

Recognizing Hidden Truths through Diverse Languages: The *Risāla-yi mūchalga* Attributed to Sayyid ‘Ali Hamadani and the Muslim Encounter with Mongol Rule

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The life and Sufi career of Sayyid ‘Ali Hamadani (d. 786/1385) have drawn a good deal of scholarly attention in connection with his role in the development of the Sufi community that descended, initiatially, from Najm al-Din Kubra (d. 618/1221), his reputation as a key Islamizer of Kashmir, and his extensive literary legacy.¹ Hamadani is less often

¹The most extensive (though not always critical) discussion of Hamadani’s life and works remains Muhammad Riyaz, *Aḥvāl va āthār va ash‘ūr-i Mīr Sayyid ‘Alī Hamadānī, bā shash risāla az vāy*, 2nd ed. (Islamabad: 1364/1985; Markaz-i Tahqīqat-i Farsi-yi Iran va Pakistan, 1370/1991). For other surveys of Hamadani’s life, see my “Hamadānī, Sayyid ‘Alī,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam Three*, 2015/2 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 147–51 (with further references, and a list of his published writings); G. Böwering, “‘Alī b. Šehāb-al-dīn b. Moḥammad Hamadānī,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. I, fasc. 8 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 862–64; and the older studies of

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regarded as a significant figure in the encounter between the Muslim world and the Mongols; his profile in that regard is considerably lower, for instance, than that of his initiatic “grandfather” ‘Alā’ al-Dawla Simnani (d. 736/1336). Nevertheless, the reality and legacies of Mongol rule in the eastern Muslim world were necessarily a significant part of his experience, given the time in which he lived—he was born in 714/1314, and his life thus spanned the fourteenth century, from the reign of Öljeytü, through the collapse of the Ilkhanate, and on to the consolidation of power by Timur—and the area in which his life unfolded—eastern Iran and the southeasterly regions of Central Asia, above all Khuttalan and Badakhshan. Hamadani’s father is said to have served the Ilkhans as governor of his native city, and he himself cultivated relationships with some of the local rulers who took power in what had been the frontier zones of Mongol rule, before their elimination by or submission to Timur; it is thus likely that he was quite familiar with many of the political, social, and cultural impacts of Mongol rule in the Muslim world. The present short study—offered in honor of a colleague who has explored so many dimensions of the Mongol–Muslim encounter—addresses what may be one small but significant

J. K. Teufel, *Eine Lebensbeschreibung des Scheichs Alī-i Hamadānī (gestorben 1385): Die Xulāṣat ul-Manāqib des Maulānā Nūr ud-Dīn Ca’far-i Badaxšī* (Leiden: Brill, 1962); A. A. Hekmat, “Les voyages d’un mystique persan de Hamadan au Kashmir,” *Journal asiatique* 240 (1952): 53–66; and Agha Hussain Shah Hamadani, *The Life and Works of Sayyid Ali Hamadani (A.D. 1314-1385)* (Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, 1984). On Hamadani’s Sufi legacies and popular memory, see Jamal J. Elias, “A Second ‘Alī: The Making of Sayyid ‘Alī Hamadānī in Popular Imagination,” *Muslim World* 90 (2000): 395–419. See also my “Sayyid ‘Alī Hamadānī and Kubrawī Hagiographical Traditions,” in *The Legacy of Mediaeval Persian Sufism*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (London: Khaniqahi Nimatullahi Publications; School of Oriental and African Studies, 1992), 121–58; the entire *Legacy of Mediaeval Persian Sufism* was reprinted as *The Heritage of Sufism*, vol. II, *The Legacy of Medieval Persian Sufism (1150–1500)* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1999); my article was reprinted in my *Studies on Sufism in Central Asia*, Variorum Collected Studies (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2012), No. II. See also my “The Eclipse of the Kubravīyah in Central Asia,” *Iranian Studies* 21 (1988): 45–83 (reprinted in my *Studies on Sufism in Central Asia*, No. I); Shahzad Bashir, *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions: The Nūrbakhshīya between Medieval and Modern Islam* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 198–99, 231–32, 249 (on his role in Kashmir); and the older discussion, obsolete in many respects, of M. Molé, “Les Kubrawīyya entre sunnisme et shiisme aux huitième et neuvième siècles de l’hégire,” *Revue des études islamiques* 29 (1961): 61–142.

reflection of Hamadani's own grappling with the challenges posed by the introduction of an initially alien social and political framework into Muslim life.

Among the many short Sufi treatises ascribed to Sayyid 'Ali Hamadani is one with a strange hybrid title—*Risāla-yi mūchalga*—that includes a word clearly drawn from the language of the Mongols. I have been able to identify only three copies of this treatise registered in manuscript catalogues. The oldest, and the one used here, is preserved in a large manuscript collection of Hamadani's writings in the Malik Library in Tehran, copied evidently in Mashhad in 907/1501–2.² Two other copies are preserved in Iran,³ and it is likely that other collections of Hamadani's treatises preserved in Central Asia, Pakistan, or India will turn out to include additional copies.⁴ Despite the likelihood that other copies survive, however, the *Risāla-yi mūchalga* does not appear to have been widely copied, and may, indeed, have been left out of many manuscript

²Sayyid 'Ali Hamadani, *Risāla-yi mūchalga*, MS No. 4250, section 29, fols. 399b–401a (though the last folio also bears the number 90), Malik Library, Tehran. I am grateful to Dr. Majid al-Din Kayvani for his help in obtaining photographs of the treatise. The *Risāla-yi mūchalga* itself bears no date, but evidently other works copied in the manuscript bear the date 907/1501–2 (see the manuscript references in the following note, where the handwriting is listed as a *nasta'liq*, despite the distinct, if unsteady, *naskh* evident from the photographs).

³Riyaz mentions only the Malik Library's copy (*Aḥvāl*, 129), but this and two additional copies are listed in the latest union catalogue of manuscripts in Iran, *Fihristgān: nuskhā-hā-yi khaffī-yi Irān (Fankhā)*, ed. Mustafa Dirayati, vol. 32 (Tehran: Sazman-i Asnad-i Kitabkhana-yi Milli-yi Jumhuri-yi Islami-yi Iran, 1392/2013), 519–20 (where *mūchalga* is explained as a Turkic word for a legal document): (1) No. 10197/17, fols. 195–98, Majlis Library, Tehran, ascribed to the tenth century; (2) No. 4250/29, Malik Library, Tehran, copied in Mashhad in 907/1501–2; (3) No. 7724/20, fols. 227–28, Mar'ashi Library, Qom, dated 1286/1869–70.

⁴The catalogue of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan, in Tashkent, for instance, describes nearly eighty copies of works by Sayyid 'Ali Hamadani, most of which belong to three large compilations of his writings similar, evidently, to those listed in *Fihristgān*: MS 480, copied in 1245/1829; MS 754, copied in 1078/1667; and MS 2312, copied in 991/1583. See *Sobranie vostochnykh rukopisei Akademii nauk Uzbezkoi SSR*, vol. III, ed. A. A. Semenov et al. (Tashkent: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk UzSSR, 1955), 230–55, nos. 2312–90. However, many sections of each manuscript are left undescribed (in MS 480, sections 3, 7, 9, 11, 15, 24–25, 31–33, 37, 40–41, and 47; in MS 754, sections 25–26, 28–29, and 33–34; in MS 2312, sections 7 and 19–21). It seems likely that more detailed cataloguing will reveal a copy of the *Risāla-yi mūchalga* in one or more of these compilations.

compilations of Hamadani's works; it appears to have had little influence or impact, leaving only its curious title (which itself may have discouraged copying and transmission) to draw interest.

Hamadani's authorship of the *Risāla-yi mūchalga* seems quite likely, on balance, given the textual environment in which the treatise is preserved,⁵ but it cannot be regarded as firmly established, given the author's failure to identify himself in the text, and the apparent absence of other references to the work.⁶ What is clear, however, is that the Mongolian word in the title was rooted in the social and political milieu of the Turko–Mongol elites, ushered in through the conquests of Chinggis Khan and his descendants, which dominated the eastern Islamic world throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; this word carried substantial social, political, and cultural significance not only for those elites, but for their Muslim subjects, as well, who necessarily became familiar with their rulers' social and political terminology. The title, then, and the treatise as a whole—whoever its

⁵The registered copies of the treatise all appear in collections of Hamadani's works. In the copy used here (MS 4250, fols. 399b–401a, Malik Library, Tehran), for instance, it appears alongside Hamadani's most extensive work, the *Dhakhīrat al-mulūk*; several of his Sufi treatises written for Sultan Bahramshah, ruler of Badakhshan (including the *Mir'āt al-tā'ibīn*, *Vāridāt-i amīrīya*, and *Risāla-yi Bahrāmshāhīya*); a collection of letters he wrote to rulers, known as the *Maktūbāt-i amīrīya* (with Bahramshah among the addressees, along with Sultan Qutb al-Din, ruler of Kashmir, and several other local rulers of northwest India); his *Risāla-yi 'aqabāt*, written at the request of Sultan Qutb al-Din; his famous collection of Sufi litanies, the *Awrad-i fathīya*; his *Mashārib al-adhwāq* (a commentary on Ibn Fariz's *Qaṣīda-yi khamrīya*); his collection of forty Hadiths; and, to judge from Riyaz's listing, several other (mostly Persian) Sufi treatises (his *Siyar al-ālībīn*, his *Risāla-yi dhikrīya*, his brief *Risāla-yi Dā'ūdīya*, addressed to a disciple, his *Chihil maqām-i ṣūfīya*, his *Risāla-yi manāmīya*, his *Risāla-yi Hamadānīya* [on the spiritual meaning of the city's name], his *Risāla-yi mashī'at*, his *Ḥaqīqat-i imān*, his *Risāla-yi mushkil-hall* [or *hall-i mushkil*], his *Risāla-yi sayr va sulūk*, his *Risāla-yi darvīshīya*, his *Risāla-yi futūvatīya*, his *Asrār al-nuqta*, his *Risāla fi 'ulamā' al-dīn*, his *Ṣifat al-fuqarā'*, and his *Dah qā'ida*).

⁶Riyaz accepted it as his (*Aḥvāl*, 129–31); Teufel listed it, as the *Risāla-i mūchalka* (*Eine Lebensbeschreibung*, 56), without comment on its authorship, citing Steingass for the form *mūchalkā*, meaning “bond” or “legal deed;” it is mentioned among Hamadani's works in Hekmat, “Les voyages,” 60; and Hamadani likewise lists the *Rasālah Muchalkā* (though writing the latter term with a final *ha* instead of a final *alif*) among Hamadani's works (*Life and Works*, 33, no. 29). Otherwise, it is not mentioned in the other surveys of Hamadani's life and works cited above.

author was—may illuminate a small corner of the encounter between the Muslim and Mongol worlds during the fourteenth century, if chiefly by prompting questions about the reasons underlying the title and the work’s composition.

The meaning of the “foreign” word in the title has been, in fact, misunderstood in the only significant, if brief, discussion, so far, of this work,⁷ but it clearly reflects the Mongolian word *möchelge*, which has itself been extensively discussed, most recently and thoroughly by Maria Subtelny.⁸ Mining the Ilkhanid and Timurid sources for occurrences of the term, and aptly translating it as “binding pledge,” Subtelny shows that the *möchelge* was a socially, politically, and economically significant term for a willingly assumed interpersonal relationship in which a subordinate bound himself unconditionally in obedience to a superior. According to Subtelny’s reconstruction, the *möchelge* originated, most likely, in the time and realm of Chinggis Khan’s second son, Chaghatay (d. 1242), and developed from a particular mode of pledging allegiance into a sworn oath either to fulfil some administrative or military function with which the individual making the binding pledge had been entrusted (by the ruler or some other superior), or to refrain from some abuse of that function (e.g., embezzling

⁷Riyaz (*Aḥvāl*, 129n1) cites Mu’ in’s dictionary in affirming that *mūchalga* (or *muchalga*) means “small, subtle, elegant, and moist” (*kūchak va zarīf va qashang va ābdār*), and says simply that this word was the *laqab* of one of Hamadani’s unidentified disciples; see Muhammad Mu’ in, *Farhang-i Fārsī-yi mutavassīṭ*, 6 vols. (Tehran: Amir-i Kabir, 1963–73). Whether preceding or expanding upon Riyaz’s interpretation, Hamadani (*Life and Works*, 33, no. 29) explains that “Muchalkā was a devout disciple of the Sayyid and this Rasālah indicates the devotion and affection of Muchalkā to Sayyid.”

⁸Maria E. Subtelny, “The Binding Pledge (*möchālgā*): A Chinggisid Practice and Its Survival in Safavid Iran,” in *New Perspectives on Safavid Iran: Empire and Society (Studies in Honor of Roger M. Savory)*, ed. Colin P. Mitchell (New York: Routledge, 2011), 9–29. On the term, see also Gerhard Doerfer, *Türkische und mongolische Elemente im Neupersischen* [hereafter *TMEN*], vol. I, *Die mongolische Elemente im Neupersischen* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1963), 502–5, no. 370, *möchālgā*. Steingass includes two entries for the term (one with and one without an explicit *vāv*), with endings in *-ā*, *-āh*, and *-a*, definitions in the first case as “a bond, note of hand, agreement, recognizance, engagement, promise,” and in the second as “a bond, a legal deed,” and both forms identified as of Turkic origin; see *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary*, ed. F. Steingass (New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, 1973), 1180, 1342.

or extorting funds, in the case of tax collection and other financial matters), on pain of death (or other serious penalty).

The fully developed *möchelge* is well-attested not only in the rich documentation of the Ilkhanid state, but in Timurid sources, as well, and was usually understood to involve a documentary dimension, with the content or fact of the binding pledge recorded in writing. The term *möchelge* could thus refer to the fact, or content, of the binding pledge, but also to the specific document that attested to the individual's acceptance of a particular responsibility and of the consequences of violating his pledge. Subtelny translates a Persian documentary template for swearing the binding pledge included in the *Dastūr al-kātib*, an administrative manual produced for a post-Ilkhanid ruler of Tabriz in the 1360s; the model text concludes by affirming that the document was delivered “as a *möchelge*” to the ruler's deputies,⁹ and from other contexts, it is clear that qazis were sometimes involved in preserving and enforcing *möchelge* documents. Both the juridical and administrative participation of Muslim officials and the Persian linguistic and textual environment for formulating the *möchelge* make it clear that Muslims were heavily involved in swearing such binding pledges, and that the institution of the *möchelge* was itself a key venue for the broader Mongol–Muslim encounter.

The term *möchelge* itself, however, does not appear at all in the text of the *Risāla-yi mūchalga*: it appears only in the title—which, like the name of the author, is not mentioned in the text—and in fact, the contents of the treatise make no evident reference or allusion to the Mongolian term or to its meaning. The contents of the treatise hinge, rather, on the validity and value of multiple linguistic platforms for expressing devotion to God. The treatise begins with a Qur'anic verse identifying linguistic and ethnic differences as one of the signs of God, and includes a brief example of the ways in which various peoples (the Mongols among them) refer to God (though in this case, the Mongolian term cited is not correct). The rest of the treatise chiefly makes the

⁹Subtelny, “Binding Pledge,” 16–17.

point that limited understanding and perspective may blind a person to hidden realities, such as the licitness of referring to God in the full variety of ways afforded by the languages God has created. Conversely, the author argues, in effect, that the ability of diverse languages to express divine truths undermines narrow religious and social exclusivism and justifies those, such as Sufis, who seek the reality veiled behind the external world.

It is, thus, unclear, after all, exactly why the term *möchelge* is used in the title of the treatise. If, in light of the *möchelge*'s typically (if not exclusively) documentary character, we interpret the title as signaling that the treatise, in effect, *constitutes* a binding pledge, there is nothing in the contents that reveals how or why this is the case: no function or action is agreed to, no penalties for non-compliance are indicated, and the only hint of a subordinate's pledge of allegiance to a superior lies in the author's mention of a "dear one" (*'aziz*), presumably a disciple. The absence of the term *möchelge* from the text itself, moreover, suggests some reticence with respect to making a direct comparison, or even a metaphorical allusion, to some principle of Muslim or Sufi teaching, using an alien term. In other contexts, that is, we find Turkic or Mongolian social, administrative, or even military terminology used in a Sufi context in metaphorical constructs: in a story about the deaths of Farid al-Din 'Attar and Najm al-Din Kubra, for example, time is characterized as a *tovachi* in delivering the "obligatory command" (*qadaghan*) for the emergence of Chinggis Khan, using the Mongolian term denoting a military official responsible for conveying orders and mustering troops alongside the Mongolian word for such a command;¹⁰ a fifteenth-century shaykh of Khurasan refers to the spiritual guide as the *qulavuz-i rah*, using a Turkic term for "guide" in connection with the Sufi path;¹¹ and another fifteenth-century shaykh of Khurasan is

¹⁰Kamal al-Din Husayn Gazurgahi, *Majālis al-'ushshāq (Tadhkira-yi 'urafā)*, ed. Ghulam-riza Tabatabā'i Majd (2nd pr., Tehran: Intisharat-i Zarin, 1376/1997), 142. On the terms *tovachi* and *qadaghan*, see Doerfer, *TMEN*, I, 260–64, 394–95.

¹¹Jani Muhammad b. Kamal b. Badr Bukhari al-Maydani, *Malfūzāt-i Shaykh Zayn al-Dīn Khwāfī*, MS sulūk fārsī no. 764, fols. 63a–79b, Raza Library, Rampur (references on fols. 64a, 67b); on *qulavuz*, see Gerhard Doerfer, *TMEN*, vol. III (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1967), 490–93.

shown referring to one of his disciples as the *yasavul-i dargah-i haqq* (i.e., the “guard” or “watchman” of the divine court).¹² If a similar linguistic inventiveness is at work here, however, it is much more subtle, to the point of utter obscurity, above all because the term appears *only* in the title.

We might suppose that in using the term *möchelge* in the title, without discussing it in the text, the author was signaling to the disciple addressed in the text that understanding this foreign word could amount to understanding something significant about the disciple’s obligations as a Muslim or a Sufi. Was the author alluding to the kind of relationship signaled by the term *möchelge*, with his disciple unconditionally bound in servitude to the shaykh, the Prophet, or God? The author certainly knew the term *möchelge* as a significant term of personal responsibility among the Turko–Mongol ruling elite who dominated his world (and if the author was indeed Hamadani, he was, as noted, thoroughly familiar with that elite); was he signaling that the term served as an appropriate way of referring to the proper relationship between a subordinate, in this case the Sufi adept—intent upon seeking and knowing hidden worlds, and open to different expressions, in different languages, for both the goal of his path and for its communal context—and his superior?

If so, then the identity of the superior would naturally be important in terms of cultural coding. Was the superior understood as the Sufi master, with *möchelge* implicitly serving as the equivalent of the Sufi *bay‘at*, or “oath of allegiance”? Or was the superior understood as the Prophet, with the binding pledge reflecting social membership in the *umma* (community) of Muhammad, or as God, with *möchelge* signifying the basic responsibility of creaturehood that lies at the heart of Islam? To express, or merely allude to, any of these relationships—the surrendering of one’s will to a Sufi master, acceptance of belonging

¹² Ali b. Mahmud al-Abivardi al-Kurani, *Rawzat al-sālikīn*, India Office collection, MS IO 698, British Library, London, fol. 32a (described in Hermann Ethé, *Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, vol. I [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1903], cols. 260–61, no. 632); on *yasāvul*, see Gerhard Doerfer, *TMEN*, vol. IV (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1975), 166–72.

to the Prophet Muhammad's community, or acceptance of the created's duties to the creator—using a Mongolian term would itself have been remarkable, even in the context of the valorization of diverse languages that is stressed in the treatise.

That the author was signaling one or all of these equivalences cannot be ruled out, but little in the treatise itself explicitly supports one of them or another, and the text's actual contents suggest some other reason for the use of this term in a short work intended to validate the use of different languages to reach God. One further possibility is that the title alludes to the occasion of the treatise's composition, or more specifically to a predicament of the disciple referred to in the treatise. Was the work written to legitimize a Muslim's participation in a Mongol oath-taking ceremony? Was the unnamed disciple faced with the demand to swear such a binding pledge to some Mongol official or ruler, with his query to his shaykh about the licitness of a Muslim doing so prompting the composition of the treatise—which, after all, legitimizes the use of a language such as Mongolian, and by extension, the use of a term from that language, but also rails against the *fuqaha* (jurists), who, we might suspect, held more restrictive views about such interactions with the Mongol elites (especially on their terms)?

Or perhaps the disciple was, in fact, not yet fully part of Muslim society, but a member of the Mongol elite who was transitioning from the Mongol world to the Muslim world, and hence in need of assurance that his entanglement in relationships framed in Mongol terms, and perhaps his limited facility in one or more of the “languages of Islam,” did not exclude him from membership in Hamadani's Sufi community, or in the *umma*. The latter scenario might explain the reference to the disciple not understanding “any of it” when a particularly relevant Qur'anic verse was recited; or a still broader context of a disciple's concern about walking in both the Mongol and Muslim worlds might be signaled by the author's extended discussion of the propriety of committing an apparent sin to prevent a greater wrong, or as a way of discovering the truth. Indeed, the point made about truth-telling being injurious if it should incite disorder (*fitna*), and a lie being

acceptable and even mandatory if it preserves the life and property of a Muslim, may suggest again the general social and political environment of Muslim society under Mongol rule. But it may also signal that the *möchelge* of the title did not merely point to the ability of a Mongolian word to express a divinely ordained obligation, but might have alluded to a specific case of a Muslim—perhaps the author’s disciple—being asked to enter into such a binding pledge and fearing that it was forbidden. In either case, we might argue that the inclusion of the Mongolian word in the title suggests that Mongolian was the disciple’s native language, or at least that the social and political world of the *möchelge* was his native world.

In the end, however, it must be stressed that we have little to go on here; on balance, it seems most likely that the title reflects a dilemma on the part of one of Hamadani’s disciples about the propriety of his involvement with the Turko–Mongol elite, or simply with the prevailing social and political order, but even this remains conjectural. The actual contents of the short treatise say nothing explicit about the *möchelge*; the treatise does, however, make several points relevant to the Mongol era’s diverse linguistic and religious environment.

In terms of contents, the treatise may be divided into five sections of unequal length. The first, including the brief introduction (which itself alludes to the multitude of meanings in each letter of the Qur’an), develops the validation of diverse languages raised in the opening citation from the Qur’an. Different languages and idioms, the author maintains on the basis of the cited verse, were not only created by God, but are themselves evidence of divine power, which brings things out of undifferentiated and invisible divine unity and into the sensible world of perception and multiplicity;¹³ the different ways in which people call upon God are, thus, all of divine origin, and are all accepted by God. The author also condemns the self-satisfaction and arrogance of those

¹³Perhaps the closest the author comes to alluding to the foreignness of his title appears immediately after the introduction, when he refers to the “signet ring” and “signature” (*tawqī’ va tughrā*) for his treatise emerging from behind the veils of divine majesty; here again, however, his intent is far from clear.

who reject other modes of speaking and, implicitly, of worshipping; hostility to other tongues and customs comes from clouded understanding and the effects of the carnal soul, and those who fail to see this are, as he writes, again on Qur'anic authority, blind in both worlds—explicitly in this world and the next, but we might also understand the two realms as a world dominated by Islam and a world dominated by the non-Muslim, or Islamizing, Mongols. Near the end of this section, the author transitions to the next section by affirming that altering a “word of the law” with the intention of provoking fear in an evildoer is not sinful, but laudable.

That contrast is developed further in the second, shorter section, which reminds the reader that an apparent sin may conceal a hidden good, and that truthfulness put to a bad purpose is not a virtue, but forbidden. This theme is reemphasized later, in the fourth section, in one, at least, of the two stories about 'Ali, but it shares with the section on the licitness of multiple languages the basic principle of seeking the hidden reality behind the apparent, external world. The short poem amounts to a third section, elevating the intellect (*'aql*) above mere thought and imagining, and ultimately invoking the principle of mystical love (*'ishq*).

The fourth, longer section presents two brief stories involving 'Ali. The first presents him as the representative, in effect, of a living connection to the revelation, as he declares himself to be “the book that speaks” (*al-kitab al-natiq*) in distinction from the written texts of the Qur'an—dismissed as “the mute book” (*al-kitab al-samit*)—that were hoisted on spears by the Syrian troops of his enemy Mu'awiya at the battle of Siffin; Mu'awiya represents exotericists focused on the written word, while 'Ali exemplifies the hidden knowledge stressed by the author. In the second, 'Ali plays the role that in other cultural contexts might be labeled Solomonic, proposing to cut a baby in two in order to reveal the truthful claimant to be the child's mother; this story, too, stresses the difference between apparent truth and real, but hidden, truth, and so makes the larger point that what may appear harmful and unlawful may, in fact, be good and licit, indeed even more so than what merely appears to be true.

The short fifth section is simply the benediction, affirming the hope that God will save the people of Islam from what we might understand, given the time of this treatise’s likely composition, as the sort of threat current in that era that most concerned the author. This is not, interestingly enough, the threat posed by infidels or insufficiently Islamized Turks and Mongols, but the threat posed by two groups who might otherwise be taken as prime representatives of Islam: “wicked specialists in the law” (*fujjar-i mutaḥaqiqiha*) and “pretentious Qur’an-reciters” (*qurra’-i mutashaddiqa*)—that is, those again who are focused on the external and blind to hidden truths.

Two additional points may be noted about the religious profile of the author of this short treatise. First, the two stories involving ‘Ali suggest a special affinity for the fourth caliph on the author’s part, but this is not unexpected in a Sufi work of this era, and need not raise doubts about the work’s authorship by the Sunni Sayyid ‘Ali Hamadani (who himself came to be celebrated as “the second ‘Ali”). More noteworthy, perhaps, is the author’s disdain for the *fuqaha*, sometimes qualified as simply those of his own times, but sometimes in general. At several points in the short text, he takes brief potshots at the *fuqaha* and their lack of understanding; it is possible that his contempt for the *fuqaha*, based on their blindness to the legitimacy of the languages created by God, and to the situational multivalence of actions and the contingent character of their classification in the enterprise of *fiqh* (jurisprudence), was directly linked to his decision to invoke the alien custom of the *möchelge* in his title.

The following translation¹⁴ must be regarded as tentative, and it is hoped that additional copies of the treatise might shed further light on the

¹⁴For Qur’anic passages, I have relied upon Abdullah Yusuf Ali’s *The Holy Qur-an: Text, Translation and Commentary* (n.p.: McGregor & Werner, 1946) for the text, and have been guided in most cases by his translation. It may be noted that Riyaz gives several excerpts from the text (*Aḥwāl*, 129–31), but since he knew only of MS 4250—the copy used here—it is clear that he has occasionally inserted material into the text that is not actually found in the manuscript, or has simply altered the wording. For example, following the account of the four terms for “God,” Riyaz inserts, still within the quotation marks, “*valī maqṣūdashān yakī ast*” (“but their meaning is one”); later, after the story of ‘Ali at the battle of Siffin, Riyaz replaces the word *fatwā* with *farmān*, and adds, at the end of the passage, “*zīrā-ke ham mānand-i khavārij-i zāhir-bīn hastand*” (“because the *fuqaha* are like the exotericist Kharijites”), as if it were part of the text of the treatise.

title, and on the author's identity and purpose in composing this short work. The original text is presented as written (i.e., without conformity to present-day orthographic practice).

Treatise of the Binding Pledge

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful:

God said (may He be exalted), "And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the differences in your languages and your colors; verily therein are signs for those who know" (Qur'an 30:22). Last night, when that dear friend was present, this *ayat* was read, together with what precedes it, in the evening recitation; but that dear friend, you may say, did not understand any of it. Abu Dharr Ghifari (may God be well-satisfied with him) related from the holy Lord of the Universe (may God bless him and keep him) that [he said,] "There is not one letter in the Qur'an that does not have 60,000 understandings." I do not know whether these jurists of your time have understood even one among these 60,000 or not; "And if God had known of anything good in them, He would have made them listen" (Qur'an 8:23).

Dear friend, the emergence of the signet ring and signature for this noble and godly address from behind the curtains that cover the abode of magnificence of the Lord of glory is an indication that [He] projects¹⁵ the overpowering shafts of light from the sun of divine solicitude onto every object of manifestation among the displays of the external world, and sends forth the breezes of beneficence and the revelations of guidance from the infinite divine essence upon every mode of speech among the languages of humankind; "Soon will We show them Our signs on the horizons and in their own souls, until it becomes manifest to them that this is the Truth" (Qur'an 41:53). And all the idiomatic sayings and diverse expressions and conflicting customs and manners and contrasting expressions and phrases are signs of the manifestations

¹⁵On the term *buruz*, as used by Ibn al-'Arabi and by Sayyid 'Ali Hamadani and his followers, see Bashir, *Messianic Hopes*, 99.

of [His] perfect power and wisdom and will, which [He] causes to appear, out of the depths of the unseen ocean of unity, onto the shores of the world of perception and witnessing, by means of the dashing of the waves of the revelations of majesty and beauty.

The holy Lord Most High has a secret in commanding any manifestation among these manifestations; [fol. 400a] and within every secret, there is something good. And so the [different] varieties and sorts of people, who are in the towns and climes and regions of the earth, call out to God (may His greatness be exalted) in diverse languages; for example, the Arab says “*Allah*,” the Persian recites “*Khuda*,” the Turk understands “*Tengri*,” and the Mongol calls out “*Yalavach*.”¹⁶ And each one of these veiled persons rejects the language of another person as repugnant, and detests the expression of the other, because their faculty of vision has become blind through the murkiness of the desires of the carnal soul and of brutish turbidities, and they are veiled, behind the curtains of partisanship and of the customs and manners [characterized by the Qur’anic verse], “We found our forefathers following a certain religion” (Qur’an 43:23), from considering the traces of the revelations of power and wisdom that pervade that other person; for “Every sect rejoices in what it has” (Qur’an 30:32).

However, since the court of reception for the holy Lord Most High and the station of the exalted chief [among those possessed of] presence with God¹⁷ are the repose of sincere truthfulness, and not a cover over differences or an attribution of distinction, then on the contrary, every declaration, in every time and in every language, is accepted by His holiness; and he who rejects these realities is deprived of comprehending the felicity of these mysteries, and is forsaken upon the carpet of proximity [to God].

¹⁶Ironically, *yalavach* is a Turkic word and means “envoy” or “messenger.” It is used in Muslim environments in reference to the Prophet Muhammad, not to God. On the term, see Doerfer, *TMEN*, IV, 106–7.

¹⁷On *‘indiyat* as “the state of presence with God,” see William C. Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Cosmology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 35.

In the same way, if a person changes a word from among the lawful words into a word [warranting] punishment, for the sake of producing fear within an evildoer, then to this extent, no damage at all occurs to that person's religion; rather, he would be rewarded. But the blind are blind in both realms, [for] "Those who were blind in this world will be blind in the next world, and most astray from the path" (Qur'an 17:72).

Dear friend, know that lying is forbidden in the law; but when the blood and property of a Muslim are kept safe from wickedness and from the clutches of an oppressor by means of a lie, that lie becomes recommended,¹⁸ or obligatory; and for that lie, his name is not recorded in the register of liars, for "He who has promoted the better of two things is not a liar." [fol. 400b] As for a truthful statement that provokes disorder (*fitna*), to utter it is forbidden, for "Disorder is more serious than killing" (Qur'an 2:191). Here, you may know what the Prophet (may God bless him and keep him) meant when he said, "There is many a good deed such that for the man who performs it, there is no evil deed more harmful than it to him; and there is many an evil deed such that for the man who performs it, there is no good deed more beneficial than it to him."

Verse:

One can travel the path of the soul in the light of the intellect;
[But] who can travel this path with the foot of thought?
One cannot find the paradise of the soul through thinking and
imagining.
By the path of the soul, you may be able to enter that paradise.
Travel the path with the intellect; keep away from sensory
perception; for it is not permitted
To leave certitude behind and travel with the foot of doubt.
Seek a glint from the sun of the mind, for through it,
Can the moon and the sun traverse the heavens.
In the light of Love, one can see the hidden secret;
With the foot of Love, one can travel the clear path.

¹⁸Mandhub is written here, for *mandub*.

You may have heard that when Mu‘awiya came out against the Commander of the Faithful ‘Ali (may God ennoble his visage), after he was defeated in the battle of Siffin, he ordered the people of Syria to place texts (*mashaf-ha*) [of the Qur’an] on the tips of their spears and raise up the cry that “We are acting in accordance with the Qur’an!” The people of Kufa took counsel with the Commander [‘Ali]; he said, “That is the silent book; I am the book that speaks.”¹⁹ Now if words of this sort should come from a dervish in your time, all the jurists (*fuqaha*) of the age would issue a *fatwa* for killing him.

It is related that in the time of ‘Umar (may God be pleased with him), two women fell into a quarrel over a child. Each one was claiming that the child was hers, but could not offer any sort of proof; both came up short. When word of this reached the Commander of the Faithful ‘Ali (may God ennoble his countenance), he came and ordered that a swordsman be brought; then, he ordered that he split the infant into two halves with a sword [fol. 401a] and give a half to each woman. The Companions were astonished by this. When the swordsman went to strike the child, one of those two women grew agitated and cried out, “Don’t strike; give him to the other one, for I have given up my claim!” And so it became clear to all that her agitation came from maternal compassion, while in that other [woman] no effect became evident. He ordered them to hand over the child to the agitated woman.

What say you? Was the Commander of the Faithful ‘Ali in the right in ordering the killing of the child in order to reveal the truth, or was he speaking falsely? Make it known from this that revealing the truth, in any way practicable, is obligatory for a ruler (*hakim*); just as they judge clear occurrences according to the injunctions

¹⁹On the raising of the *masahif* on lances prior to the arbitration between ‘Ali and Mu‘awiya (in 37/657), see Abu Ja‘far Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari, *The History of al-Tabarī*, vol. XVII, *The First Civil War*, trans. G. R. Hawting (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 78–82; and the discussion by Martin Hinds, “The Siffin Arbitration Agreement,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 17 (1972): 93–129. I have not traced the specific comment ascribed here to ‘Ali.

of the law, he determines encloded and concealed events through the light of discernment and the power of intelligence and understanding, and does not show favor on the authority of irreligious formalists, so that at the greatest gathering and the supreme rising, he should not be among those who cry out in regret, “Our Lord! We obeyed our chiefs and our great men, and they misled us as to the right path. Our Lord! Give them double penalty and curse them with a very great curse!” (Qur’an 33:67–68).

May God Most High keep the watering places of the sacred tenets of the people of Islam safe and sound, in the refuge of His purity, from the misfortunes entailed by the vain adornments upon the fictitious embellishments forged by wicked experts obsessed with the law, and from the temptations and adulterations introduced by pretentious reciters of the Qur’an.

In His beneficence and His munificence: truly, He is near and responsive. Praise be to God alone, and peace be unto him who follows [His] guidance. The end.

Text (MS No. 4250, fols. 399b–401a, Malik Library, Tehran)

رسالهٔ موچلکه

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

قال الله تعالى وَ مِنْ آيَاتِهِ خَلْقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَ اخْتِلَافَ²⁰ السِّنْتِكُمْ
وَ الْوَاوَانِكُمْ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ²¹ لِلْعَالَمِينَ (Q. 30.22) دوش که خدمت ان
عزیز حاضر بود این آیت مع ما قبله در قرأت عشا خوانده شد و ان عزیز
کویی که هیچ از ان فهم نکرد ابو ذر غفاری رضی الله عنه روایت کرد از
حضرت سید کاینات صلی الله علیه و سلم که ما من حرفٍ من القرآن الا و
له ستون الف فهم نمیدانم که این فقهای زمان تو ازین شصت هزار یکی
فهم کرده اند یا نی و لَوْ عَلِمَ اللهُ فِيهِمْ²² خَيْرًا لَأَسْمَعَهُمْ²³ (Q. 8.23)

²⁰Thus, for اِخْتِلَافٍ.

²¹In the MS, لَآيَاتٍ.

²²In the MS, فِيهِ.

²³In the MS, لَأَسْمَعَهُمْ.

ای عزیز ورود توقیع و طغرای این خطاب شریف ربانی از سرادقات جناب کبریای حضرت سبحانی اشارت بدانکه سطوات انوار افتاب عنایت الهی را در هر مظهری از مظاهر جهان ظهوری و نفحات الطاف و تجلیات هدایت ذات نامتناهی را در هر منطقی از السنه انسانی²⁴ بروز یست **سَنُرِيهِمْ آيَاتِنَا فِي الْآفَاقِ وَ فِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ حَتَّىٰ يَتَبَيَّنَ لَهُمْ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ** (Q. 41.53) و جمیع لغات مصطلحه و اصطلاحات مختلفه و رسوم و عادات متضاده و اشارات و عبارات متقابله اثار مظاهر کمال قدرت و حکمت و ارادتست که از لجه بحر غیب احدیت بواسطه تلاطم امواج تجلیات جلال و جمال بسواحل عالم حس و شهادت ظهور میکند

حضرت صمدیت را بامر مظهری ازین مظاهر سّری /400a/ و در ضمن هر سّری بریست و اصناف و انواع خلایق که در بلاد و اقالیم و اقطار زمین بالسنه مختلفه حق را جلت عظمته میخوانند مثلا عرب الله میکوید و عجم خدا میخواند و ترک تنکری میداند و مغول یلواج بر زبان میراند و هر یکی ازین محجوبان استقباح منع زبان دیکری میکند و اصطلاح دیکری را کاره است زیراکه دیده بصیرت ایشان با دخنه شهوات نفسانی و کدورات بهیمی کور کشته است و در پس پردهای تعصب و رسوم و عادات **إِنَّا وَجَدْنَا آبَاءَنَا عَلَىٰ أُمَّةٍ** (Q. 43.23) از مطالعه اثار تجلیات قدرت و حکمت که در ان دیکر ساریست محجوبند که **كُلُّ حِزْبٍ بِمَا لَدَيْهِمْ فَرِحُونَ** (Q. 30.32)

اما انجا که بارگاه قبول حضرت صمدیت و مقام صدر رفیع عندیت مقعد صدقست نه کسوت اختلافست و نه نسبت امتیاز بلکه هر بیانی در هر زمانی بهر لسانی در ان حضرت مقبول است و منکر این حقایق از ادراک سعادت این اسرار محرومست و بر بساط قرب مخذول همچنین اگر کسی بجهت حصول مهابت در باطن فاجری لفظی از الفاظ شرعی را²⁵ بلفظ سیاستی مبدل کند بدین مقدار بهیچ وجه خللی در دین انکس واقع نکردد بلکه مثاب بود اما کوران در هر دو سرای کورند **مَنْ كَانَ فِي هَذِهِ أَعْمَىٰ فَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ أَعْمَىٰ وَ أَضَلُّ سَبِيلًا** (Q. 17.72)

ای عزیز بدانکه دروغ در شرع حرامست و چون خون و مال مسلمانی از شر و چنک ظالمی بواسطه دروغی محفوظ ماند ان دروغ مندوب یا واجب شود

²⁴ inserted in the margin.

²⁵ (apparently) inserted above the line, above the final yā.

و بدان دروغ نام او در دیوان کذابان ثبت نکردد که لیس بکذاب من اصلح بین اثنین /400b/ و راستی که موجب فتنه باشد گفتن آن حرامست که وَ الْفِتْنَةُ أَشَدُّ مِنَ الْقَتْلِ (Q.2.191) اینجا بدانی که آنچه رسول صلی الله علیه و سلم فرمود که رَبِّ حَسَنَةٌ يَعْمَلُهَا الرَّجُلُ لَا يَكُونُ لَهُ سَيِّئَةٌ²⁶ اضر علیه منها و رَبِّ سَيِّئَةٌ يَعْمَلُهَا الرَّجُلُ لَا يَكُونُ لَهُ حَسَنَةٌ أَنْفَعُ لَهُ مِنْهَا چه معنی دارد شعر

بنور عقل توان در طاریق جان رفتن بیای وهم درین راه کی توان رفتن
جانان نتوان یافتن بوهیم و خیال ز راه جان بتوانی در ان جنان رفتن
بعقل ره برو از حس ببر که جایز نیست یقین کداشتن (sic) و در پی کمان رفتن
ز افتاب خرد ذره طلب که بدو توان فراز مه و مهر اسمان رفتن
بنور عشق توان دید راز پنهانرا بیای عشق توان در ره عیان رفتن

شنیده باشی که چون معاویه بر امیرالمومنین علی کرم الله وجهه خروج کرد بعد از آنکه در جنگ صفین مغلوب گشت فرمود که اهل شام مصحفها بر سر نیزها کردند و فریاد بر آوردند که ما بقران عمل میکنیم اهل کوفه با امیر مشاورت کردند فرمود که **ذَلِكِ الْكِتَابُ الصَّامِتِ و انا الكتاب الناطق** و اگر مثل این سخن در زمان تو از درویشی صادر شود جمیع فقهای زمان بقتل او فتوی دهند

نقلست که در زمان عمر رضی الله عنه²⁷ دو ضعیفه را در طفلی منازعت افتاد و هر یکی دعوی فرزندی او میکردند و بهیچ نوع هیچ کدام اثبات نمیتوانستند کرد هر دو عاجز آمدند چون خیر بامیرالمومنین علی کرم الله وجهه رسید حاضر شد و بفرمود تا سیاف را حاضر کردند پس امر کرد که کودک را بتیغ بدو نیم کند /401a/90a/ و هر یکی را نصفی بدهند صحابه ازین حال تعجب کردند چون سیاف قصد کودک کرد از ان دو ضعیفه یکی در اضطراب افتاد و فریاد بر آورد که مکشید و بدان دیگر دهید که من از حق خود در کدشتم (sic) چنانکه بر همه معلوم شد که ان اضطراب از جهت شفقت مادرست و دران دیگر هیچ اثر بدید نیامد بفرمود تا ان طفل را بان ضعیفه مضطرب²⁸ تسلیم کردند

²⁶Written thus here, and as سَيِّئَةٌ in the next instance, for سَيِّئَةٌ or سَيِّئَةٌ.

²⁷عنه is written above علیه.

²⁸Written thus, perhaps for مضطرب.

چه کویی امیر المومنین علی در امر کشتن ان طفل بجهت ظهور این حق محق بود یا مبطل ازینجا معلوم کنی که بر حاکم اظهار حق واجب بهر نوع که میسر شود چنانکه حادثات واضحه را باحکام شرع حکم میکنند واقعات متلبسه مخفی را بنور فراست و قوت فطنت و کیاست درک کند و التفات بتقلید مترسمان بی دیانت نکند تا در محشر کبری و قیامت عظمی از ان جمله نباشد که بحسرت فریاد کنند که رَبَّنَا اِنَّا ۲۹ اَطَعْنَا سَادَتَنَا وَ كِبْرَاءَنَا فَاضْلُونَا السَّبِيلَا رَبَّنَا ۳۰ اَتَيْهِمْ ضِعْفَيْنِ مِنَ الْعَذَابِ وَالْعَنُومُ ۳۱ لَعْنَا ۳۲ كَبِيرًا (Q. 33.67-68)

ایزد تعالی مشارب عقاید اهل اسلام را از افات زخارف تسویلات
 فجار متفقه و وساوس و تمویهات قراء متشذقه^{۳۳}
 در پناه عصمت خود مصون و محفوظ دارد
 بمنه و کرمه انه قریب مجیب
 و الحمد لله وحده و السلم
 علی من اتبع الهدی

م

²⁹MS reads اِنَّا.

³⁰MS inserts وَ here.

³¹MS reads لَعْنُهُمْ .

³²MS reads لَعْنَا.

³³متشذقه in the MS, with the *tashdid* clearly misplaced.