expedited demise of Nāṣer od-Dīn Shāh so that the Qājār state's "oppression" (*ẓolm*) would end,[126] defended himself by saying: "I am only a village farmer and a dervish, and I do not know

[119]I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer of my manuscript for having pointed me for generic context to Sabzavārī's *Rowżat ol-anvār-e ᶜAbbāsī* (1073/1636) (Sabzavārī 2004), whose functionalist concept of monarchy (see Arjomand 2016, pp. 246–247) reminds of Solṭānᶜalīshāh's, and the before-mentioned *Toḥfe-ye ᶜAbbāsī*, which follows the topical structure of a classical Sufi treatise (Nasr 1986, pp. 664–665) after a prologue that lays claim to legitimacy in asserting Safavid connections, i.e. to the ruling 'house founded on the caliphate' (Anzali 2017, pp. 81–82). Kashfi's *Toḥfat ol-molūk* (written 1233/1818), for an example from the Qājār era, stems from an *oṣūlī* author who closely integrated 'the concept of *walāya takwīnīya*,' and established *valāyat* – another similarity to the *Valāyat-nāme* – as crucial to the 'successful deployment of governance' (Rizvi 2012, pp. 407–408).

[120]Several examples are given in Tābande 2006/1384 [1954/1333], pp. 141–142, 156. In one case, harassment was explicitly motivated by hostility to the Sufi master on the basis of the latter's ideas (see further below), targeting local notables affiliated to the order such as Movassaq os-Solṭān (ibid., p. 142).

[121]Ibid., p. 157.

[122]Ibid.

[123]See Qazvīnī, *Shahīdiy*e, p. 89 (in Gonābādī and Qazvīnī 1387/2008–2009); *Revue du Monde Musulman* (RMM), 1909, 7, 3, p. 336.

[124]Tābande 2006/1384 [1954/1333], pp. 157–158. Another Gonābādī Sufi, Mīrzā Muḥammad Maᶜṣūm Shīrāzī (d.1344/1925), was a notable constitutionalist, but had stopped any political activity by the time of his renewed, late discipleship of Solṭānᶜalīshāh in November 1908, after several months in the late nineteenth century - see Tabandeh 2017, pp. 115, 123, 126, 127. (It is unclear why Tabandeh's article would be a 'reply' to my work (Cancian 2020, p. 140), presumably *Conjectures*, if only because the text doesn't refer to my work.) 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 (Tābande 2006/1384 [1954/1333], pp. 146, 151, 152, cf. Qazvīnī, *Shahīdiye*, pp. 84–85, 87–88). He and his helpers reportedly unleashed an extensive campaign of assault, harassment, theft, and vandalism, left unaddressed by the authorities of the day, against the order's affiliates in the wider area (Qazvīnī, *Shahīdiye*, p. 87).

[125]Tābande 2006/1384 [1954/1333], p. 145. My estimate of the time of the confrontation derives from the context of the citation, which is preceded by the mention of the murder of the Shah-appointed governor (RMM 1909, 8, 5, p. 92) of the provincial city of Torbat (-e Ḥeydariye), Shajiᶜ ol-Molk, established also, in the order's literature, as banditry in the name in the Constitution, which was reported per telegraph (suggesting its recent nature) in *Safar* 1227Q/March 1909 (Golban 2008/1387, p. 594).

[126]Tābande 2006/1384 [1954/1333], p. 138.

what "constitutionalism" or "despotism" mean. We have nothing to do with these matters and we obey the government, whether constitutional or autocratic."[127]

Besides political confrontation, Solṭānᶜalīshāh was also besieged on socio-economic grounds. Rather than plainly a *zāreᶜ-e dehātī*, he had likely become, more accurately, a wealthy landowner[128] who - while warning against worldly conceit - valued wealth positively ("wealth itself, and its spending in lawful ways and on charitable work and for developing the world, is not in any way inconsistent with dervishhood").[129] The *Valāyat-nāme* argues ardently that "usury" (*rebā*) did not refer to practices such as the hoarding of grain or money, but rather to the non-*sharīᶜa*-based affairs of banks that were now established all over the country.[130] But a popular view was recorded within a decade after the master's murder, relating the event to his refusal "to give people grain from his storehouses" at a time of famine. Solṭānᶜalīshāh then allegedly "became so unpopular that he was killed."[131]

Opposition of a predominantly religious nature was the third aspect beyond the primarily political and economic in these confrontations of the Sufi master. Rokn od-Dowle's enmity towards Solṭānᶜalīshāh reportedly had its origin in the presentation by Shokūh os-Solṭān, the former's servant, of the Sufi master's newly published hagiography, *Rojūm osh-Shayāṭīn*, containing "the claims of this spiritual lineage" (*eddeᶜāhā-ye īn selsele*).[132] Another instance concerned visitors from Kheybarī and Gonābād who had reportedly contacted the Āyatollāhs Mīrzā-ye Shīrāzī the Second[133] (d.1338/1920) and Moḥammad-Kāẓem Khorāsānī (d.1290/1911)[134] in Iraq in order to expose Solṭānᶜalīshāh.[135] To different degrees, these clerics were both involved with the constitutionalist cause.[136] It is not known whether this fact informed their judgement, but constitutionalism was at stake – as indicated – for some of Solṭānᶜalīshāh's detractors. The drama of the occasion, however, lies elsewhere. Khorāsānī had responded to his visitors' portrayal of Solṭānᶜalīshāh's teachings by stating that they concerned *kofr*, and that their author was deserving of execution (*koshtanī*).[137] The Gonābādī order avows, however, that the *marjaᶜ*, not having read his work or met with him, had not wished to proclaim a *fatvā* on Solṭānᶜalīshāh. The master was later exonerated and the recipient of Khorāsānī's praise, it is further claimed, after the *marjaᶜ* had been sent the former's *tafsīr*.[138] But regardless of the reported restraint, the fate of Solṭānᶜalīshāh would still have been imperilled by the traveling villagers who, upon their return, are said to have spread the alleged news of Khorāsānī's *takfīr*.[139]

[127]Ibid., p. 145. This statement corrects my original discussion in Van den Bos 2002, pp. 77–78. As to Solṭānᶜalīshāh's general attitude to worldly involvement, Cancian holds it "safe to conclude from reading his works that he stood with the traditional Shīᶜī approach, according to which, in the absence of the imam, no political power is fully legitimate, but, since society must function in an orderly way, it is necessary to compromise with the illegitimate powers that rule society" (Cancian 2020, p. 137).

[128]Cf. Miller 1923, p. 345 and the detractor's account of Qazvīnī 1997/1376 [1932/1310], p. 195, stating that great riches had flowed to Solṭānᶜalīshāh in Gonabad after the death of his master in 1293/1876 in Tehran, which Qazvīnī relates to Solṭānᶜalīshāh's purchase of a house, building of a *ḥamām*, construction of gardens, and buying of ranches, cows and donkeys, and thousands of sheep.

[129]Tābande 2006/1384 [1954/1333], p. 203.

[130]1986–87/1365 [1323Q/1905–6], p. 146.

[131]Miller 1923, p. 345.

[132]Tābande 2006/1384 [1954/1333], p. 142.

[133]Madanī 2002/1381 [1997/1376], p. 76.

[134]The story of Solṭānᶜalīshāh's case brought before Khorāsānī is acknowledged in Tābande 2006/1384 [1954/1333], p. 513, but with the plaintiffs identified as among 'the intimate companions' of the Ākhūnd.

[135]Madanī 2002/1381 [1997/1376], pp. 76–77.

[136]Cf. Hairi 1977, p. 91; Tābande 2006/1384 [1954/1333], p. 513.

[137]Tābande 2006/1384 [1954/1333], p. 513.

[138]Ibid.

[139]Madanī 2002/1381 [1997/1376], p. 77. It is difficult to ascertain the veracity of this claim, stated by a self-proclaimed religious and political enemy of Sufism and of Gonābādī Sufis in particular (whom the Order claims has incited violence against them - see Ansari 2018), but whose account does not contradict the Order's own reports of religious enmity both regionally and in wider *ᶜolamā* circles, and indeed seems plausibly to connect these facts to the murder of Solṭānᶜalīshāh.

By the early twentieth century, in other words, a storm had gathered over the Shiite legitimacy of Solṭānᶜalīshāhī Sufism. In the apparent absence of accounts detailing the charges against Solṭānᶜalīshāh,[140] one may conjecture from circumstantial evidence about the objections, beyond the contested religious reputation that the master had brought with him to Beydokht. These reasons in turn echo the various grounds of Solṭānᶜalīshāh's competition for Shiite orthodoxy.

First, an account of the Order under the latter's grandson Ṣāleḥᶜalīshāh, who emerges as of lesser stature than his grandfather, indicates that Sufi affiliates did not present "*zakāt* [. . .] to the mullahs," but to their Pole.[141] The issue of stature suggests that religious taxes were also presented to the Sufi master under Solṭānᶜalīshāh. Both Sufi leaders, moreover, were also *mojtahed*s - which gave an edge to their rivalry for religious funds with the exoteric *ᶜolamā*.[142] Second was a confluence of the elder master's spiritual and worldly power in Khorasan, even hagiography acknowledges – evident especially in the Sufis' sympathetic relations with the provincial governor.[143] This posed a challenge to the exoteric clergy as leaders of the community, and became a source of enmity against Solṭānᶜalīshāh.[144] Local *ᶜolamā*, the Order claims, were among the opponents who perceived his abjection and demise as the source of their honour and continued leadership.[145] The proto-statal prerogative of *taqlid* wielded by exoteric jurists found a match here, in other words, in the political religion of an accredited jurist doubling as Sufi master. These are Straussian themes, but crucially, playing out through the contentious politics of divine guidance within a shared religious universe. Third, heresiological literature asserts that the *esteftāᵓ* requests and resistance against the master had surfaced after Solṭānᶜalīshāh had "stated his claims" in the *Valāyat-nāme*.[146] What, then, did the *Valāyat-nāme* assert regarding Shiite Sufi authority?

As previously established, the *Valāyat-nāme* advances the idea of *beyᶜat* to the sheikh as a mediation of the divine to the faithful. The intricate links and closely related meanings of *beyᶜat* and *valāyat* are seen in its discussion of what strengthens *valāyat*, referencing the image of the sheikh. It is possibly such ambiguity which has sometimes led observers to unduly conflate the terms, as in the statement that "[t]he first pillar of the Gūnābādī branch of the Niᶜmatullāhiyya is *valāya* or "allegiance" to the *Quṭb*."[147] The assertion may well echo Qazvīnī's contested charge of an esoteric claim by the Sufi master to *be* the Hidden Imam,[148] resonating further in present-day studies hostile to the Order and Sufism at large.[149] But the *Valāyat-nāme* does emphasize supreme sheikhal authority, as where it expands on "the need of the disciple-wayfarer (*morīd-e sālek*) [. . .] for the 'perfect sheikh' (*sheykh-e kāmel*)"[150] – whose identity is hinted at, but not spelled out. His identity must derive, however, from the Gonābādī master's understanding of the Imam as a manifestation of divine will (*mashīyat*), and, in the specific sense of his

[140]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 likely if challenging to trace. Hence, future research will hopefully establish a fuller record of Solṭānᶜalīshāh's late religious confrontations.

[141]Miller 1923, pp. 345, 347.

[142]Although an exponent of *Oṣūlīsm*, Solṭānᶜalīshāh also included some Akhbārī elements in his thought, while keeping discussion of the theological dispute 'consciously ambiguous' (Cancian 2021, pp. 254–256). It is conceivable that but unclear whether perceived Akhbārī-ism played significantly into Solṭānᶜalīshāh's contestation.

[143]Even hagiography mentions that, "in addition to his 'spiritual rule' (*salṭanat-e [. . .] maᶜnavī*), that noble man [. . .] became entangled in the 'exoteric leadership' (*reyāsat-e ẓāherī*) [. . .] of the people as well" (Jaẓbī-Eṣfahānī 1993/1372, p. 143). Sir Percy Sykes noted in his travelogue that Solṭānᶜalīshāh wielded 'immense influence' (Sykes 1902, p. 30).

[144]Jaẓbī-Eṣfahānī 1993/1372, p. 143.

[145]Tābande 2006/1384 [1954/1333], p. 145.

[146]Madanī 2002/1381 [1997/1376], p. 76.

[147]Trimingham 1971, p. 164; cf. Borqeᶜī?, pp. 168–169.

[148]Īzad-Goshasb 1983/1362, pp. 64, 66, 67; Parīshānzāde 1998/1377, p. 118.

[149]Monjezī, for instance, claims that the *Valāyat-nāme* equated the spiritual rank of the Sufi *qoṭb* with that of the 'fourteen immaculates' (2007/1386, p. 119). The alleged passage from the second edition reproduced in support of this claim, however, "morshed maẓhar-e tamām-e asmāᵓ va ṣefāt [. . .] mi-bāshad," does not occur on the cited page (Gonābādī 1965–66/1344 [1323Q/1905–6], p. 198).

[150]1986–87/1365 [1323Q/1905–6], p. 252.

"dwelling in the station of divine will," a divinity. This "architecture," it has been pointedly observed, also "poses the question of [Solṭānᶜalīshāh's] self-understanding."[151]

The historian Zarrinkoob was less inhibited to point at Solṭānᶜalīshāh as the "great Shaykh of the Gunābādī Order" in a reference to the *Valāyat-nāme*. This held the religious mediation of the Sufi master to work in the name of the Hidden Imam.[152] The two substantial occurrences of "*nāᵓeb*" ("deputy") in the *Valāyat-nāme* concern, respectively, a passage from the Masnavī (1/226) where the Deputy's hand is said to be "the hand of God" (*khodā*), and a reference to the Guide (*morshed*) who is the vice-gerent of God (*ḥaqq*). The only mention of "deputation" (*neyābat*) is also found in the latter sentence, carrying the same referent.[153] Arguably, these passages reflect the discussion of the divine will, as mentioned above. Imam and Deputy are distinguished, however, in a single reference to the "*nāyeb-e emām*," even while both are related in this sentence with the complete "theophanic form" (*maẓhar*).[154]

Contextual arguments substantiate these Shiite articulations of Sufi authority, in line with Zarrinkoob's assessment. A corroborating narrative appears from the Solṭānᶜalīshāhī sheikh ᶜEmād, the grandson of Solṭānᶜalīshāh's teacher Hādī Sabzavārī, who was initiated in the Order under his pupil. The sheikh stated that "*valāyat*" in the treatise derived from "*valī* " in the meaning of "vice-gerent"[155] – i.e. one only of the several meanings elaborated in the *Valāyat-nāme*. Being a true Muslim depended on *beyᶜat* with the *valī*. *Beyᶜat* with the *valī* was the only condition for salvation.[156] While the term applied especially to Imam ᶜAlī,[157] it could also refer – once more ambiguously - to the Order's *aqṭāb*, as emerges from its application to Ṣāleḥᶜalīshāh, as "the *valī* of God on earth to-day."[158] The dangerous suggestion is contained, however, by the view of the latter *qoṭb* in the eyes of his contemporary affiliates, congruent with Neᶜmatollāhī notions of Sufi spiritual authority in the preceding centuries,[159] as Deputy of the Imam (*nāᵓeb-e emām*).[160] The title could equally apply to Solṭānᶜalīshāh, as emerges from the sheikh's account of the first of the wayfarer's four mystical journeys (which are treated saliently in the former's *Valāyat-nāme*): "The first stage consists of *bayʿat* with the Qutb, as a result of which the divine life is grafted on to one's sinful human life and he becomes conformed into the heavenly image of the Imām [. . .]."[161]

Shiite Sufi authority in and around the *Valāyat-nāme*, then, held a "marginal" claim of spiritual deputyship pertaining to Solṭānᶜalīshāh in relation to the Mahdī. Its "dangerous knowledge" was contained in the dual application of "*valī*" (despite the fact that the Sufi imamology itself echoed "extremist" heterodoxy)[162] and in the subordination of the Sufi Friend as a "Deputee" (even while "exoteric" orthodoxy made no such provision – see further below). The overlap of "*valī*" and "*nāᵓeb-e emām*" also implied, however, that the boundaries of the Sufis' "spiritual deputyship" were unstable – inviting its contestation (as seen in Qazvīnī's writings). In another field of application, moreover,

[151]Cancian 2023, p. 196. The term 'creator' (*khāleq*) in the *Valāyat-nāme* (p. 21) is used in a discussion of the Imams but was also reportedly associated by a later sheikh in the order with the *qoṭb* - see Miller 1923, p. 353; cf. Algar 2012 [2002]. While Miller's reputation has been contested (e.g. Cancian 2021, p. 242) it is appropriate to recognise that his article provides a wealth of untypically fact-oriented information on the early order; builds on the observations of an erudite proselyte under Solṭānᶜalīshāh; and gives the apparently first English-language reading of the *Valāyat-nāme*, which can hold its ground over a century later as an insightful treatment.

[152]Zarrīnkūb—Zarrinkoob 1970, p. 198. 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 1971, p. 164).

[153]1986–87/1365 [1323Q/1905–6], pp. 84 (hand), 251 (vice-gerent, deputation).

[154]Ibid., p. 80. I have borrowed 'theophanic form' from Corbin's usage (Corbin 1994 [1971], p. 102).

[155]Cf. Miller 1923, p. 352.

[156]Ibid., pp. 360 (true Muslim), 356 (salvation).

[157]Ibid., p. 352.

[158]Ibid., p. 360.

[159]E.g., cf. Algar 1995, p. 46, referring to the views of Nūrᶜalīshāh I (d.1212Q/1797).

[160]Miller 1923, p. 354.

[161]Ibid., p. 359.

[162]See Cancian 2023, pp. 215–218 on the *Bayān*.

"*nāʾeb-e emām*" had been a royal designation, as for the Safavid monarch Tahmāsp I.[163] The immediate challenge of the *Valāyat-nāme* and its implied status for Solṭānᶜalīshāh, however, emerges in light of the reorganization of Shiite orthodoxy in the Qajar era. "[S]acredness was [now] exclusively [laid claim to by] an independent Shiᶜite hierocracy consisting of the jurists and theologians on the basis of their collective authority as "general deputies" [*novvāb-e ᶜāmm*] of the Imam during his Greater Occultation."[164] The grip of *oṣūlī* power over Iranian society, furthermore, was anti-Sufi in nature.[165]

Solṭānᶜalīshāh's mystic authority delegated from the Mahdī, a counterpoint to the exoteric *oṣūlī*s' monopolization of religious legitimacy as *novvāb-e ᶜāmm*, had accompanied his enlarged regional role as an economic agent and political man of influence – and he was resented on each count. The ambiguity in his designs of Shiite Sufi authority – e.g. regarding the "perfect sheikh," the boundaries of Sufi and Imamic Friendship with God, or their authorship by an accredited jurist – may well at times have protected the master (as against his detractors in Najaf) and at least allowed for detailed disavowals.[166] By the early twentieth century, however, his Shiite accommodation of Sufism in line with Imamic authority, audacious as much as quietist, was out of sync with the encroaching assertion of religious jurists and constitutionalism (an Imamic cause for Khorāsānī),[167] which allowed for the expression of socio-political discontent in its name. The unsettled, unmended hierarchy of old saw religious ambiguity leading not to renewed encompassment and retention, but to the fatal confrontation of Shiite Sufi identity.

Conclusion

The occasional suggestion of Straussian relevance to the interpretation of Shiite Sufism is well borne out by the vita and oeuvre of Solṭānᶜalīshāh, even while their mystical meanings have tended to reside "along" rather than "between" the lines of creedal orthodoxy – as articulation rather than circumvention. The dualistic play of esoteric-and-exoteric is evident in both his life and work, through the organizing themes of persecution, dangerous knowledge, epistemic subordination, and political religion. Regarding the first of these topics, the *Valāyat-nāme* extends a long tradition. The earliest forms of Shiite esoterism had emerged in a context of violent reaction, which also contextualizes the gnostic-metaphysical elaboration of Shiite imamology.[168] Violence similarly associates with the theme of "dangerous knowledge." Solṭānᶜalīshāh writes that "the disciple (*morīd*) has to tread this [Sufi] path like an *ᶜayyār*, because perilous tasks lie ahead in the "hidden world" (*gheyb*) and in martyrdom (*shahādat*)." Those who consider that they can cultivate themselves, risk falling "into the "abyss of destruction" (*varṭā-ye halākat*) and the "valley of wretchedness" (*vādī-ye maẕallat*)."[169] Conversely, it was indicated above that the fierce enmity against the master had flowed in part from the perception of his graded teachings, which would have become progressively more blasphemous.

More than through the thematic interrelation of persecution and dangerous knowledge, however, Solṭānᶜalīshāh's exoteric-esoteric balancing is on display in the tension between epistemic subordination and political religion. Extending Straussian analysis to the realm of Shiite Sufism, these concepts were aligned with competing revelation and illumination-based claims, pertaining to divine guidance.

[163]Arjomand 2023, p. 94.
[164]Arjomand 2016, pp. 8–9.
[165]E.g., see Algar 1969, p. 34.
[166]E.g., Īzad-Goshasb 1983/1362; Parīshānzāde 1998/1377.
[167]Hairi 1977, p. 99.
[168]Amir-Moezzi 2016, pp. 167–172.
[169]1986–87/1365 [1323Q/1905–6], pp. 282 (path), 278 (cultivate). *ᶜAyyār* generally connoted 'brigand' but Sufis admired an ideal type associated with 'spiritual chivalry' (see Ridgeon 2010, pp. 5–27).

The "reviver" of the Neᶜmatollāhī order in Iran, Nūrᶜalīshāh (d. 1212/1798) had held "the Sufi master [to be] the true deputy [. . .] of the Hidden Imām."[170] But the originator of the Ṭāvūsiyya line, Solṭānᶜalīshāh's predecessor, was not associated with Shiite Sufi claims making, and their celebrated teacher had carefully avoided the challenge of either ruler or jurist authority. A second reason why the claims to spiritual authority of Solṭānᶜalīshāh cannot be seen simply as an extension of the assertive Neᶜmatollāhī revival, moreover, is the shifted counterpart – rulers are central to the vicegerency discourse of Neᶜmatollāhī predecessors, whereas jurists are often implied in the balances struck by the Gonābādī sage.[171] The overarching tendency of his writing, thirdly, is accommodationist. Solṭānᶜalīshāh, indeed, was the first of three *mojtahed-qoṭb*s, whose jurisprudential profiling served the Gonābādī order's quest for orthodox legitimacy.[172] The *Bayān os-Saᶜāda*, for instance, is associated with a division of "general" and "special" representation of the Hidden Imam's authority, pertaining respectively to the *ᶜolamā* and the Sufis.[173] With typical ambiguity, it establishes "the pre-eminence of Sufi masters as custodians of the esoteric aspect of religion," while holding religion to be "essentially esoteric," but within an *oṣūlī* framework bolstering jurist authority.[174]

If Solṭānᶜalīshāh's *tafsīr* is indeed "the foundational act" of modern Shiite Sufism,[175] the qualification must be shared by its "compact compendium" – the *Valāyat-nāme*. The cited understandings of exoteric-esoteric balancing in the former are similarly alluded to in the *Valāyat-nāme*. The master's argument that unauthorised *ẕekr* will remain fruitless, for instance, employs the simile of *foqahā* who warn that worship without *taqlīd* will not be sound. A worshipper (*ᶜābed*) is either a jurist (*mojtahed*), an emulator (*moqalled*), or practising "caution" (*eḥteyāṭ*) when in distress and the "knower of the age" (*ᶜālem-e vaqt*) is inaccessible.[176] The *qoṭb* reminds of "Imamic traditions (*akhbār*) which indicate that the favourite creature (*khalq*) on God's path is the subject (*bande*) who follows the *ᶜolamā* and accepts them."[177] Simultaneously, it was shown that the *Valāyat-nāme* bears traces of *ghuluww* imamology, was associated with transgressive claims to spiritual authority, refers ambiguously to religious deputation, and leaves open the identity of the current salvific guide. Not after Solṭānᶜalīshāh have the notables of this order ventured onto such perilous ground, but they have cherished the original treatise.[178] Through such precarious articulations has emerged the orthodoxy of Shiite Sufism.

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[170]Algar 1995, p. 46; cf. discussion in Van den Bos 2002, pp. 59–64. See Amanat 1989, p. 74, cf. pp. 73, 75–83 for the similar but 'more vivid' claims of his pupil, Moẓaffarᶜalīshāh (d. 1215/1800–1); cf. Gramlich 1965, pp. 37–38; elaboration in Scharbrodt 2010, pp. 42–46.

[171]See Amanat 1989, pp. 74–75 (rulers), below for Solṭānᶜalīshāh (jurists).

[172]Van den Bos 2013, p. 150. Solṭānᶜalīshāh's juristic profile fits a longer development in the Neᶜmatollāhī order, whereby the first generation of leaders after the return from India counted as emotive-charismatic, the second as seeking Twelver juridical training, and the third (to which Solṭānᶜalīshāh belonged), as establishing a synthesis between *Oṣūlī* Twelverism and classical Persian Sufism (Cancian 2021, pp. 247–248; cf. Tabandeh 2021, pp. 203–210 and case study chapters of phases 1–2). There is no equivalent in the earlier phases, however, to the sustained effort of the Solṭānᶜalīshāhīs to demarcate realms of authority and define themselves within Twelver orthodoxy.

[173]See the analysis in Cancian 2023, p. 210.

[174]Ibid., pp. 180 (esoteric), 210 (custodians), 233, 260 (oṣūlī).

[175]Ibid., p. i.

[176]1986–87/1365 [1323Q/1905–6], p. 185.

[177]Ibid., pp. 324–325.

[178]E.g., Pazouki 2010, p. 121–n47.

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