

Walāyah in Practice

God has a secret; if He were to make it manifest, the
divine providence would be rendered null.
The prophets have a secret; if they were to make it
manifest, prophethood would be rendered null.
The learned have a secret; if they were to make it manifest,
knowledge would be rendered null.¹

In the Fāṭimid Ismāʿīlī tradition, the teachings and practices that constitute the open secret of *walāyah* are made manifest in the course of prophetic history. How can a secret, however, be shown as a “secret,” “revealing itself as a secret, but sealing while (by, through) unsealing itself”?² The issue that then concerns us here is how does the secret as a “secret” elide dualities, or multiply them, in terms of the eschatological registers of disclosure and hiddenness, that is, whether or not a “limited secrecy” or an “absolute secrecy” is implied by the open secret of *walāyah*.³

Between the remembrance of the past and in expectation of the future, the centrality of the *imām* is another distinctive feature of 10th–11th-century Ismāʿīlī works. The Ismāʿīlī *imām* is the divinely appointed guide, serving as the repository of *taʿwīl* for the community of believers. Both the historical and doctrinal discussions of the *imām* present an ideal depiction of the Fāṭimid Ismāʿīlī *daʿwah*, in which the scholarly *imām* is surrounded by the learned members of his *daʿwah* and where he imparts the esoteric knowledge of *taʿwīl* to his community of believers. On the one hand, the concealment and revelation of knowledge is linked to the movement of *walāyah* through history: to keep it safeguarded as the divine trust of *amānah*

(Q 33: 72) and preserve it in the treasure chambers (*khazāʿin*) of the friends of God in each epoch but, as well, to disclose it to those who are “preferred” (*tafḍīl*). On the other, the mid-11th-century Fāṭimid Ismāʿīlī *daʿwah* concerted its efforts to signal its politico-esoteric sovereignty and to make public and affirm publicly how the Fāṭimid caliph-*imāms* were the heirs of *walāyah*. The Fāṭimid *daʿwah*, under the guidance of al-Muʿayyad and the ruling elite, consolidated the Fāṭimid claim to the caliphate as an imamate. The mid-11th-century Fāṭimid *daʿwah* broadened the contexts in which *walāyah* as a pillar of practice functioned, through setting the parameters of individual initiatory experience within the cumulative soteriological and eschatological province of the Qāʾim, that is, within the apocalyptic spacing of the cycles of the prophets and the *imāms* (*adwār*) that mark the completion of *walāyah*.

This chapter introduces the principles of *walāyah* in practice. In defining the eschatological registers of *walāyah*, Ismāʿīlī authors framed the sources of religious authority. This chapter provides background to the history of *walāyah* and the seal of God’s friends through considering the responses of Sufi and Ismāʿīlī authors to a set of issues related to prophetic inheritance and initiatory knowledge, thereby situating the concept’s currency in medieval Islamic intellectual history as well as al-Muʿayyad’s thought in relation to his near-contemporaries in the Ismāʿīlī *daʿwah*. Another area of discussion concerns how 10th–11th-century Fāṭimid Ismāʿīlī “protocol” or etiquette (*adab*) incorporated devotional aspects of *walāyah*. This feature of historical texts and contexts is clearly apparent in the 10th–11th-century Fāṭimid *sīrah* and *majālis* literature. In what I term the post-Kirmānī and proto-Nizārī period of Ismāʿīlī thought, which circumscribes al-Muʿayyad’s career in the Fāṭimid *daʿwah* and his turbulent rise to the position of Fāṭimid chief missionary, the usefulness of this twofold approach lies in then considering historically the movement toward an established record of *daʿwah* teachings, where collections of lectures used to instruct missionaries and members of the Fāṭimid *daʿwah* gained widespread circulation by the mid-11th century. This approach makes it possible to indicate the topical progression of *daʿwah* teachings as well as the flexible “valence” of *daʿwah* teachings on *walāyah* in response to the needs of the Fāṭimid *daʿwah* and the Fāṭimid ruling elite.⁴

The Cycles of Prophecy

How does time shape religion, from the beginning, and in terms of religion's end? Expressions of messianism and apocalyptic teachings have engaged and haunted the imaginations of countless authors and audiences. In Ismā'īlī thought, the concept of time sets up the constructs of eschatology and messianism. It traces the future horizon of the Qā'im's appearance. But, as Ebstein, Halm, Hollenberg, and Walker have shown, in the long history of the Ismā'īlī tradition, 10th-century Ismā'īlī authors in particular advanced different doctrinal expositions that integrated Neoplatonism as well as enstructured Qur'ānic cosmologies with respect to other philosophical sources and ancient wisdom literatures. Past scholarship has provided detailed studies on the rise of the Fāṭimids as well as early Ismā'īlī thought. Since this is the case, this section takes as its starting point the concept of time to then consider the prophetic cycles in Ismā'īlī thought, the transmission of knowledge, and prophetic inheritances.

With respect to Ismā'īlī texts, a set terminology stands in construct with the development of both the doctrines of the imamate and *walāyah*. Some of the terminology of Ismā'īlī texts, to be discussed later, is ubiquitous throughout the different historical periods of Ismā'īlī thought. Many complex relationships can be inscribed between Ismā'īlī thought as an intellectual tradition, with its devotional practice of reliance on the *imām*, and building politico-esoteric sovereignties, which redefined governance and yet provided the eschatological registers for eruptions of messianic expectations. Contextualizing *walāyah* in the Ismā'īlī tradition necessitates considering the employment of Neoplatonist elements, a Neoplatonism permeated by the transmission of "Hermetic" knowledge as well as theories of knowing. At certain historical junctures in the 10th century CE, these extra-Qur'ānic theories of knowing were intercut with the continued involvement of *da'wah* teachings in response to the deferral of the Qā'im's advent. The models for mapping esoteric knowledge proliferated within Ismā'īlī intellectual circles, where the markers of making "obscure" by the elite and for the elite drew on strong and multifaceted links to alchemy, astrology, the natural sciences, and various aspects of philosophy. It can be said that the theories of the esoteric constructed by Islamic, Jewish, and Byzan-

tine cultures not only built on one another but also supported this approach to secret knowledge as cultural capital.⁵

In early Ismāʿīlī thought, the contexts of transmitting esoteric knowledge were inclusively framed yet discussions of *walāyah* were displaced—rather than deployed—in favor of ancient inheritances and prophetic inheritances.⁶ The loyalties of “ancient friendships” were the communal bonds and spiritual lineages formed within those older, secret communities and intellectual circles of practitioners, ritual experts, and philosophers. In the older, secret communities the configurations of ideas, doctrines, and practices drew upon and reworked the inheritances of prophets of the past and covenants of knowledge from ancient times (i.e., Hermetic knowledge, “Gnostic” anthropologies, Pythagorean theories, Greek wisdom literature, and Greek philosophy).

The introduction of Neoplatonist elements and extra-Qurʿānic sources into Ismāʿīlī teachings constituted a major shift in the Ismāʿīlī tradition, but there would be others, foremost related to reconfiguring messianic expectations, and as this study maintains, the eschatological registers specific to *daʿwah* teachings on the Qāʿim. In terms of the broad view, this questioning of the apparition of the Qāʿim became synchronized and correlated with new valences of *daʿwah* teachings on *walāyah*. As shall be seen, by the mid-11th century, the *Majālis al-Muʿayyadiyah* proposes that “the sphere of *walāyah*” shapes the mesocosm that mediates in between two abodes, this world (*dār al-dunyā*) and the Afterlife (*dār al-ākhirah*).⁷ The mediation and transmission of prophetic knowledge from Adam to the Qāʿim serves to complete and perfect the cycles of prophecy as well as seal them, where the bloodlines of the Qāʿim and genealogies of the form of the Qāʿim stand paramount as central questions and concerns.

Regarding shared terminology, in early Ismāʿīlī thought, the cycles of the prophets include cycles of the *imāms*, followed by cycles of the members of the *daʿwah*. The significance and meaning of the different narrations of prophetic history as *heilsgeschichte* is also accentuated by the role of *taʿyīd* (divine support, or inspiration) and *tanzīl* (the coming down of revelation and scriptures). The movement of *taʿyīd* and *tanzīl* through the cosmology of emanation from Intellect and Soul is most clearly seen in the articulation of cosmological cycles through the “heavenly letters.” Ismāʿīlī prophetic history is

divided into seven epochs (*adwār*), of varying durations, in which the first six epochs commence with a *nāṭiq* (speaking prophet) and revelation (the *ūlū al-‘aẓm*, cf. Q 46: 35): Adam, Noah (Nūḥ), Abraham (Ibrāhīm), Moses (Mūsā), Jesus (‘Īsā), and Muḥammad. On one level, the *zāhir* signifies the revealed message and “scripture,” where the realities (*ḥaqā’iq*) of the *bāṭin* are entrusted to and guarded by the legatee and foundation (*waṣī/asās*) of the Speaking Prophet. The “silent one” (*ṣāmit*) is silent with respect to *tanzīl*. However, he holds the important and necessary function of esoteric interpretation and providing *ta’wīl* to the community of believers. The Qur’anic names of some of the silent ones are as follows: Seth (Shīth), Shem (Shām), Ismael (Ismā‘īl), Aaron or Joshua (Hārūn or Yūshā), Simon Peter (Shāmūn al-Ṣafā’), and ‘Alī. In cyclical fashion, seven *imāms* follow the *waṣī*, where the seventh *imām* both completes the cycle and rises to become the new *nāṭiq* of the next, new epoch.⁸

In the hierarchies of the ranks of religion (*ḥudūd al-dīn*), the seven *imāms* are followed by twelve proofs (*ḥujjāt*, sing. *ḥujjah*), four of which are known as “gates” (*abwāb*, sing. *bāb*). Different lexical terms are often ascribed to these members of the *da’wah*, so as to situate their roles and functions, for example, *mutimm*, *lāḥiq*, or simply, *dā’ī*. Also, the apocalyptic spacing of the *da’wah* is further configured in ideal terms, topographically, into the twelve “islands” (*jazā’ir*) of the *da’wah*, each of which a *ḥujjah* will potentially govern.⁹ Throughout the periods of *satr* and *kitmān* (concealment and hiddenness) and the epochs of *kashf* (unveiling and disclosure) that characterize and shape the contours of prophetic cycles, the true identities of the ranks of religion may be likewise concealed or revealed. This, coupled with another complex change in the theologico-political foundations of Ismā‘īlī doctrine that took place between the time of the Qarmatians and the establishment of the Fāṭimid dynasty, suggests that “[t]he subsequent substitution of Adam for ‘Alī as one of the *nāṭiqs*, and the change of ‘Alī’s rank from prophet to that of Muḥammad’s successor, may thus indicate a less radical position.”¹⁰

Much more will be enumerated about these and other prospective frameworks that concern the transmission of esoteric knowledge through the ranks of religion, that is, the emblematic hierarchies introduced by the “Persian School” and Kirmānī, as well as the post-Kirmānī shift, represented by al-Mu’ayyad. Nonetheless, now

we will use the works of Sijistānī to contextualize and define further the aforementioned concepts. In *Kitāb al-Yanābīʿ*, Sijistānī details the cosmological and ontological framework of Qurʾānic hermeneutics available to the individual soul who seeks the sources of the most permanent forms of knowledge. Many passages from *Kitāb al-Yanābīʿ* constitute the basic working understanding of the principles of medieval Ismāʿīlī *taʿwīl*. Sijistānī's work also articulates in concise terms the exact placement of the "science" of *taʿwīl* in relation to the other bodies of knowledge available to human beings. In order to explicate Sijistānī's Qurʾānic hermeneutics and its associated *zāhir* and *bāṭin* distinctions, we will begin our discussion of Ismāʿīlī *taʿwīl* with the passage concerning the word "Allāh" from the First "wellspring" of *Kitāb al-Yanābīʿ*.

I say that the letters of the word *Allāh* are indications of the four wellsprings that derive from God's absolute unity and that are the foundation of the spiritual beings, namely, the closest angels and His righteous servants. Each of its letters occurs parallel to one of these wellsprings. The *alif* is the analogue of the Preceder (*al-Ṣābiq*), who is the wellspring of divine inspiration (*ta'yīd*); the first *lām* is the analogue of the Follower (*al-Tālī*), who is the wellspring of physical composition (*tarkīb*); the second *lām* is the analogue of the Speaking Prophet (*al-Nāṭiq*), who is the wellspring of scriptural compilation (*ta'liḥ*); and the round, spherical *hā'* is the analogue of the Founder (*al-Asās*), who is the wellspring of interpretation (*taʿwīl*).¹¹

At the same time that the four letters of *Allāh* demarcate the four levels of the Qurʾān in its entirety, the four letters also are ascribed the symbolic function of representing the four elements (*arkān*), respectively, fire, air, water, and earth. Sijistānī notes the homologies that exist in both the spiritual and physical domains between the dimensions of each letter. Forming a concentrated center, the four letters of *Allāh* are the four principles or "roots" (*uṣūl*) to and from which all other "letters" may be traced in both domains.

In the First wellspring, Sijistānī states: "The beginning of the number four is from one and its ending is also at one."¹² The *alif* of

the word *Allāh*, according to the “balance of letters” (*mīzān al-ḥurūf*), is one in numerical value as well as unitary, in and of itself. All numbers are generated from the number one. Sijistānī then goes on to explain in the most abbreviated of terms, “. . . in respect to structural order, the order of the universe and the composition of the Supreme Name coincide.”¹³ Occurring on a higher level of abstraction, God as the Creator is the oneness behind creation and the cause of the four “roots.” The Intellect is the letter *alif* from which all other numbers and letters stem.

At the same time that Sijistānī enumerates the constituent parts of the four “roots,” he also embarks on an explanation of the potential referents each letter of the word *Allāh* may possess. This passage is crucial for understanding Sijistānī’s *ta’wīl* of the Muslim testimony of faith, the *shahādah*, as well as his cosmology of spiritual and corporeal “wellsprings.”¹⁴ As previously noted, the four letters of *Allāh* differ in terms of their potential for change and transubstantiation and in their dimensions with respect to their parallel association with one of the four *arkān*.¹⁵ Hence, some of the four letters bear determining referents whereas others do not.¹⁶

Sijistānī concludes the First wellspring of *Kitāb al-Yanābī’* with schematic and numerical configurations of his previous explanations concerning the four letters of *Allāh*, the four *arkān*, and the four “roots.” In pre-Fāṭimid Ismā’īlī conceptions of the religious community (*da’wah*), individuals possessing varying degrees of knowledge were also arranged in analogous hierarchical relationships with one another.¹⁷ Alibhai, Halm, Kamada, and Walker have noted that Sijistānī employs three terms in several of his works. The *far’ān* (branches), *aṣlān* (roots), and the *asāsān* (two bases) correspond to the Ismā’īlī *da’wah*, the spiritual world and the physical world.¹⁸ Sijistānī also adds some additional considerations with respect to the prophetic cycles and the Ismā’īlī missionary organization (*da’wah*), thus further defining the underlying principles included in his method of *ta’wīl*.

For implicit reasons, the *Kitāb al-Yanābī’* renders obscure Ismā’īlī doctrinal points and religious tenets within an elaborated Neoplatonist framework in ways that outweigh any sort of preliminary discussion of God’s act of creation. Rather, all of Sijistānī’s interpretative exercises hyperarticulate the continuity, stability, and endurance of

ta'wīl throughout the prophetic cycles, until the advent of the Qā'im, for primary in importance to understanding the dynamic of *ta'wīl* is that it marks the progress of the soul's potential perfection and humanity's cumulative perfection. This can be seen most clearly in Sijistānī's *ta'wīl* of the Muslim testimony of faith (*shahādah*), where the first issue is the concept of prophetic revelation and language. According to Sijistānī, it is of vital importance that prophetic revelation takes on the qualities and characteristics of the spiritual and the corporeal domains for it to be intelligible and discernible. In this sense, prophetic revelation must acquire a general composite form. The crafted nature of prophetic revelation is such that it is inevitable that it possesses (as well as acquires) both the *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin*. In another work, the *Kitāb al-Iftikhār*, Sijistānī's discussion of the application of *ta'wīl* to specific Qur'ānic verses includes recognizably doctrinal glosses detailing the Ismā'īlī theory of revelation's exoteric and esoteric aspects. It also includes different explanations for the necessity of the prophets and their heirs, the *imāms*. In terms of the historical context and development of Ismā'īlī doctrines, Sijistānī's works were not always in strict accordance with Fāṭimid understandings of interpretive authority. Fāṭimid legitimacy, however, is by no means the central concern of the *Kitāb al-Yanābī*.¹⁹

Sijistānī's *Kashf al-Mahjūb* is even more ambitiously obscure in terms of the claims of Fāṭimid legitimacy. The *Kashf* only presents a schematic, interpretive framework of the relationships between the levels and grades in the Ismā'īlī *da'wah*. In one sense, the framework represents the transmission and reception of religious knowledge between individuals within the religious community. The prophets (*payghambarān*), the chosen ones (*guzīdagān*), the legateses (*waṣī/vaṣiyān*), the *imāms*, and the friends of God (*awliya'*) receive divine "assistance" (*ta'yīd*) as well as articulate, interpret, and sustain divine revelation and knowledge (*'ilm*) in sounds and symbols appropriate to the sensible, physical domain and the prophetic cycle (*dawr*).²⁰ The lords of "going astray" (*khudāvadān-i gum shudagī*), Satan (Iblīs), and his progeny exist at the other end of the continuum. They are parallel to the less clearly stated constituents of unobtainable and improbable knowledge (*khābar nā yaftah*), thus explaining their perception of a veil's (*hijāb*) presence cloaking the realities of knowledge (*ḥaqā'iq-i*

‘ilm) rather than of the shining light of God’s command (*nūr-i amr-i Īzād dar ū tābandah*).²¹

In fact, Sijistānī’s works are foremost concerned with the means by which the individual soul locates and obtains the complete understanding of revelation, “purified” of the elements of the physical world subject to generation (*kaẓn*) and corruption (*fasād*). The following passage from the *Kitāb al-Yanābī’* highlights the distinctions between the interpretive process of *ta’wīl* and the knowledge bestowed through “divine support” (*ta’yīd*).

Spiritual inspiration (*ta’yīd*) commences when the inspired person (*mu’ayyad*) becomes able to discover things neither by a route that has the senses as their source nor by the inference of hidden things from external aspects. He then experiences his soul existing apart from sensible things, forsaking them, and desiring instead the intelligibles that are not attached to material things. The distinction between the scholar and the one inspired is that, for the preservation of his knowledge and wisdom, the scholar requires the material sensibilia whereas the inspired person is independent of these and thus conceives in his mind something the scholar cannot extract by deriving its indicants from sensible signs only. Often, however, when a spiritual thing occurs in the mind of the inspired person—something without an established definition—he expresses it with a sensible sign that allows his people to see what he is describing to them. This is then more firmly fixed in the people’s understanding because it resembles a specific, sensible thing.²²

The placement and role of God’s command (*amr*) figures prominently in Sijistānī’s cosmology of Qur’ānic hermeneutics. The example of God’s command also sheds much light on *Kitāb al-Yanābī’*’s presentation of the four modes of revelation. The “creative” word (*kalimah*), Be! (*Kun!*), forms the matrix and nexus between the corporeal and the spiritual domains. God’s “creative” word ensures the twofold nature and duality (*zawjiyyah*) of every created existent. In the discussion of

God's command in the Third wellspring, the *kāf* and the *nūn* of *Kun!* are equal to seven tens ($20 + 50 = 70$), whether on the level and the rank of the "seven heavenly letters," the seven planets, the seven speaking prophets, or the human being's seven (internal) organs.²³ The *kāf* and the *nūn* also form and mark the outermost limits of "all worlds circumscribed in the Command of God, the Ever Glorious."²⁴ From another perspective, God's command is not subject to corruption. It transcends all duality. By analogy, the Preceder as Intellect is also God's command of *Kun!*, which occurred in the "blink of an eye" (*turfah al-'ayn*) (Q 54: 50).²⁵ As Sijistānī chooses to explain in specifically Qur'ānic terms, the Intellect is synonymous with the *kalimah* in the same manner that the Preceder (as Intellect) is God's face (*wajh*), as "All things perish, except for His face" (Q 28: 88).²⁶

The point here is that Sijistānī's *zāhir/bāṭin* distinctions are extended to include the complete range of spiritual and corporeal forms and not merely prophetic language. Drawing upon the Thirty-ninth and the Fortieth wellsprings, it is possible to put forth the hypothesis that when Sijistānī articulates the relation of the Qur'ān's *bāṭin* to its *zāhir*, he takes on altogether another issue: the composite nature of prophetic revelation. As has been mentioned earlier in the presentation of the four letters of the word *Allāh*, each letter represents a mode of the Qur'ān's composition. Sijistānī addresses the matter of the distinctions between "God's speech" (*kalām Allāh*) and the everyday language of human beings, implying the necessary function of the Ismā'īlī *da'wah* for interpreting the Qur'ān.²⁷

He also explicates the meaning and the function of the four letters in the word *kalimah* in accordance with their varying loci in the two domains. The *lām* and the *mīm*, which correspond respectively to the Follower and the Speaking Prophet, are also interpreted in terms of Q (75: 1–2) and Q (17: 1).²⁸ The *kāf* and the *lām* are described as "open" in shape in comparison to the *mīm* and the *hā'*. Sijistānī then points out that the second *lām* and the *hā'* in the word *Allāh* correspond and coincide with the *lām* and the *hā'* in the "creative" *kalimah*. It is on the basis of this analogy that he then infers that the physical composition (*tarkīb*) and interpretation (*ta'wīl*) do not differ from one another. The *tarkīb* and the *ta'wīl* are the two unvarying constants and "exist at all times in a uniform manner and in the same arrangement," whereas the "divine support" of *ta'yīd* and the

sending of revelation, the *tanzīl*, differ according to each speaking prophet and the “requirements of his time (*zamān*) and era (*dawr*).”²⁹

As well, in the Thirty-ninth wellspring, the four modes of *ta’yīd*, *tarkīb*, *ta’līf*, and *ta’wīl*, acquire an additional signification or sense (*ma’ānī*), namely, essences (*dhawāt*), psychic motifs (*humūm*), speech (*qaww*), and script (*kitābah*).³⁰ He then explains the relationship between script and interpretation:

Script parallels interpretation, since interpretation is explanation and the engravings of intellectual forms in the hearts of novices. As there is nothing in the world that is not susceptible to script, be it wood, clay, the species, minerals, or animals, accordingly, interpretation extracts something from everything and finds an inference in all things.³¹

In the Thirtieth wellspring, Sijistānī comments on how the words of the Muslim testimony of faith, “There is no God but God and Muḥammad is His messenger” (*Lā ilāhā illā Allāh*), is the key (*miftāh*) to Paradise (*jannah*). He first clarifies the implications of the word “Paradise” in terms of the speech of God (*kalām Allāh*). The speech of God serves as a “key” because it “opens up” all of the four aforementioned modes of the Qur’an.³² Again Sijistānī is concerned with the totality of God’s creation as it is represented and signified by the four modes and “roots,” and not merely the relation of the *bāṭin* to the *zāhir*. The knowledge of any created existent is neither complete nor permanent unless it is recognized in connection with its corresponding “share” of God’s “creative” word. Maybe it is more tenable to state that the complete knowledge of a created existent— inclusive of prophetic revelation—entails a thorough understanding of the cosmological and ontological placement of the created existent. This occurs after recognizing its composite nature.

Concerning the composite nature of God’s creation, in the *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, all six creations are equal *in potentia* in the First Intellect. Creation appeared all at once (*daf’atan wāḥidatan*). In this work, where each chapter forms a treatise on one of the creations, the sixth and final creation is none other than the last prophetic cycle at the moment of resurrection. Corbin and Madelung have tentatively discussed the seventh treatise in the light of Sijistānī’s views on

resurrection and his stance on metempsychosis (*tanāsukh*) as well as Nāṣir-i Khusraw's (d. ca. 467 AH/1077 CE) later responses.³³ The same common principles and denominators, however, apply to the first as well as the final treatise. Through the matched pair of the Intellect and the Soul, or the teacher (*muta'allim*) and the student (*mu'allim*), all existents and individuals realize their completion in their "raising" (*ba'th*) and resurrection (*bar angīkhtan/qiyāmat*) from a partial knowledge of temporally bound and defined things (*chīzī-hā*), characteristics (*ṣifāt*), and existents (*hastī-hā*) through the perfect substance of the First Intellect.

The concept of "pairedness" (*zawjiyyah/juft gashtan/dū-gānagī*) in the *Kashf al-Mahjūb* integrates the different levels of the text. The First Intellect and the Soul are the cosmic hypostases, the *syzygie primordiale*.³⁴ Every created existent (*shay'/chīz*) is composed (*tarkīb*) from the *sābiq/tālī* pair and has *zawjiyyah*. Every created existent is therefore two-sided. Due to its unavoidable two-sidedness, the existent is defined (*maḥdūdī*) as well as in need of another existent to define (*ḥaddī*) it, yet its "pairedness" ultimately indicates and refers back to the origins of its composite nature.³⁵ Spiritual substances, however, do not have dimensions. Other substances limit them in terms of giving (*dādan*) and receiving (*pazīraftan*).³⁶ In other instances, the relationship between substances is defined in terms of their active ability or passive potential for action (*qāhiri/maqhūrī*).³⁷ To then speak of, or to recognize, an existent is also to acknowledge that it contains *zawjiyyah* in it. In the matter of determining the position and relations of a created thing, the presence of *zawjiyyah* indicates that it is foremost receiving assistance from the First Intellect as the *sābiq*, though it is possible for it to incline (*mayl*) one side (*jaht/karānah*) toward nature (*ṭabr'at*).³⁸

On the level of intellects and souls, the individual human being benefits from the mercy of the light spilling down and overflowing (*farū rikhtan/chakīdan/ifāzah*) from God's command through the First Intellect.³⁹ As the most noble of forms (*ṣūrat-i mardum-i sharīf*) that bears the seeds of the First Intellect and the Soul within it, the human being is in fact the primary recipient (*pazīrandah*) of the influences and benefits of *ta'yīd*. The relationship of qualities (*chigūnagī-hā*) and quantities (*chandi*) to natural and spiritual substances first may be discerned through the act of knowing (*ma'rifat*) the multiple examples

of creation in the physical world. They may also be recognized in one's own inner qualities (*chigūnagī-hā-ye andarūnī*). God's creation thus serves as a dynamic template for the individual in the midst of the process of *mujarrad kardan* and recognition (*shinakhtan*).⁴⁰

Teachings on *Walāyah*

This part of chapter 1 examines Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī's concept of *walāyah* and the seal of the friends of God. It then turns to the Fāṭimid Ismā'īlī employment of prophetic ascent and the exemplars of the prophets as mystical stations (*maqāmāt/manāzil*), which shares similar conceptual concerns with Tirmidhī, as it sets up the parameters of the concept of *walāyah* and underscores the soteriological function of the *da'wah*.⁴¹ In the Ismā'īlī tradition, the two "horizontal" (chronological) dimensions of history (the prophetic cycles and the imamate) both culminate in the messianic return or *parousia* of the seventh *imām* of the final cycle—the Qā'im. The "vertical dimension" consists of the Ismā'īlī concept of the corporeal and spiritual hierarchies (*ḥudūd al-dīn*) that operate in order to transmit prophetic revelation and *ta'wīl* to human beings.⁴²

The emphasis on the role and function of the *da'wah* and the *ḥudūd al-dīn* in the works of the Fāṭimid Ismā'īlī authors served to highlight the initiatory and esoteric component of the knowledge the prophets received through the designation of messengership. But since in the repository of the *da'wah* lies the ineffable knowledge of proximity to God, this esoteric knowledge can only be preserved and transmitted among the members of the spiritual hierarchy of the *da'wah* over the rest of God's Creation. In effect, the spiritual hierarchy of the *da'wah* comes to function as an external symbolic referent or schema in order to articulate the profoundly initiatory aspect of the knowledge attained through God's selection, which, in turn, reinforces its politico-esoteric sovereignty.⁴³

Before we turn to our discussion of Tirmidhī, another point of consideration is to what extent are the cosmological and eschatological registers below Universal Intellect fixed in the medieval Ismā'īlī tradition? In fact, they are not. However, broadly speaking, the role of the *da'wah* and the function of the *ḥudūd al-dīn* gain in prominence

during the Fāṭimid period. It is within these structures that pertain to the “world of religion” and religious hierarchies that authors such as Sijistānī, Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān, and al-Muʿayyad most amend the time line concerning the temporality of the *imām*’s manifestation and individual resurrection.

Likewise, there is a notable shift in the terminology for the types of forms and shapes in this world, and their coming into being and passing away, that is, their instauration and effacement. In the works of the “Persian School” and al-Muʿayyad, the focus is less on those terms that explain what in the Sufi context would later be framed as witnessing (*mushāhadah*/*muʿayyanah*) in relation to the loci in which perception takes place in the individual human being. Rather, the primary concern for Ismāʿīlī authors is how wisdom (*maʿrifah*) arises, becomes manifest, and is “resurrected” within the structural relations between the limits of the *ḥudūd*. Because there exists on all levels of God’s Creation the dyad of Intellect and Soul, this synergy produces and brings to “form” cognitions between the *ḥudūd* and works potentially to attain to the limit (the horizon) of the next immediate rank (*ḥadd*) through *baʿth*, culminating in a collective resurrection at the end of the prophetic cycles. A way to understand *baʿth* is as an “arising.” God is “unknowable,” whereas on the next immediate level, Intellect is the treasure chamber and, with Soul, bestows forms. In keeping with Ismāʿīlī doctrines of redemption and salvation, everything in God’s Creation takes part in creation and return (*al-mabdaʾ wa al-maʿād*) and therefore can be resurrected in and from its limits as a cumulative process entailing eschatological perfection and completion.

In his discussion on Ṭūsī, Jambet states that while there may be proximity to the Real (i.e., God), there will always be the intermediary of the *amr* of God’s creative command, the *ḥudūd*, and the *imām*. These intermediaries bring the individual to realize resurrection. The “resurrector” of each rank manifests the manifestation, itself, of God’s creative command. It is important to note here briefly that in the post-Fāṭimid period of Ismāʿīlī thought, the *imām* becomes the *mazhar*, the receptacle and place of manifestation, which is receptive to *taʿyīd*. The classic example Ṭūsī employs is that the prophets and *imāms* are like glass vessels of different purity and clarity, held up to the light of Intellect, and that light is itself the word (*kalimah*) of

God's Creative command, the *amr*.⁴⁴ Ethical models for individual spiritual purification and perfection parallel the modes of acquiring esoteric knowledge. According to Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, al-Mu'ayyad, and Ṭūṣī, the forms of obedience or submission to the *imām* (*ṭā'ah*, or *taslīm*) likewise determine the manner in which ethics is approached as a central and self-defining feature of the Ismā'īlī hierarchies of the corporeal and spiritual ranks of religion. Ethics are put in practice through the reliance on the *imām* as a guide and religious authority, placing emphasis again on the soteriological function of the designated intermediaries for both individual and communal salvation. For the Ismā'īlīs, all is restored to Intellect and resurrected as the final perfection; the final creation, which is a spiritual creation, is resurrection, heralded by all that came in the previous cycles and in God's act of creation.

Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī

Dissimulation is inherent in *walāyah* if consideration is given foremost to how the friends of God make manifest or conceal their "sanctity" and proximity to God, "which remains a secret between them and God."⁴⁵ The secret of secrecy, and how different authors articulate it in relation to teachings on *walāyah*, poses a very interesting problem with respect to the typologies of inspired discourses described in Tirmidhī's works and how *ta'yīd* is conceptualized in Ismā'īlī texts. In his treatment of *walāyah*, Tirmidhī considers the registers of disclosure and secrecy (i.e., hiddenness) and what seals and safeguards the forms of inspired language and speech from the carnal soul (*nafs*). He sets up the distinctions between prophetic revelation and the inspired discourses of the friends of God, where the dynamic of sealing provides proof and confirmation of the discourses. In a similar manner, the letters of the names of God become inscribed on the individual friend's heart, which is, like *walāyah* itself, reciprocal and potentially both active and passive.⁴⁶ As shall be seen, for the authors Qāḍī al-Nu'mān and al-Mu'ayyad in particular, the tension that emerges is one between facilitating the proximity (and access) to initiatory knowledge through the ranks of religion and yet safeguarding its upper registers as the domain of the Qā'im as the seal.

On another level of interpretation, due to the fact that this set of texts employs concurrent terminology in discussion and argumentation, attention will be paid to how the seal's inheritance and share in the allotments of *walāyah* is linked to leadership explicitly, or it oscillates around the question of superiority, selection, and sovereignty, that is, the dominion to rule. According to Tirmidhī, attaining to proximity represents the opening of *walāyah* for the friends of God and is unrelated to bloodlines from the family of the Prophet, kinship, or leadership. The idea that the seal of God's friend has an allotment that shares uniquely in the "dominion" is not clearly equated with leadership.⁴⁷ Sijistānī's *Kitāb al-Iftikhār* presents the "portioning" of God's names in terms of the Ismāʿīlī *imāms'* sovereignty culminating in the figure of the Qā'im. Yet, the role of the Qā'im's deputies (= successors, *khulafā'*) in relation to the religious frameworks of the prophetic cycles becomes a hidden question again and is made obscure.⁴⁸ In Qāḍī al-Nu'mān's works, which overall reflect the 10th-century progression of *da'wah* teachings, the reception of esoteric knowledge takes place through *ta'yīd* or *ta'wīl*, but it is not exactly clear what proximity signifies. For example, does proximity represent the individual practitioner's closeness to the rank of the seal or his or her acquisition of esoteric knowledge potentially acquired from the seal? If this is understood correctly, the Ismāʿīlī authors amplified the eschatological registers of *walāyah*, so that the proximity to the *imām* of the time is likewise linked to both the making manifest and the manifestation of the Qā'im.

Karamustafa, Radtke, and other scholars have focused on the question of proximity to God in Tirmidhī's autobiography and the *Khatm al-Awliyā'*. Other important themes appear in the *Khatm*: God's names, revelation and conversations with God, the two types of God's friends, the function of miracles (*karāmāt*), and the seal of God's friends. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss in depth the importance of all of these themes in relation to the history of Sufism. Rather, what follows addresses the specific areas of shared concern between Tirmidhī and 10th–11th-century Ismāʿīlī authors. The first issue to consider is how, as Radtke has discussed, "inspiration comes forth from God's treasure chambers."⁴⁹ In terms of medieval Islamic intellectual history, the controversy on the ranks of the friends of God in relation to ranks of the prophets is best articulated in the passage where one of Tirmidhī's students states: "For my part, I

stand in fear of the opinion that someone other than the prophets has any share in prophethood!"⁵⁰

In a set of questions, Tirmidhī addresses the names of God, the states of individual friends of God, and the relationship between what is revealed to whom and where.⁵¹ He presents cosmological considerations in view of the limits for specific friends of God and the treasure chambers (*khazā'in*) entrusted to them. For example, the "Supreme Intellect" (*al-'aql al-akbar*) and cosmological hierarchies demarcate the limits for specific friends of God and the treasure chambers, that is, who is entrusted to them, and to whom are they entrusted.⁵² The limit of the place of proximity (*maḥall al-qurbah*) refers back to the two types of attainers among the friends of God, the *walī Allāh* and the *walī ḥaqq Allāh*, in the sense that *ḥaqq* demarcates the relationship with God, where laws (= what is due) are still operative at this point.⁵³ Those who are led beyond this point, that is, *al-'aql al-akbar*, experience the parallelism of three protecting forces. The friend of God's soul is protected and safeguarded, as are his or her inspired discourses or intimate conversations with God (*najwā*), because what is due (*ḥaqq*) = *al-'aql al-akbar* = beyond laws.⁵⁴ One of the underlying reasons refers back to Tirmidhī's typology of *walāyah*. It is due to the fact that the people of religion (*ahl al-dīn*) need good circumstances and situations to be pious, whereas the people of certitude (*ahl al-yaqīn*) are not influenced by time or secondary causes.⁵⁵ Tirmidhī explains about the individual who is set free within the limit of his or her rank:

The person who has reached the rank [of divine closeness] but whose carnal soul, in its secret corners, is still filled with the carnal soul's cunning wiles is unconditionally obliged to remain in his rank in order to become refined. Thus he is like a self-ransomed slave who is freed for money. He is a slave as long as one dirhem is still owing. On the other hand, the slave who was set free out of generosity (*jūd*) and mercy (*rahma*), becomes a free man (*ḥurr*) without the one who formerly possessed him retaining any claim on him.⁵⁶

Thus the friendship with God may be perfected and become "unrestricted" after acquiring the ten qualities of refinement through

effort and striving or through being drawn by God close to God (*majdhūb*).⁵⁷

In the *Khatm*, there are two other passages of fundamental importance with regard to mystical ascension as both a microcosmic and macrocosmic process. In the first passage, the purification of the carnal soul occurs through the lights of the celestial dominion (*al-malakūt*) and ascent through the realms, to the “possessor of the heavenly Throne,” an ascent through the highest heaven to the celestial dominion. In the second passage, which describes the inner journey and macrocosmic ascent to God, the *walī ḥaqq Allāh*’s ascent ends at the “border of the created cosmos.”⁵⁸ In the *Khatm*, the “oath” of *walāyah* (*‘aqd al-walāyah*) the friends of God take in pre-eternity is linked to a *ḥadīth* from ‘Alī and uncovering the knowledge of the hidden (*‘ilm al-ghayb*).⁵⁹ God transports the group of friends who have taken this pre-eternal oath to the place of friendship, just as the prophets are transported to the place of prophethood.⁶⁰ Further structuring the hierarchy of the friends of God, Tirmidhī explains that it is formed of forty men, thirty with hearts like the prophet Abraham, emphasizing the friend of God’s nonstatic nature or permanency of state as continuously linked to the support of the earth.⁶¹ Yet the hearts of the friends of God are “so intimately joined,” with their hearts directed to a “single point of attachment” (*muta‘allaq wāḥid*) on God alone, that they are like one heart.⁶²

In terms of the cosmological order presented in the *Khatm*, Tirmidhī’s discussion of the “assemblies of supernatural speech” (*majālis al-ḥadīth*) situate the treasure chambers of those who hear “supernatural speech” (*muḥaddathūn*) from the friends of God, and draws connections between the forms of inspired discourses and language that the prophets and friends of God receive, such as revelation (*wahy*) and supernatural speech (*al-ḥadīth*).⁶³ God grants a gradation of “allotments” (*ḥuzūz*) to the messengers, the prophets, the *muḥaddathūn*, and the remainder of the friends of God.⁶⁴ Are these allotments portions of revelation? If so, how do they share in revelation? Of the three kinds of treasure chambers, the seal participates in two.

His station is in the highest rank of the Friends of God in the realm of Singleness. Indeed, he stands isolated in

God's Unicity (*wahdāniyya*). He converses face to face with God in the assemblies of the realm and the gifts he receives are from the treasure chambers of exertion [running] (*khazā'in al-sa'y*).⁶⁵

Even though the seal of God's friends receives gifts from the treasure chambers of exertion or striving (*khazā'in al-sa'y*), Tirmidhī explains that what has been uncovered and removed for the seal lies in what he receives from the prophets' treasure chambers. Elsewhere, he raises an intricate point, which reveals again the intersections between *nubuwwah* and *walāyah*. The prophets "know their stations by means of Friendship with God."⁶⁶

Toward the end of the *Khatm*, Tirmidhī mentions the Day of Resurrection (*yawm al-qiyāmah*) for two reasons: the seal and the End Time, but also to address the continuance of the allotments through the opening up of the *walāyah* of the friends of God. The end of time is contextualized in reference to the first Muslim community and the *Muhājirūn* and *Anṣar*. The End Time is correlated to the Prophet Muḥammad's intercession (*shafī'*) as the seal of prophethood. In another interpretive turn, the question of what is due to prophethood (*ḥaqq al-nubuwwah*) is traced back to the beginning of the *Khatm*, where Tirmidhī first asks the question, "What is the banner of praise (*liwā' al-ḥamd*)?"⁶⁷ His discussion of the people of the upper chambers (*ahl al-'urf*) and the stations of the prophets categorizes and configures the sincerity of faith and works (= what is due) in opposition to "apostasy" and "expulsion." Equivalences are forged between the first time period of the Muslim community and the end of time. According to Tirmidhī, equal shares, as allotments, exist until the end of the world. The equal shares represent the "booty" (*alfā*) granted to those sincere of faith (*ṣiddīqūn*).⁶⁸ The question of allotments is related to God granting precedence and priority to God's friends in terms of sincerity, rather than temporal proximity to the Prophet Muḥammad. These distinctions reinforce the metaphors between striving and being drawn, as they concern the types of God's friends and the allotments they are granted and receive. Thus, Abū Bakr's and 'Umar's works define the Mahdī's works in terms of restoring Islam and giving "it a fixed accommodation so that the people who were to come after them might travel on a more firm, clearer road."⁶⁹

Tirmidhī's discussion of the movement of *walāyah* toward the appearance of the seal of God's friends also draws on correspondences between the appearance of God's names, what the seal of God's friends makes manifest and how the seal stands as a proof and verification (*abraza*) that is evident. Tirmidhī states: "Contained in the letters is the complete knowledge of the primal beginning, knowledge of God's attributes and His names. . . . They also contain the knowledge of His regulating the world, which covers from the creation of Adam to the day of the appointed time."⁷⁰ Sviri has explained: "It is by means of letters, the a-b-j-d [*sic*], that the unfolding of the divine order and governance—*al-tadbīr al-ilāhī*—takes place."⁷¹ On the macrocosmic and microcosmic levels, the letters and names of God determine the points of articulation, "proving," and unfolding. Tirmidhī states: "The first knowledge which was revealed were God's names, and the first of these names was *allāh*, and that is why all names are to be traced back to this name. God said [7/180]: 'God (*allāh*) possesses the beautiful names.' Thus God attributes the names to His name *allāh*. God's name *allāh* dominates and excels all other names."⁷² For this reason, the seal of God's friends as the proof (*ḥujjah*) on the Day of Judgment, with its explicate or obscure connection to the Mahdī, has an established trajectory when viewed in reference to the verses from the Qur'ān on Adam learning the names.⁷³ Just as Muḥammad's rank as the seal of prophethood is due to his preeminence and precedence, rather than temporal considerations, the rank of the seal at the end of time (*ākhir al-zamān*) is defined in the same manner.⁷⁴ The seal protects what it seals and words come to an end; what has been sealed removes doubt or uncertainty.⁷⁵ The seal is the proof of the collectivity of the friends of God, within (as a friend of God) but from without, proving and sealing, by setting the limits of their share in *walāyah* just as it brings them to their standing as a friend of God. Tirmidhī presents the appearance of the seal of God's friend as "evident" (*abraza*) as well as singular because the seal has attained to the realms of Unicity and Singleness: "He is the one who has received all his allotments from amongst the names."⁷⁶ In other words, like the Prophet Muḥammad established the measure and horizon of prophecy through sealing the meaning of prophecy, the "highest" seal of the friends of God offers a measuring and typology of the limits of *walāyah*.

The friend of God stands as a seal, but this identity is "seal" rather than an individual identity. Then how can the seal of the