

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

MESSIANISM, OCCULTISM, AND POETICS IN THE 15TH-CENTURY PERSIANATE
WORLD: THE LIFE AND WRITINGS OF ĀZARĪ-YI ISFARĀYINĪ (D. 866/1461-2)

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Transliteration and Dating

Transliteration of Arabic and Persian words throughout will follow the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies (IJMES)* system. In keeping with *IJMES* guidelines, certain words of Arabic or Persian origin which may be commonly-used in English (Islam, imam), or are well-known place names (Khurasan, Iraq) are presented without diacritics. Transliteration choices have been made to follow the language of origin. Hence, the /ث/ when appearing in Persian words is transliterated as /s/ as opposed to the Arabic /th/, the Persian /ذ/ as /z/ as opposed to /dh/, the Persian /ض/ a /z/ and not an Arabic /d/, and so on. Titling of Persian works which follows Arabic conventions (جواهر الاسرار) will be rendered in Arabic transliteration (*Jawāhir al-Asrār*, not *Javāhir*).

Dating throughout will be presented in both Muslim (*hijrī*) and Christian (*mīlādī*) forms, e.g., the birth of Āzarī occurred in the year 784 [*hijrī*]/1382 [*mīlādī*]. Where necessary and possible based on the historiographical record, the full date will be provided. For example, the well-known attempt on Shāhrukh's life would be rendered as occurring on 23 Rabī' II 830/21 February 1427.

Common Abbreviations

AMA: Āzarī-yi Isfarāyinī, *Miftāḥ al-Asrār*

AJA: Āzarī-yi Isfarāyinī, *Jawāhir al-Asrār*

EP²: *Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition*

EIr: *Encyclopedia Iranica*

Abstract

Messianism, Occultism, and Poetics in the Fifteenth-Century Persianate World: The Life and Writings of Āzarī-yi Isfarāyīnī (d. 866/1461-2)

This dissertation discusses the life and works of the poet, Ṣūfī, and occultist, Ḥamza b. ‘Alī Malik Āzarī-yi Isfarāyīnī (784-866/1382-1461 or 1462). Āzarī is likely best known for his work as a poet, culminating in his serving as the poet laureate (*malik al-shu‘arā*) at the court of Shāhrukh b. Tīmūr (d. 850/1447), followed by his abruptly departing courtly circles to pursue the Ṣūfī path. While taking note of certain themes in his widely-circulated poetic *dīvān*, this project is also particularly interested in the contents of two occult compendia written by Āzarī after this moment of spiritual crisis: the *Miftāḥ al-Asrār* (*The Key to the Secrets*) and the *Jawāhir al-Asrār* (*The Gems of the Secrets*).

Born in Isfarāyīn to a family of local notables, the life of Āzarī was closely tied to two of the most important intellectual developments of the 9th/15th century Persianate world: (1) the spread of an interest in the occult sciences at the highest levels of courtly society, and (2) a great profusion of messianic movements emerging to challenge the established order. Though spending significant portions of his life at Timurid courts, the writings of Āzarī show a warm reception of the Ḥurūfiyya order, the radical, gnostic-messianic lettrist movement which was harshly persecuted across Timurid domains. This was not the sole affiliation of Āzarī, as he likewise fancied himself both a member of the Kubrawī Ṣūfī network and an admirer of the People of Investigation and Unveiling, *ahl-i kashf va taḥqīq*. In constructing a complete biography of Āzarī and considering those elements of his works which have received less scholarly attention, one finds a unique combination of many of the intellectual debates which were roiling across the Persianate world throughout his lifetime.

The works of Āzarī display a wide-ranging and encyclopedic approach to esoteric knowledge. Alongside an appreciation for such earlier thinkers as Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240), Sa‘d al-Dīn Ḥamuwayī (d. 650/1253) or ‘Alā’ al-Dawla Simnānī (d. 736/1336) are found both direct citations of the Ḥurūfī founder, Fażl Allāh Astarābādī (d. 796/1394), and a sympathy for the concept of the transmigration of souls (*tanāsukh*), normally the realm of such movements as those considered Shī‘ī “exaggerators” (*ghulāt*). Such apparent incongruities are considered carefully in the broader intellectual context of 9th/15th century Iran, with the dissertation re-examining the dynamics of spiritual network formation in a period of political turmoil and intellectual experimentation.

Likewise, Āzarī did not ultimately become a solitary contemplative – his reputation in the biographical dictionary (*tazkira*) literature notwithstanding – but rather was often closely tied to major courts throughout the 9th/15th century. Beyond his connections to Ulugh Beg and Shāhrukh, Āzarī briefly served as an advisor to Aḥmad Shāh I (d. 839/1436) of the Bahmanid sultans in South India. Likewise, Āzarī provided counsel to the Timurid prince Sulṭān-Muḥammad b. Bāysunghur (d. 855/1452) in the years preceding the rebellion of the latter against Shāhrukh. Despite the potentially “transgressive” nature of certain of his writings, Āzarī retained close connections with leaders of his time across much of his life.

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down copies of the Iranian *Bahman-nāma*. Finally, my thanks to the staff of both the Salar Jung archives and Telangana State Archives for their support.

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Chronology

Items in bold are related directly to the life of Āzarī. Those in standard type are provided for additional context.

783/1381-2: The Sarbadārīds under ‘Alī Mu’ayyad become vassals of Tīmūr Bārlās.

Ca. 7 Ramaḍān-6 Shawwāl, 784/14 November-13 December, 1382: Āzarī is born.

800-1/1398-9: The campaign of Tīmūr in Hindūstān.

802/1399: Beginning of Tīmūr’s “Seven Year Campaign.”

After the *qishlāq* of 802/1399: Āzarī becomes attached to the Timurid court.

Before 803/1400-1: Āzarī departs from the court, studies with Kamāl Khujandī in Tabriz.

804/1402: Tīmūr defeats Bāyazīd I “Yıldırım” at the Battle of Ankara.

807/1405: Death of Tīmūr.

Ca. 809-810/1406-1408: Āzarī’s completion of his initial literary studies.

Ca. 811-813/1408-1411: Āzarī travels to the court of Shāhrukh in Herat

817/1414: Shāhrukh defeats Iskandar b. ‘Umar Shaykh at Isfahan.

Ca. 818-19/1415-17: Āzarī’s spiritual turn away from the court.

825/1422: Aḥmad Shāh I seizes power from his brother Fīrūz Shāh in Gulbarga. Death of the Ṣūfī saint, Gīsū Darāz.

826/1422-3: Āzarī’s pursuit of the Ṣūfī path begins in earnest.

827/1424: Transfer of the Bahmanid capital from Gulbarga to Bidar.

23 Rabī‘ II 830/2 March 1427: A Ḥurūfī partisan attempts to assassinate Shāhrukh in Herat.

830/1427: First mentor, Shaykh Muḥyī al-Dīn Ṭūsī Ghazālī, dies. First Ḥajj pilgrimage is completed. Āzarī meets with Ni‘mat Allāh in Māhān. Composition of *Miftāḥ al-Asrūr*.

After the events of 830/1427: Āzarī departs Khurasan for second Ḥajj.

Ca. 831/1428: Completion of *Sa‘ī al-Ṣafā* after one year in Mecca.

Ca. 832/1428-29: Āzarī arrives at the Bahmanid court of Bidar.

832/1429: Bahmanid campaign against the Mālwā Sultanate begins.

836/1432-3: Āzarī returns to Khurasan for the rest of his life.

839/1436: Accession of ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Aḥmad II to the Bahmanid throne.

840/1436-7: Composition of *Jawāhir al-Asrār* completed.

Ca. 847/1443: Āzarī meets with Sulṭān-Muḥammad b. Bāysunghur

848/1444-5: Rebellion of Sulṭān-Muḥammad b. Bāysunghur.

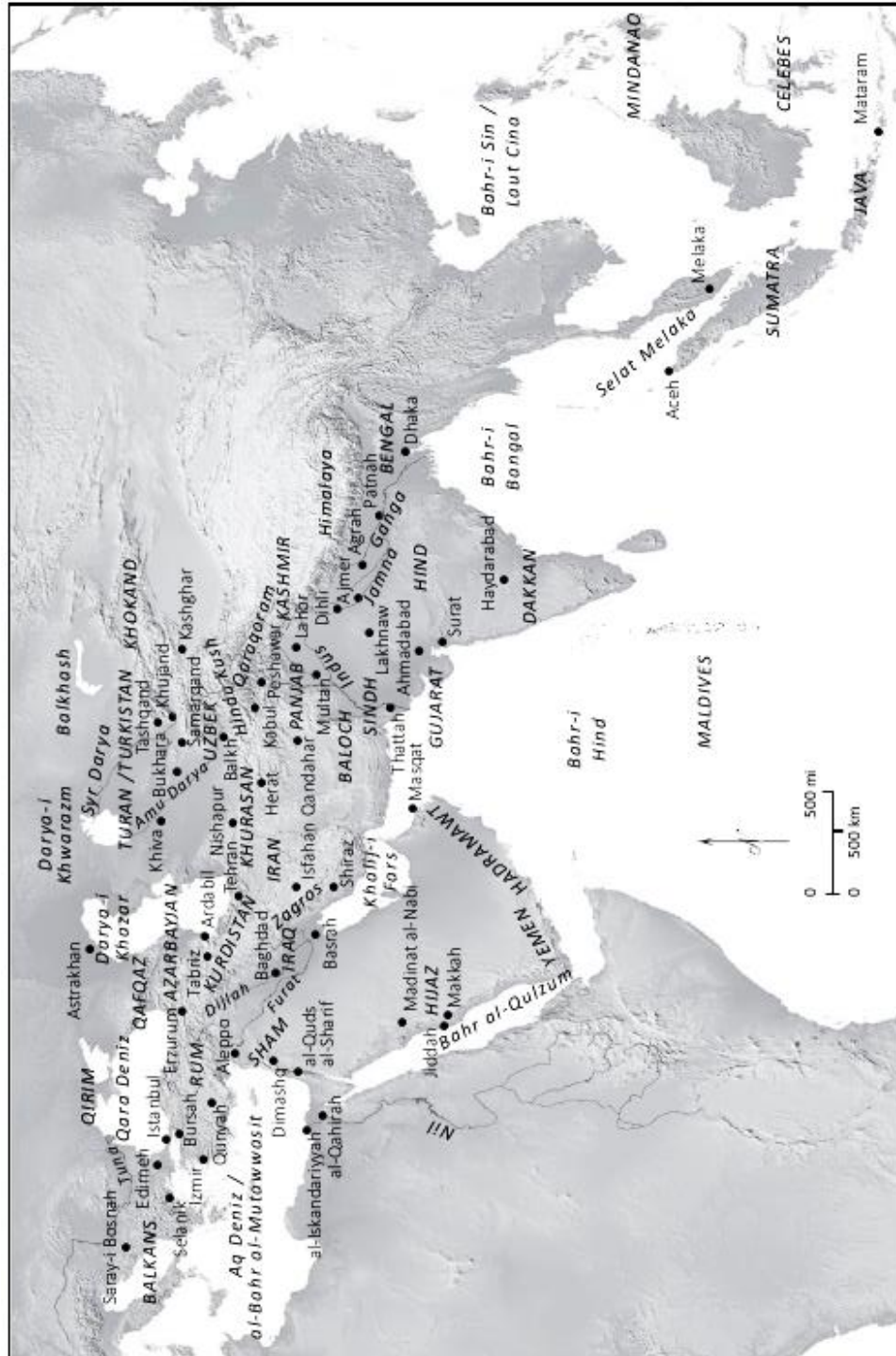
850/1447: Death of Shāhrukh.

852/1448-9: Āzarī converses with Ulugh Beg in Khurasan.

863/1458: Sulṭān-Abū Sa‘īd b. Sulṭān-Muḥammad b. Mīrānshāh b. Tīmūr pre-eminent in Khurasan.

866/1461-2: Āzarī dies.

Figure 1: Map of the Persianate World¹



¹ This map is drawn from: Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam?: The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 74.

Chapter 1: The Life of Āzarī

آزری طوطی بندارچه که شکر شکن است
یک باطبع نیکویت ز کجا تا کجا

Although, Āzarī, the parrot of India crunches sugar;
But as for your fine nature – from where? To where?
Āzarī, *Ghazal* 17¹

1.1 Introduction

In the early decades of the 9th/15th century, the leader of the Bahmanid Sultanate of the Indian Deccan, Aḥmad Shāh I (d. 839/1436), found himself in an unsteady position. Aḥmad had successfully seized the Bahmanid throne from his brother, Fīrūz Shāh (d. 825/1422), with the blessing of one of the most famous Ṣūfī saints of the Indian Deccan, Gīsū Dirāz (d. 825/1422). However, shortly after this successful palace coup, the great saint of Gulbarga passed away, depriving Aḥmad of both his personal spiritual guide and the figure whose endorsement had provided a key plank of legitimacy through the early turbulence of his reign. Perhaps seeking to physically and ideologically distance himself from what had already been a tumultuous first century for the Bahmanids – the year 799-800/1397 alone saw three separate sultans take the throne – it was not long before Aḥmad sought a new capital from which he could lead the polity, and he moved the seat of Bahmanid power from Gulbarga to Bidar.² For the finishing touch of

¹ Ḥamza b. ‘Alī Malik Āzarī-yi Isfarāyīnī, *Dīvān-i Āzarī-yi Isfarāyīnī*, ed. Muḥsin Kiyānī and ‘Abbās Rastākhīz (Tehran: Kitābkhānah, Mūzih va Markaz-i Asnād-i Majlis-i Shūrā-yi Millī, 1389 [2010]), 114.

² A more romantic reasoning for the change in capital is contained in the *Tazkirat al-Mulūk* of Rafī‘ al-Dīn Ibrāhīm Shīrāzī, in which during a hunt, Aḥmad saw a rabbit chasing away a dog, as opposed to the expected reverse. Assuming that these lands would produce a salubrious population, Aḥmad chose Bidar, christened Muḥammadābād, to found his new city. Rafī‘ al-Dīn Ibrāhīm Shīrāzī, *Tazkirat al-Mulūk* (Paris, n.d.), Supplément persan 189, Bibliothèque nationale de France Département des Manuscrits, 13a-13b.

his magnificent new palace, Aḥmad held a contest among the poets of his realm to craft a line that could be inscribed upon the walls. The victor, in the end, was Shaykh Ḥamza b. ‘Alī Malik al-Ṭūsī al-Bayhaqī, known as Āzarī-yi Isfarāyīnī, who was able to craft the winning verse:

جدا قصرشید که ز فرط عظمت
آسمان سده از پدید این درگاه است
آسمان هم توان گفت که حد ادب است
قصر سلطان جهان احمد بهمن شاه است

How excellent the lofty castle in excessive greatness,
The heavens a threshold at the foundation of this court.
One too cannot say “heavens” is within the bounds of etiquette.
It is the castle of the sultan of the world, Aḥmad Bahman Shāh.³

As will be discussed in greater detail below, this was perhaps not the only mark left upon the Indian Deccan by Āzarī, as he was also allegedly commissioned by the sultan to compose the *Bahman-nāma*, a verse history of the Bahmanid sultans from their founding under ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Ḥasan Bahman Shāh (d. 759/1358) up to the days of Aḥmad I.⁴ In other words, it was at this

³ *Tazkirat al-Mulūk*, 13b; Muḥammad Qāsim Hindū Shāh Astarābādī Firishta, *Tārīkh-i Firishta*, ed. Muḥammad Rizā Naṣrī, vol. 2, (Tehran: Anjumān-i Āsar va Mafākhir-i Farhangī, 1387 [2009]), 374.

⁴ Āzarī is mentioned in Firishta in the broader context of citing earlier historians of the Bahmanids and discussing the alleged lineage of ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Ḥasan Bahman Shāh, founder of the sultanate, which supposedly could be traced back to the legendary Kayānī king, Bahman, son of Isfandiyār. Firishta notes that the *Bahman-nāma* has been attributed to Āzarī and nods towards a Kayānī lineage of this first Bahmanid sultan, though with the caveat that the text to which Firishta had access was lacking the pen-name (*takhalluṣ*) of Āzarī. Firista, *Tārīkh-i Firishta*, 2: 250-1; Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh, “Bahman (2) Son of Esfandiyār,” *Elr*. The function of the anti-heroic figure of Bahman in an earlier *Bahman-nāma* has been discussed in: Saghī Gazerani, *The Sistani Cycle of Epics and Iran’s National History: On the Margins of Historiography*, Studies in Persian Cultural History 7 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2016), 164-93. This earlier *Bahman-nāma* was likewise cited as a source of Iranian history in the *Mujmal al-Tawārīkh*, composed 520/1126: Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila, *Khwadāy-nāmag: The Middle Persian Book of Kings*, Studies in Persian Cultural History 14 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2018), 125-6. See also a recent discussion of the references to the epic Iranian kings, especially Bahman, in the Bahmanid sultanate: Blaine Auer, *In the Mirror of Persian Kings: The Origins of Perso-Islamic Courts and Empires in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 18-19.

moment of great transition for the Bahmanid Sultanate that Āzarī rose to the occasion, becoming an irreplaceable part of the court and memorializing the Bahmanid sultans as a sort of Firdawsī figure for these sovereigns of Gulbarga and Bidar.⁵

With this in mind, one might assume that Āzarī, a significant figure at the court of a major regional power and center of Indo-Islamic culture in its own right,⁶ would be well represented in the literature surrounding the Bahmanid Sultanate, and his own works studied deeply. Even this brief mention of Āzarī calls to mind other illustrious and highly influential figures who travelled to the Indian Deccan from Iranian lands, such as Khalaf Ḥasan Baṣrī, or the most famous intellectual and minister in Bahmanid history, Maḥmūd Gāwān.⁷ However, unlike Maḥmūd Gāwān, no full-length biography of Āzarī has been written in a European language, though there do exist two short Persian-language biographies, both by Muḥammad-‘Alī Vuṣūqī, which summarize the major details of his life and give an overview of his works.⁸ The same situation holds for analytical works related to the intellectual production of Āzarī, for while one might find an exploration of the secretarial style of Gāwān⁹ or his connections to intellectual

⁵ As is known, well after the work of Firdawsī, patrons of the arts continued to commission verse epics in the model of the *Shāhnāma*. On this phenomenon in the Mongol and Timurid periods, see: Manūchihr Murtaṣavī, *Masā’il-i ‘Aṣr-i Īlkhāniyān*, Majmū‘a-yi Intishārāt-i Adabī va Tārikhī, Mawqūfāt-i Duktur Maḥmūd Afshār Yazdī 103 (Tehran: Bunyād-i Mawqūfāt-i Duktur-i Maḥmūd Afshār Yazdī, 1385 [2006]), 545-625

⁶ Notable examples of the Bahmanid sultans showing an interest the culture of the Deccan as well as architectural synthesis in Bahmanid domains, are discussed in: Haroon Khan Sherwani, “Tāju’d-Din Fīrōz and the Synthesis of Bahmanī Culture,” *New Indian Antiquary* 6, no. 4 (1934): 75–89.

⁷ The influence of these figures upon the Bahmanids, particularly in their serving to connect the Deccan to the rest of the Persianate world, has been discussed by Emma Flatt: Emma Flatt, *The Courts of the Deccan Sultanates: Living Well in the Persian Cosmopolis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 120-164.

⁸ On Gāwān, see: Haroon Khan Sherwani, *Maḥmūd Gāwān, The Great Bahmani Wazir* (Allahabad: Kitābistān, 1942). The biographies of Āzarī are: Muḥammad ‘Alī Vuṣūqī, *Ḥamza bin ‘Alī Malik Āzarī-yi Isfarāyīnī: Shā‘ir va ‘Ārif-i Nāmī-yi Qarn-i Nuḥum* (Mashhad: Kitābdār-i Tūs, 1390 [2011]); Muḥammad ‘Alī Vuṣūqī, *Shaykh Āzarī-yi Isfarāyīnī: Aḥvāl va Ash‘ār* (Mashhad: Kitābdār-i Tūs, 1390 [2011]).

⁹ Emma Flatt, “Practicing Friendship: Epistolary Constructions of Social Intimacy in the Bahmani Sultanate,” *Studies in History* 33, no. 1 (2017): 61–81.

networks of the 9th/15th century Islamic world,¹⁰ there is little comparable material on Āzarī to be found beyond a set of collected Persian-language conference papers.¹¹ This is an underwhelming body of literature for a figure who was a highly influential court figure for the Bahmanid Sultanate at a key inflection point in its history. Even taking into account that many of the works of Āzarī exist in manuscript, and some key works such as the *Bahman-nāma* have not yet been found and studied, one could read much of the existing literature on Āzarī and find that many questions about his life and works have been left unanswered.

Even this opening anecdote, in which Āzarī wins the favor of Aḥmad Shāh and establishes himself at the court in Bidar, must be viewed by the reader with some ambivalence. It was not unusual for an Iranian Ṣūfī, intellectual, and poet to travel to India¹² and find productive work, of course, and Āzarī already had built a reputation at the court of Shāhrukh (d. 850/1447) in Herat as a poet of some consequence.¹³ However, so too had Āzarī himself claimed to have found the courtly atmosphere overly focused on sensual pleasure and inhibitive towards his spiritual practice, notably leading to his swearing off the comforts of the world and the game of

¹⁰ Flatt, *Deccan Sultanates*, 181–82; İlker Evrim Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks in Timurid Iran: Sharaf al-Dīn ‘Alī Yazdī and the Islamic Republic of Letters*, Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 96.

¹¹ ‘Abbās Shujā‘ī and Yūsuf ‘Alī Yūsuf-nizhād, eds., *Mawj-i Daryā-yi Ma‘rifat: Majmū‘a-yi Chakīdah-hā va Barguzīdah-yi Maqālāt-i Hamāyish-i Bayn al-Milālī-i Shaykh Āzarī* (Mashhad: Kitābdār-i Tūs, 1390 [2011]).

¹² Both “India” and “Iran”/“Iranian lands” will be discussed often in this dissertation, but in neither case are these being used anachronistically to refer to the territories of the modern states of India and Iran. One might read in “India” a rough parallel with the quite expansive conception of *al-Hind* in the writings of the early Arab geographers, with “Iranian lands” roughly corresponding to a fluid *Īrānshahr/Īrānzamīn* which would include (but not be limited to) Fārs, Khurasan, and Persian Iraq. See: André Wink, *al-Hind: The Making of the Islamic World. Volume 1: Early Medieval India and the Expansion of Islam, 7th-11th Centuries*. (Boston; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 189-92; Abbas Amanat and Assef Ashraf, eds., *The Persianate World: Rethinking a Shared Sphere*, Iran Studies 18 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2019), 22.

¹³ The life of Āzarī, including his time at the court of Shāhrukh will be discussed throughout this chapter. The dynamic of Iranian immigration to the Deccan will be discussed in further detail in chapter 4 and 5 below, but note already the aforementioned example of Maḥmūd Gāwān.

courtly politics in favor of the Ṣūfī path.¹⁴ And yet, within only a few years of his having supposedly left his old life of service as a court poet behind, Āzarī is found in Bidar as the victor of a poetry competition for Aḥmad Shāh and composer of an official verse history – so much for a life of simple, spiritual contemplation. This will prove to be one in a series of events in the biography of Āzarī to which there would seem to be more than initially meets the eye. A major contributing factor to these moments of ambiguity is the fact that the writings of Āzarī themselves have not been fully incorporated into the literature on his life: most importantly, the *Miftāḥ al-Asrār* (hereafter *AMA*), which contains an account in Āzarī’s own words of his life up to the text’s compilation in 830/1427, has received only a fraction of the attention of his later recension of the *AMA*, the *Jawāhir al-Asrār* (*AJA*), despite the fact that the biographical material in the introduction of the latter is scant.¹⁵ What is needed, then, is an account of the life and times of Āzarī which fully synthesizes both the autobiographical material in the *AMA* and *AJA*, as well as the entries devoted to him in biographical dictionaries and chronicles of the 9th-11th/15th-17th centuries.

1.2. Family Background

While it is possible to draw out a relatively complete account of the life of Āzarī through source analysis, the same cannot be said of his family, as they are almost completely obscure outside of a few brief references. Āzarī himself was born Ḥamza b. ‘Alī Malik al-Ṭūsī al-Bayhaqī al-Isfarāyīnī, eventually taking on “Āzarī” as his *nom de plume*.¹⁶ The source material

¹⁴ Ḥamza b. ‘Alī Malik Āzarī-yi Isfarāyīnī, *Miftāḥ al-Asrār* (1067/1657), #2423, Central Library of the University of Tehran, 9a-9b.

¹⁵ The *AMA* has likely not been incorporated into most of the literature on Āzarī based on the fact that it was once thought to be lost: A. ‘A. Rajā’ī “Āzarī Ṭūsī,” *EIr*.

¹⁶ Āzarī, *AMA*, 5b; Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā’-yi Dawlatshāh Samarqandī*, ed. Fāṭima ‘Alāqa (Tehran: Pizhūhishgāh-i ‘Ulūm-i Insānī va Muṭāla‘āt-i Farhangī, 1386 [2007]), 718. Sources have also included honorific names (*laqab*) of Nūr al-Dīn, Fakhr al-Dīn, and Jamāl al-Dīn to Āzarī. However, there is no

does not provide information such as the specific date of his birth, though as he died at the age of 82 in the year 866/1461-2, his birth year would be 784 *hijrī*.¹⁷ As the *takhalluṣ* of “Āzarī” was derived from his birth month of Āzar, ¹⁸ he must have been born between 7 Ramaḍān-6 Shawwāl, 784/22 November-21 December, 1382. Likewise, Āzarī himself confirmed that he was born in Isfarāyīn,¹⁹ which would place him in Khurasan in the latter years of the Sarbadārid “republic.”²⁰ This is particularly relevant, as the single hint that is available as to the lineage of Āzarī is that his family was closely connected to the Sarbadārid polity. His father, Shaykh Kh^wāja ‘Alī Malik, served as the *ṣāhib-ikhtiyār*²¹ for the Sarbadārid regime in Isfarāyīn,²² with Dawlatshāh having ultimately traced the line of Āzarī back to a certain Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Ramaḡī al-Hāshimī

consistency on this point. The provenance of “Āzarī” itself is a topic of discussion in the *Majālis al-‘Ushshāq* of Gāzurgāhī and will be discussed further below.

¹⁷ Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā’*, 727.

¹⁸ Kamāl al-Dīn Ḥusayn Gāzurgāhī, *Majālis al-‘Ushshāq: Tazkira-yi ‘Urafā’* (Tehran: Zarrīn, 1375 [1996]), 333–34.

¹⁹ Āzarī states that Bayhaqī was an inherited name, while his place of birth specifically was Isfarāyīn. Āzarī, *AMA*, 5b.

²⁰ On the Sarbadārids at this point in their history, see: Jean Aubin, “La fin de l’état sarbadār du Khorassan,” *Journal Asiatique* 262 (1974): 95–118. On the history of the Sarbadārid movement as a whole, see: John Masson Smith, *The History of the Sarbadar Dynasty, 1336-1381 A.D. and its Sources*, Columbia University Publications in Near and Middle East Studies, Series A 11 (The Hague: Mouton, 1970).

²¹ Literally translated as one who is a “possessor of authority,” this title appears periodically in Timurid chronicles in reference to regional or local government officials. Note the reference (among many throughout the work) to the *ṣāhib-ikhtiyār* of the territories of Persian Iraq (*mamālik-i ‘irāq-i ‘ajam*) in the the *Zubdat al-Tawārīkh* of Ḥāfiẓ Abrū: Ḥāfiẓ Abrū, *Zubdat al-Tawārīkh*, vol. 2, 4 vols. (Tehran: Sāzmān-i Chāp va Intishārāt-i Vizārat-i Farhang va Irshād-i Islāmī, 1380 [2001]), 885.

²² The death year of Āzarī is reported in Dawlatshāh as having been confirmed by chronogram – “*khusraw*,” which by *abjad* (alphabetical numerology) calculations adds up to 866 – being included in a line of poetry of Kh^wāja Aḥmad Mustawfī memorializing the death of Azari: Dawlatshāh, *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā’*, 728. Given his death in 866/1461-2, this would place the birth of Āzarī as occurring almost contemporaneously with the end of independent Sarbadār rule in Khurasan, as the Sarbadārid ruler ‘Alī Mu‘ayyad would have put himself and his polity in the service of Tīmūr Bārīās (“Tamerlane”) *circa* 783/1381-2. While this did not mark the end of Sarbadārid activity in Khurasan – a Sarbadārid rebellion led by Sulṭān-‘Alī Sabzavārī broke out in 808/1405 after the death of Tīmūr – it would have meant the end of the so-called Sarbadārid “republic” as an independent polity. Jean Aubin, “La fin de l’état sarbadār du Khorassan,” 110-16.

al-Marvazī, who held the position of *ṣāhib-da‘wa*.²³ It is the title of this latter figure which is particular intriguing, as one will recall that the Sarbadārid “republic” was more properly an often ill-fitting diarchy between a group of local notables of Khurasan and the Shaykhid-Jūrid Ṣūfī order.²⁴ Indeed, the years just preceding the birth of Āzarī saw a renewal of the disputes between these two wings of the polity which plagued the Sarbadārids from their very inception, as though the Shaykhid-Jūrid order had briefly held Sabzavār and Nīshāpūr from 779-781/1377 or 1378-1379 or 1380, by 782/1380-81, they had been routed, with ‘Alī Mu‘ayyad restored to the governorship of the region.²⁵ One is certainly tempted to assume that this ancestor of Āzarī, the *ṣāhib-da‘wa* Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Ramajī, was involved with the proselytization efforts of the Shaykhid-Jūrids, leaving his family line intertwined with the radical Ṣūfī branch of the Sarbadārids. Unfortunately, to my knowledge, these relatives of Āzarī are not mentioned by name in the Timurid histories of the 8th-19th/14th-15th centuries, so there is little that can be added at this point beyond conjecture. There are, though, enigmatic references in the *AMA* and the work of Dawlatshāh to a maternal uncle of Āzarī’s, and it is through this uncle that Āzarī was able to truly begin his career as a poet in the Timurid courtly scene. According to the *AMA*, in the year 800/1397-8, Āzarī traveled from his homeland of Isfarāyīn to enter into the service of his “fortunate, foreign,” and politically well-connected uncle in Tabriz.²⁶ As this uncle is not even

²³ Or, al-Zamajī: Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā’*, 718fn2607. The title indicates the “master of proselytization,” though the specific *da‘wa* is not named.

²⁴ Biancamaria Scarcia-Amoretti, “Religion in the Timurid and Safavid Periods,” in *The Cambridge History of Iran. Vol. 6, Timurid and Safavid Periods*, ed. Peter Jackson, Lawrence Lockhart, and Keele University (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 613–14.

²⁵ Smith, *The History of the Sarbadar Dynasty, 1336-1381 A.D. and its Sources*, 154.

²⁶ Āzarī, *AMA*, 5b. That is, the uncle is described as *sa‘īd* and *gharīb*, and as being acquaintance of a storyteller, Shaykh Ḥasan, who worked at the court of Tīmūr Barlas.

named, little can be said about his identity. It is theoretically possible that he was one of the many Sarbadārid officials who accepted roles in the Timurid administration after the absorption of the Sarbadārid polity in 783/1381.²⁷ However, there is little else that can be definitively said about the extended family of Āzarī at this time, though it is through this nameless maternal uncle that the story of Āzarī could truly begin.

1.3 Āzarī at the Court of Tīmūr Bārlās

It was in Tabriz that Āzarī began the education that would shape him into the poet, historian, and occult scientist that he would become in his adult life. While he could only benefit from the tutelage of his uncle briefly before this relative passed away, Āzarī studied widely, covering manners of expression (*anvā`-i t̄uruq-i zabān-āvarī*) in both verse and prose, storytelling and history, the poetic collections of the masters, medicine, and mathematics.²⁸ It is with the death of his uncle, though, that the story of Āzarī comes to be fully intertwined with the dynamics of the Timurid Empire. Āzarī explained that his uncle was politically well-connected: as a known entity at the court of Timur Bārlās – here titled *Şāhib-Qirān-i²⁹ Turkistān, Amīr Tīmūr Kürgān³⁰* –, the good reputation of this uncle of Āzarī allowed for an order to come down

²⁷ For example, successors of ‘Alī Mu`ayyad, the Sarbadārid leader who ultimately surrendered and paid tribute to Tīmūr, were granted governorships in ‘Arab Iraq. Aubin, “La fin de l’état sarbadār du Khorassan,” 114.

²⁸ Āzarī, *AMA*, 5b.

²⁹ *Şāhib-Qirān*, the “Lord of the Favorable Conjunction,” was a title infused with esoteric significance which did not begin with Tīmūr, though Tīmūr is likely its most famous carrier. For earlier roots of the *şāhib-qirān*, see: Naindeep Singh Chann, “Lord of the Auspicious Conjunction: Origins of the Şāhib-Qirān,” *Iran & the Caucasus* 13, no. 1 (2009): 93–110; Christopher Markiewicz, *The Crisis of Kingship in Late Medieval Islam: Persian Emigres and the Making of Ottoman Sovereignty*, Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 167. The evocative use of the title among the Timurids of India, the Mughal Empire, might be seen in: A. Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 23–55.

³⁰ Technically, the orthography in the manuscript indicates *kurikān*, but this is unmistakably references to *kürgān*, a “royal son-in-law” in the Mongol system. One will recall that Tīmūr himself was not descended from Mongol aristocracy, but instead married into the so-called “Golden Family” and throughout most of his career maintained a “puppet khan,” that is, a Chinggis-Khānid “monarch” who officially held the throne of the Timurid

inviting Āzarī himself to also be an attendee in the court.³¹ In terms of timing, this is described as having occurred “after the campaign at the borders of Hindūstān,” when Tīmūr and his armies were “on the way to the realms of Gurjistān, Rūm, and Shām,” preparing for their winter quarters³² at Sultāniyya.³³ It will be recalled that Tīmūr would have reached Delhi in Rabī‘ II 801/December 1398, returning to Samarqand in the spring of 801/1399 before setting out for the Seven-Year Campaign in early 802/Fall 1399.³⁴ Āzarī, then, must have become attached to the court of Tīmūr after the *qishlāq* of 802/Fall 1399, which, given his birth in 784/1382, would mean that he was roughly 18 lunar years old at the time.³⁵ The significance of this is not simply in determining the specific chronology of the life of Āzarī for its own sake, but in order to better understand what, exactly, were his ties to a court that he joined at such a young age. For Āzarī was not merely an occasional fixture at the court of Tīmūr, but in fact, a close attendant to the

Empire, even as Tīmūr himself was the main military and executive force. On the genealogy of Tīmūr, see: John E. Woods, “Timur’s Genealogy,” in *Intellectual Studies on Islam: Essays Written in Honor of Martin B. Dickson*, ed. Michel M. Mazzaoui and Vera B. Moreen (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1990), 85–125. On Tīmūr’s adoption of Chinggis-khānid symbols of legitimacy, see: Beatrice Manz, *The Rise and Rule of Tamerlane*, Canto Edition, Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 14–15. Likewise, Tīmūr famously deferred from considering himself a great king in conversation with Ibn Khaldūn, insisting that he was merely a general in service of his puppet khan, Sulṭān Maḥmūd Khān (d. 805/1402), the son of the previous Tīmūrid puppet khan, Suyurghatmish Khān (d. 790/1388). The episode may be found in: Ibn Khaldūn, *Ibn Khaldūn and Tamerlane: Their Historic Meeting in Damascus, 1401 A.D. (803 A.H.)*, trans. Walter J. Fischel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1952), 29–47. On the term *kürgän*, see: Gerhard Doerfer, *Türkische und Mongolische Elemente im Neupersischen, unter besonderer Berücksichtigung älterer neupersischer Geschichtsquellen, vor allem der Mongolen- und Timuridenzeit*, vol. 1, 4 vols., Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur. Veröffentlichungen der Orientalischen Kommission 16, 20–21 (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1963), 475-77.

³¹ This is confirmed in the *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā’*, in which during a later, chance encounter with Ulugh Beg, it is mentioned that Āzarī was the maternal nephew of a Timurid storyteller (*qişsa-kh‘ān*). Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā’*, 647-8.

³² The text references the *qishlāshī* of Tīmūr, though winter quarters are more generally known as *qishlāq*, with summer quarters being the *yaylāq*.

³³ Āzarī, *AMA*, 5b.

³⁴ Manz, *The Rise and Rule of Tamerlane*, 72.

³⁵ The itinerary of the Timurid court as it passed from Sultāniyya to Ardabīl on the way to the *qishlāq* in Qarābāgh in the year 802/1399 may be found in the *Zubdat al-Tawārīkh*: Ḥāfiẓ Abrū, *Zubdat*, 2:885.

grandson of Tīmūr, Ulugh Beg b. Shāhrukh, an acquaintanceship which would last for most of Āzarī's life.

While attached to the court originally due to the connection of his uncle, Āzarī soon became a fixture among the Timurid royal family in his own right. Able to leverage the previous rank of his relative, Āzarī was assigned to the service and companionship (*mulāzamat va muṣāḥabat*) to Ulugh Beg, who – having been born in 19 Jumādā I 796/22 March 1394 – would have been 5 years old at the time. This was only the beginning of an intimate connection to the Timurid dynasty which would recur throughout the life of Āzarī: as will be discussed shortly, perhaps the position for which Āzarī is best known – eventually attaining the title of Poet Laureate (*malik al-shu'arā'*) in Herat – would come at the court of Ulugh Beg's father, Shāhrukh. This episode in the life of Āzarī also provides a small window into court appointments at this time, as it seems that the main job of Āzarī was to provide the young prince Ulugh Beg with the “joyfulness and playfulness of youth and boon-companionship” (*mulā'aba va nashāt-i kūdakī va nadīmī*).³⁶ This is not to say that his life was all play and no work, as he simultaneously continued to study poetry, learning “5,000 to 6,000” lines of poetry of the great masters (*ustādān*), as well as committing to memory a number of works of biography and narrative (*siyar va qiṣaṣ*).³⁷ So too can one place exactly where the Seven-Year Campaign had progressed at the time when Āzarī became attached to the service of Ulugh Beg, as he reported that shortly after his joining the court, they passed through the “rugged lands of Georgia up to the borders of Abkhazia, on the lip of the Frankish Sea”³⁸ (*ḥazābī-yi gurjistān tā ḥudūd-i abkhās ki*

³⁶ Āzarī, *AMA*, 6a.

³⁷ Āzarī, *AMA*, 6a.

³⁸ This is a bit unusual, as the lands to which Āzarī is referring were almost certainly on the Black Sea. A more common name would be the simple calque, *daryā-yi aswad*.

dar navāḥī-yi lab-i daryā-yi farang).³⁹ Though clearly an approach into Anatolia via the Caucasus which can now be recognized as the maneuvers preceding the confrontation with the Ottoman Empire at the Battle of Ankara in 804/1402, Āzarī himself would not have the opportunity to see the great confrontation between Tīmūr and the Ottomans, as he broke away from the campaign and returned to his homeland of Khurasan.⁴⁰ This early Timurid phase of the life of Āzarī is not included in his primary biographical entry in the *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā’*, though it is confirmed in a separate chapter: in 852/1448-9, with Ulugh Beg campaigning in Khurasan, he passed through Isfarāyīn, where Āzarī had been living as a Ṣūfī dervish since roughly 836/1432-3.⁴¹ Āzarī, having recognized his old companion, presented himself to Ulugh Beg, with the latter instantly recognizing him as “the maternal nephew of [their] storyteller,” despite the fact that Āzarī had taken on the new appearance of the Ṣūfī renunciant. Their reunion is punctuated by a night of reminiscence over the campaign through Qarābāgh and Georgia.⁴² In other words, this impactful phase of his adolescence would tie his fortunes at many points in his life to descendants of Tīmūr Bārlās. While Āzarī may be better known as a court poet who would later serve at the court of Ulugh Beg’s father, Shāhrukh, his ties went beyond the recitation of the occasional *qaṣīda*, and rather, he would have established a relatively intimate relationship with the Shāhrukhid branch of the Timurids well before his later arrival in Herat.

³⁹ Āzarī, *AMA*, 6a.

⁴⁰ Āzarī, *AMA*, 6a. There is a curious reason given in the text for this departure: *az ān navāḥī ba-jahat-i istīrẓā-yi khāṭir-i vālid dar muṣāḥibat-i barādar az khāl-i khud muḥāraqat kardīm*, “from those lands, for the sake of satisfying the mind of my father, I separated from my uncle in the companionship of the brother.” While the reference is oblique, one reading may be that, wishing to assuage his own father, Āzarī travelled back from where he had come prior to the campaign (Tabriz) in the company of an unnamed brother.

⁴¹ Dawlatshāh states that Āzarī spent the last thirty years of his life in Isfarāyīn, hence, 836-866 *hijrī*. Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā’*, 720.

⁴² This account occurs in the context of a description of Ulugh Beg’s preternaturally strong memory. Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā’*, 647-8.

A brief aside must be added here related to the life of Āzarī from a separate source, the *Majālis al-‘Ushshāq* of Mīr Kamāl al-Dīn Ḥusayn Gāzurgāhī, completed 909/1503-4. A biographical dictionary of Ṣūfī figures and political leaders, including many notables of the Islamic Middle Period,⁴³ the text includes a brief entry on Āzarī.⁴⁴ Certain elements of the entry, such as his falling in love with a local young shoe-maker or verses in praise of a handsome governor of Isfarāyīn, may have a certain entertainment value, but they provide little that can be used towards writing a full biography of Āzarī. A part of this text that may have a more definite historical rooting is that Āzarī, while passing through Mashhad with Shaykh Ṣadr al-Dīn Ravvās, had a conversation with Ulugh Beg. Following the genre of the work overall, much of the discussion between the two involves Ulugh Beg lightheartedly testing the poetic knowledge of Āzarī by asking him about how he attained the pen name (*takhalluṣ*) of “Āzarī” itself.⁴⁵ The response of Āzarī is deemed sufficient, Ulugh Beg is pleased, and the two have a long and pleasant conversation.⁴⁶ Gāzurgāhī provides no dates to place this account in historical context,

⁴³ The *Majālis al-‘Ushshāq* does also include a number of individuals, such as Pīr Budāq b. Jahān Shāh of the Qarā Quyunlu confederation, or Sultān-Ḥusayn Bāyqarā (d. 911/1506) – who was, for a time, thought to have compiled the work himself – who are not usually considered to have been “Ṣūfī” figures, so much as political and military notables. However, given both their being placed side-by-side with known “Ṣūfīs” such as Āzarī, the resonance of *‘ishq* in the Persian Ṣūfī tradition by the time of the composition of the work, and the not insignificant number of political leaders in the Islamic Middle Period who would have considered themselves affiliated with Ṣūfī networks, I would contend that it is not a work of two separate categories of individuals – the Ṣūfīs and the notables – but rather can be discussed in shorthand as simply a Ṣūfī biographical dictionary. Note the development of *‘ishq* in Ṣūfī thought in the work of figures such as ‘Alī b. ‘Uthmān Hujvīrī, Aḥmad Ghazālī, and Abū Ḥāmid Ghazālī, long before Gāzurgāhī composed his *tazkira*: Joseph E. B. Lumbard, “From Ḥubb to ‘Ishq: The Development of Love in Early Sufism,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 18, no. 3 (September 2007): 345–85.

⁴⁴ Gāzurgāhī, *Majālis al-‘Ushshāq*, 333-4.

⁴⁵ The issue is whether the month in which Āzarī was born, *ṣar*, was pronounced “āzar” or “āzur.” Āzarī is able to satisfy Ulugh Beg’s inquiry in convincing the sultan that he should not, in fact, be known as “Āzurī,” and that “Āzarī” is linguistically appropriate. This account is also faithfully re-told in Firishta. Firishta, *Tārīkh-i Firishta*, 2:376.

⁴⁶ Gāzurgāhī, *Majālis al-‘Ushshāq: Tazkira-yi ‘Urafā’*, 333. See also the account cited above from Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā’*, 647-8.

and one might be tempted to view it skeptically, and at best as an occurrence with dubious basis in historical fact. However, given what is known about both the early meeting of Ulugh Beg and Āzarī, as well as their eventually speaking once more *circa* 852/1448-9 when Ulugh Beg was in Khurasan with his son ‘Abd al-Laṭīf attempting to take control of the region following the death of Shāhrukh,⁴⁷ there may be a hint of historical reality within the anecdote. There are sufficient inconsistencies – the difference in location between Isfarāyīn and Mashhad, as well as the difference in the content of the respective conversations – that it is possible, but unlikely, that Dawlatshāh and Gāzurgāhī are not discussing the same meeting. Ultimately, I would argue that these differences in specifics are less important than the underlying theme of the early link between Āzarī and Ulugh Beg being one that firmly established his Timurid ties and would re-appear throughout accounts of his life.

1.4 The Court of Shāhrukh and Spiritual Crisis

Despite having departed from the Timurid court and the official position of companion and mentor to Ulugh Beg before the Anatolia campaign, Āzarī undertook a plan of study in the literary arts that would bring him back to the court of Ulugh Beg’s father, Shāhrukh, before long. The *AMA* mentions that over the course of his travels back from the Caucasus to Khurasan, he briefly became attached to two teachers, Amīr Abū Bakr Sāgharjī and Sharīf al-Ma‘ālī Kamāl Khujandī.⁴⁸ Āzarī stated that his education in eloquent speech (*balāghat*) continued under these

⁴⁷ Beatrice F. Manz, "Ulugh Beg," *EP*².

⁴⁸ Text reads *sharīf al-ma‘āl*, likely in error. The first figure is more obscure, and Āzarī mentions only that he was one of the “[prominent] appointees of the time.” The second would be the poet Kamāl al-Dīn Mas‘ūd Khujandī, a poet and proponent of “a deep pantheistic mysticism reminiscent of the school of Ibn al-‘Arabī and Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī;” see, Mansour Shaki, “Kamāl Khujandī,” *EP*². As Khujandī died, per Khwāndamīr, in 803/1400-1, Āzarī would have just barely had time to have met him in Tabriz. Ghiyās al-Dīn b. Humām al-Dīn Khwāndamīr, *Tārīkh-i Ḥabīb al-Siyar*, eds. Jalāl al-Dīn Humā’ī and Muḥammad Dabīr-Siyāqī, vol. 3 (Tehran: Kitābfurūshī-yi Khayyām, 1362 [1983]), 549.

two, as he learned both astrological terms (*iştilāḥāt-i hai'āt*) and logic (*manṭiq*) from his teachers on his way back to his homeland. Arriving in Khurasan to spend time with his mother, Āzarī received a large inheritance from his father, beginning a phase of his life dedicated almost exclusively to mastery of poetry and the indulgence of the senses.⁴⁹ This was a period in the life of Āzarī when no desire remained in his mind except for a yearning (*shawq*) for the poetic arts, and as such, he devoted “seven or eight years” to mastering more material from poetic collections, learning skillful constructions and rhetorical flourishes (*'ilm-i ṣanā'i' va badā'i'*), and prosody (*'arūz*).⁵⁰ This turn to full immersion in literature led Āzarī, so he has explained, to a mastery of the various poetic forms, such as the *qaṣīda* and *ghazal*, as well as to a greater capability in the art of official prose composition, *inshā*.⁵¹ In terms of historical context, assuming that Āzarī would have been returning from the Timurid court to Khurasan in roughly 802, this deep study of poetry and prose would have lasted until about 809-810/1406-1408. Shortly after his study of *inshā*, Āzarī was on the move again, this time traveling to Ṭabaristān⁵² and meeting with many of the nobles of this region.⁵³ However, before long, Āzarī was apparently struck with intense homesickness (*ḥubb al-waṭan*) for Khurasan, a recurring condition throughout his life.⁵⁴ It was at this point that Āzarī found himself in the right place at the right

⁴⁹ Āzarī, *AMA*, 6a–6b.

⁵⁰ Āzarī, *AMA*, 6b.

⁵¹ Āzarī, *AMA*, 6b–7a. It should not be surprising that the language that Āzarī himself chose to discuss his newfound training in *inshā* is itself more elevated than much of the rest of his autobiography, given the mastery of eloquent prose speech that would be expected of a *munshī*. A useful discussion of *inshā*, especially relevant because of its focus on Maḥmūd Gāwān, may be found in the chapter of Flatt on “Scribal Skills:” Flatt, *Deccan Sultanates*, 167–209.

⁵² Which is to say, Māzandarān in northern Iran.

⁵³ Āzarī, *AMA*, 7a–8b.

⁵⁴ An additional contributing factor was an apparent falling out between Āzarī and the nobles of Ṭabaristān, to which he refers in only an allusive manner. Āzarī, *AMA*, 7b–8a.

time, with a personal background and set of skills which would launch him into a life of true poetic prominence. Traveling to Herat over the course of “one or two years” (perhaps 811-813/1408-1411, depending on the duration of his time in Tabaristān) and writing verses of praise for “the *Pādishāh* of Islam and the Sultan of the Age,⁵⁵ Shārukh Bahādur Nuyān” – and therefore reviving his dormant links to the Timurid royal family – Āzarī won the official position of *malik al-shu‘arā’* (poet laureate) at the court in Herat, joining the chorus of nobles and attendants who would wait for the moment when the “border of the might of the Sultanate [Shāhrukh] would enter, and each would open his tongue in praise and recognition.”⁵⁶ Winning such a position at the pre-eminent capital of the eastern Islamic world after years of study must have felt to Āzarī as a moment of great personal triumph. And yet, it would be out of this moment of success that the primary drama of the life of Āzarī would spring, namely, his withdrawal from the courtly world in favor of a renunciatory Ṣūfī path.

In the manner of one who reaches a long-held goal only to find himself unfulfilled, Āzarī has related that it was at his greatest moment of professional accomplishment that he was struck with a profound spiritual crisis. The arrival of Āzarī at the court of Shāhrukh was followed by a meteoric rise, with his poetry well-received by the assembled court and an appointment to the post of poet laureate, *malik al-shu‘arā’*, within his grasp.⁵⁷ This rising status was solidified with his successfully besting his most serious court rival, Kh^wāja ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Ūdī (“one of those bigoted against [him]”), in a verse competition based on the compositions of the Jalāyirid-era

⁵⁵ *pādishāh-i islām va sulṭān al-ayyām*

⁵⁶ Āzarī, *AMA*, 8b. Though the dating is unspecific, this would put Āzarī at the Shāhrukhid court *circa* the early 810s/late 1400s-early 1410s.

⁵⁷ In Dawlatshāh, *malik al-shu‘arā’*. Āzarī, *AMA*, 8b; Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā’*, 719.

poet Salmān Sāvajī (d. 778/1376).⁵⁸ Triumphant as one of the foremost poets in Timurid lands, Āzarī requested a one-year leave of absence to rest in his home city of Isfarāyin, only to be confronted by the “slicing sword of destiny” and finding that “divine fate overwhelmed [his] human arrangements.”⁵⁹ This sudden moment of realization was characterized by, according to the telling of Āzarī, an abrupt loss of interest in worldly matters and a fierce drive to pursue a more renunciatory, religious lifestyle. As such, returning from “the great deep of drunkenness to the shore of sobriety,” Āzarī devoted himself as a seeker of knowledge in all things for “seven or eight years,” though without truly satisfying his newfound yearning for more sublime intellectual accomplishments:

[I] was involved in seeking knowledge in Arabic... After nearly seven or eight years of attaining knowledge, understanding books, and spending my days in dispute and argumentation, I started into the intellectual arts. I came to understand most of the rhetorical expressions; then, syntax, declension, logic, clarity of meaning, philosophy, astronomy, and theology, and other things. At the end of this, after obtaining a great deal in this manner, and bring about the furthest extent [of knowledge] on this path, I also found nothing except for a great deal of babbling, opposition, dispute, viewpoints, and proofs.⁶⁰

While Āzarī does not give a specific date for this major shift in his life, it may possibly be reconciled with Dawlatshāh’s statement that the final 40 years of the life of Āzarī were spent “on the carpet of obedience and servitude,”⁶¹ that is, beginning in 826/1422-3.⁶² With the *AMA* itself completed in 830/1427, and assuming correct dating from Dawlatshāh, the seven to eight years

⁵⁸ Āzarī, *AMA*, 8b; Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā’*, 718-19.

⁵⁹ Āzarī, *AMA*, 9a.

⁶⁰ Āzarī, *AMA*, 10a.

⁶¹ *chihil sāl bar sajjāda-yi ṭā‘at va ‘ibādat*

⁶² Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā’*, 717.

of study could not have begun with 826/1422-3, but may have rather concluded in this year. This would indicate that the original turn away from the lavish courtly lifestyle and the beginning of the investigation of the various sciences would have occurred around 818-19/1415-17, and the date of Dawlatshāh could be the culmination of this seeking with Āzarī pursuing the Ṣūfī path. This emphatic frustration with a wide variety of the sciences should not be taken to mean that Āzarī rejected them altogether: his *AMA* will make generous use of philosophical and astronomical source material, and the withdrawal of Āzarī from the world of court poetry did not stop him from composing pious devotional poetry.⁶³ The grumbling of Āzarī is in service of a more exalted goal to create something of a hierarchy of sciences, and an effort to find more definitive and reliable means of inquiry. In response to the endless debate and disputation, if not sophistry, of these other sciences, Āzarī would devote himself wholeheartedly to a more pietistic Ṣūfī orientation.

1.5 Āzarī upon the Ṣūfī Path

Having turned away from the comfort of the lifestyle of the courtly poet, Āzarī (in the styling of Dawlatshāh) “placed his foot upon the path of poverty [*faqr*] and self-annihilation [*fanā*].”⁶⁴ Unfortunately, the folio in the *AMA* which would discuss his early spiritual journey is defective, though Dawlatshāh identifies the first mentor of Āzarī as Shaykh Muḥyī al-Dīn Ṭūṣī Ghazālī (d. 830/1427).⁶⁵ While neither Āzarī nor Dawlatshāh provide much in the way of

⁶³ For example, there are a number of poems showing reverence towards ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and the remainder of the imams of the *ithnā ‘asharī* Shī‘a. Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 1–88. The structure of the *dīvān* will be discussed in detail in chapter 4.

⁶⁴ Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā*, 719.

⁶⁵ Kiyānī has hypothesized that this portion of the text was removed intentionally: as Shaykh Muḥyī al-Dīn was most likely a Sunnī, the Ṣafavid-era copyist may have wanted to avoid any hint of ambiguous confessional affiliation for Āzarī. This is a reasonable hypothesis, given that the Ṣafavid era also saw the “editing” of a new recension of the *Ṣafvat al-Ṣafā* in which the early Ṣafavid order was made to be Shī‘ī from its origins, despite the fact that the early leaders of the order were almost certainly Sunnī. That said, the body of the *AMA* at the hand of

discussion of the teachings of Shaykh Muḥyī al-Dīn, nor to which Ṣūfī networks he may have been connected, some basic information about this figure can at least be gleaned from the Timurid historiographical tradition. Both the *Rawḍat al-Ṣafā* of Mīrkh^wānd (d. 903/1498) and *Ḥabīb al-Siyar* of Kh^wādamīr (d. 942/1535-6) confirm that Shaykh Muḥyī al-Dīn was well-regarded by the political leaders of the Timurid realms, and that he died in Aleppo while performing the Ḥajj pilgrimage. The *Rawḍat al-Ṣafā* provided the date of 830 *hijrī*, while including a line of poetry in memoriam to Shaykh Muḥyī al-Dīn which seems to indicate his death occurring *miyāna-yi rajab [ast] va miyāna-yi ramazān*. The presentation of two distinct months is not explained, though a range of death date beginning in Rajab 830 would correspond to a *mīlādī* year of 1427, and (as will be clear as the biography of Āzarī is discussed) would likewise indicate the *AMA* was completed in the later months of 830 *hijrī*, meaning 1427 *mīlādī*.⁶⁶ The death date of 830 *hijrī* is confirmed in Kh^wādamīr.⁶⁷ Finally, Jāmī (d. 898/1492) did mention Shaykh Muḥyī al-Dīn in his *Nafaḥāt al-Uns* as being a descendent of Abū Ḥamid Ghazālī, but with the dismissive caveat that he was a teacher from whom Fakhr al-Dīn Lūristānī could not find what he sought.⁶⁸ According to Kh^wādamīr, Muḥyī al-Dīn was a popular figure in Khurasan, visited frequently by the leaders and commanders of Timurid realms and treated

this same Ṣafavid scribe will be shown to have not been excised of material related to the Ḥurūfīyya, or from Āzarī himself discussing his Ṣūfī lineage as reaching back through the Kubrawīyya, so any speculation about scribal editing will have to remain tentative. Āzarī, *Dīvān*, xxxix; Michel M. Mazzaoui, “A ‘New’ Edition of *Ṣafvat al-Ṣafā*,” in *History and Historiography of Post-Mongol Central Asia and the Middle East: Studies in Honor of John E. Woods.*, ed. Judith Pfeiffer, Sholeh Quinn, and Ernest Tucker (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006), 303–10.

⁶⁶ Muḥammad ibn Khāvandshāh Mīrkh^wānd, *Tārīkh-i Rawḍat al-Ṣafā fī Sīrat al-Anbiyā’ wa-al-Mulūk wa-al-Khulafā’*, ed. Jamshīd Kiyānfār, vol. 10 (Tehran: Aṣāṭīr, 1380 [2001]), 5395-6.

⁶⁷ Kh^wādamīr, *Ḥabīb al-Siyar* 4:6.

⁶⁸ ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī, *Nafaḥāt al-Uns min Ḥaḍarāt al-Quds*, ed. Maḥmūd ‘Ābidī (Tehran: Mu’assasa-yi Ittīlā’āt, 1375 [1996]), 454.

with great respect.⁶⁹ In this regard, Shaykh Muḥyī al-Dīn would have fit naturally into the world of the Ṣūfī tradition in the 9th/15th century, for by the time Āzarī was seeking a Ṣūfī instructor, the *‘ilm-i taṣawwuf* – despite its reputation as being linked with strict renunciatory discipline and ecstatic visionary experiences – was anything but universally quietist. While certain lineages were more wary of direct political engagement, there was no shortage of Ṣūfī figures in Iranian lands and beyond who developed close relationships with political leaders, even going so far as to play a role in the political landscape.⁷⁰ In fact, one will recall that this exact dynamic played out in Bahmanid domains shortly before Āzarī’s own arrival to South India, as the saint Gīsū Dirāz threw his spiritual weight behind Aḥmad Shāh, providing a key boost of legitimacy as Aḥmad overthrew his brother Fīrūz and seized the throne at Gulbarga for himself.⁷¹ Likewise, following the death of Gīsū Dirāz, Aḥmad was quick to turn to a new source of spiritual legitimacy, as he invited the Ṣūfī shaykh Ni‘mat Allāh himself to join him in the Deccan, but was forced to settle for, first, the saint’s grandson Nūr Allāh, and after the death of Ni‘mat Allāh in 834/1430-31, the rest of the family.⁷² It is of particular note, then, that both the first mentor of Āzarī in Shaykh Muḥyī al-Dīn, and the descendents Ni‘mat Allāh, whom Āzarī would eventually visit, were not totally averse to the fruitful interaction between Ṣūfī figures and the powers that be.

⁶⁹ See Kh^wādamīr, *Ḥabīb al-Siyar*, 4:6.

⁷⁰ These dynamics will be discussed again in chapter 3. For certain clear examples of this phenomenon in the post-Mongol period, see: Lawrence G. Potter, “Sufis and Sultans in Post-Mongol Iran,” *Iranian Studies* 27, no. i–iv (1994): 77–102; Muzaffar Alam, “The Mughals, the Sufi Shaikhs and the Formation of the Akbari Dispensation,” *Modern Asian Studies* 43, no. 1 (2009): 135–74.

⁷¹ The episode is summarized in: Haroon Khan Sherwani, *The Bahmanis of the Deccan: An Objective Study* (Hyderabad: The Manager of Publications, Saood Manzil, 1953), 164–70.

⁷² Sherwani, *The Bahmanis of the Deccan*, 193–94.

While Āzarī did not pursue a life of total seclusion, he certainly devoted his energies in new directions compared to his time wholly committed to the world of poetry. While in the service of this teacher, Āzarī both studied the books of prophetic traditions [*aḥādīth*] and embarked on the Ḥajj pilgrimage with his mentor. Confirming the notice provided in the chronicle sources, Āzarī related that Shaykh Muḥyī al-Dīn passed away after falling ill in Aleppo *en route* to Mecca, leaving Āzarī to complete the pilgrimage on his own.⁷³ According to the *AMA*, after the funeral of the shaykh and the division of his inheritance, Āzarī completed the Ḥajj pilgrimage, passed through Jerusalem on his return to Damascus, and spent a bit of time resting with the son of Shaykh Muḥyī al-Dīn, Imām al-Dīn.⁷⁴ After setting out “along the paths of those two blessed nobles, Commander of the Faithful ‘Alī and Commander of the Faithful Ḥusayn⁷⁵ and passing through Ḥilla, Āzarī and Imām al-Dīn had the misfortune of being robbed by bandits in Kurdistān, though they escaped with their lives and were ultimately rescued through the assistance of the governor of Ḥilla.⁷⁶ Though not discussed by Āzarī, who mentioned only returning to Khurasan with little other additional detail, the *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā’* stated that, following the death of Shaykh Muḥyī al-Dīn, Āzarī returned to Iran⁷⁷ to seek an audience with Shāh Ni‘mat Allāh Valī, the eponymous founder of the Ni‘mat-allāhī Order, accepting both

⁷³ Āzarī, *AMA*, 11a.

⁷⁴ Āzarī, *AMA*, 11a.

⁷⁵ This is somewhat unclear, though may be referring to the unusual path Ḥusayn took to flee Damascus towards Mecca at the time of the death of Mu‘āwiya and the accession of Yazīd. Laura Veccia Vaglieri, “(al-) Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib,” *EP*.

⁷⁶ Āzarī, *AMA*, 11b.

⁷⁷ Dawlatshāh mentioned a “return to Sayyid Ni‘mat Allāh,” which, given that Āzarī had not yet met him or entered his service, might indicate instead a geographic “return” for Āzarī to the lands of his birth. Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā’*, 719.

cloak (*khirqā*) and license (*ijāzat*) from this elder.⁷⁸ It is somewhat curious that Āzarī would not mention meeting such a well-known figure as Ni‘mat Allāh, though it is in keeping with the fact that Ni‘mat Allāh did not figure all that prominently as an authority in either the *AMA* or *AJA*.⁷⁹ In any case, it would seem most likely that Āzarī briefly passed by the residence of Ni‘mat Allāh at Māhān before finally returning to Khurasan and completing the *AMA* in the “months of 830(1427).”

1.6 The Bahmanid Court of the Indian Deccan

As it is known from the opening of this chapter itself that Āzarī eventually found himself in South India, the time between the composition of the *AMA* and the departure of Āzarī for the Deccan must be completed through recourse to both Dawlatshāh – who seems to have had Āzarī himself as a source⁸⁰ – and the *AJA*, which, though brief, clarifies the timeline somewhat. The introduction to the *AJA* reiterates that the *AMA* was composed in the year 830/1427 upon the return of Āzarī to Khurasan from Syria.⁸¹ In Āzarī’s own words, following the composition of

⁷⁸ Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā’*, 719.

⁷⁹ The Ṣūfī affiliation of Āzarī will be discussed at length in chapter 3. Though Ni‘mat Allāh is discussed respectfully in these texts, he appears on only 5 folios of the *AMA* and 7 of the *AJA*, a far more modest amount than other well-known Ṣūfī thinkers, as will be explored later. One reference in the *AJA* does discuss Ni‘mat Allāh with particular reverence as, “my lord, sayyid, and exemplar...the exemplar of the later shaykhs” (*makhdūmī wa sayyidī wa qudwatī...qudwat mashā’ikh al-muta’akhhirīn*). Āzarī, *AJA*, 113b. Curiously, it is this alleged affiliation which most often appears in existing literature which mentions Āzarī, possibly based on the legacy of the narrative in the *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā’*. See Āzarī’s being included in a list of poets who also were members of the Ni‘mat-allāhī Order: Terry Graham, “Shāh Ni‘matullāh Walī: Founder of the Ni‘matullāhī Sufi Order,” in *The Heritage of Sufism Volume 2: The Legacy of Medieval Persian Sufism*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn, (London: Oneworld Publications, 1999), 189.

⁸⁰ That is, in the account of the meeting between Āzarī and Ulugh Beg later in their lives, the account is given in the format of a direct report from Āzarī himself. Chronologically, it would be possible for Āzarī and Dawlatshāh to have met. Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā’*, 647-8.

⁸¹ Hamza b. ‘Alī Malik Āzarī-yi Isfarāyīnī, *Jawāhir al-Asrār* (Tehran, 1043/163), #5882, Kitābkhāna-yi Majlis-i Shūrā-yi Millī., 3b

the *AMA*, he again successfully carried out the Ḥajj pilgrimage⁸² before his travel to the Deccan, though without giving any additional detail related to his travel in contrast to the *AMA*.⁸³ This too ultimately accords with the *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā’*, which stated that Āzarī, at a date chronologically later than the visit to Ni‘mat Allāh while returning to Khurasan, sought out a number of “friends of God” (*awliyā’ Allāh*) for his spiritual training, passed through Syria, completed the Ḥajj pilgrimage, and spent a year at Mecca composing his *Sa‘ī al-Ṣafā* (*The Striving of Purity*), a discussion of the rites of the pilgrimage and the history of the Ka‘ba of Mecca.⁸⁴ One can only speculate as to why Āzarī did not mention his composition of the *Sa‘ī al-Ṣafā* in the *AJA*, though it is theoretically possible that he simply did not see such material as relevant to the task at hand of composing this second esoteric compendium. In any case, it was at this point that Āzarī made a short but impactful trip away from his native Iranian lands towards the court of Aḥmad Shāh Bahmanī in Bidar.

While Āzarī did not provide a specific reason for his travel to India – that is, an invitation to Bidar from Aḥmad Shāh, or a desire to flee an unpleasant situation in his homeland, though each of these would seem possible – there can be little doubt that he had no trouble associating himself with the Bahmanid court. As noted in the anecdote which opened this chapter, almost immediately upon his arrival in Bidar, Āzarī had distinguished himself in his old vocation of

⁸² Rajā’ī has stated that this second pilgrimage was completed with Ni‘mat Allāh, but this appears to be a misreading of the *Majālis al-Mu‘minīn*, which stated: “[Āzarī] returned after the death of Shaykh Muḥyī al-Dīn to Sayyid Ni‘mat Allāh and remained in his presence, occupied with the path; and [Āzarī] had from [Ni‘mat Allāh] a license and blessed cloak; and he went on the Ḥajj a second time, living next to the sanctuary for an entire year.” The text does not state that the pilgrimage was undertaken *with* Ni‘mat Allāh, but rather, this assertion is based on an error in the work of Nafīsī. Rajā’ī, “Āzarī Ṭūsī,” *EIr*; Sa‘īd Nafīsī, *Tārīkh-i Nazm va Naṣr dar Īrān va dar Zabān-i Fārsī: tā Pāyān-i Qarn-i Dahum-i Hijrī*, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Tehran: Furūqī, 1344 [1965]), 294; Qāzī Nūr Allāh Shūshārī, *Kitāb-i Mustafāb-i Majālis al-Mu‘minīn*, vol. 2 (Tehran: Kitābfurūshī-yi Islāmiyya, 1365 [1986]), 125.

⁸³ Āzarī, *AJA*, 3b.

⁸⁴ Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā’*, 720.

poetry. Indeed, this was not the only return to form for Āzarī, as it is noted in Firishta that he was also a mentor for the young son of Aḥmad I, ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Aḥmad II (who would later rule from 839-862/1436-1458), providing mentorship and guidance for the crown prince as he once had for Ulugh Beg.⁸⁵ In terms of timing, there is not a specific date given by Āzarī or his biographers for when he departed from Khurasan and arrived in Bidar, though given his composition of the *AMA* in 830/1427, his completing the Ḥajj again, and his one-year stay in Mecca, the approximation of his reaching Bidar in perhaps 832/1428-29 is reasonable.⁸⁶ The move of the Bahmanid capital to Bidar would have already been initiated by this time: both Ibrāhīm Shīrāzī and Ṭabāṭabā place the decision to move the capital as occurring just after the accession of Aḥmad I, and as noted by Sherwani, there is inscription evidence at Bidar to suggest the move having taken place by 827/1424, within two years of Aḥmad having seized the throne from his brother Fīrūz in 825/1422.⁸⁷ While it is certainly accurate that Aḥmad Shāh was interested in attracting Iranian notables to his court and maintaining connections with Iranian lands, per his eventual connections with the Ni‘mat-allāhī Ṣūfī network or his correspondence with the Timurid leader Ibrāhīm-Sulṭān,⁸⁸ I would hypothesize that the enticement of a plum position in Bidar may not have been the only reason why Āzarī may have wanted to spend time in the Deccan. To place his timeline in a broader context, one will recall that in the same *hijrī* year in which Āzarī completed

⁸⁵ Firishta, *Tārīkh-i Firishta*, 2:377.

⁸⁶ Rajā’ī, “Āzarī Ṭūsī,” *EI*.

⁸⁷ ‘Alī b. ‘Azīz Allāh Ṭabāṭabā, *Burhān-i Ma’āsir* (Delhi: Maṭba‘at Jāmi‘ah Dihlī, 1315 [1936]), 53–55; Ibrāhīm Shīrāzī, *Tazkirat al-Mulūk*, 13a–13b; Sherwani, *The Bahmanis of the Deccan*, 183–84.

⁸⁸ For a recent book chapter on these connections, see: Payvand Firouzeh, “Dynastic Self-Fashioning and the Arts of the Pen: Sufi and Calligraphy Networks between Fifteenth-Century Shiraz and Bidar,” in *Iran and the Deccan: Persianate Art, Culture, and Talent in Circulation, 1400-1700*, ed. Keelan Overton (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2020), 145–74. On Timurid Shiraz, see also: Jean Aubin, “Le mécénat timouride a Chiraz,” *Studia Islamica* 8 (1957): 71–88/

his first esoteric compendium in the *AMA*, there was an attempt on the life of Shāhrukh by a Ḥurūfī follower, Aḥmad-i Lur, in Herat on 23 Rabīʿ II 830/2 March 1427.⁸⁹ As will be discussed in much greater detail in the next chapter, this wide-ranging encyclopedia of occult topics of Āzarī included a number of positive discussions of Fażl Allāh Astarābādī (d. 736/1394), in which this founder of the Ḥurūfiyya is taken as a genuine authority of esoteric knowledge.⁹⁰ In other words, Āzarī would have composed a work which included chapters openly endorsing certain Ḥurūfī teachings in the same year in which the aftermath of the assassination attempt on Shāhrukh saw an intense political pressure campaign against not only the Ḥurūfiyya themselves, but anyone within Shāhrukhid circles who had an interest in the science of lettrism more broadly. Even a figure such as Šāʿin al-Dīn Turka – no supporter of Fażl Allāh – would be subject to intense interrogation at the hands of the authorities as part of this backlash.⁹¹ It is, at the very least, a curious coincidence that Āzarī had hardly written the last word of the *AMA* before departing from Khurasan for first, Mecca, for at least a year, then onward to Bidar. Here was a figure who was well-known in the upper echelons of Timurid power who had written a work both deeply concerned with investigating the science of the letters (*ʿilm-i ḥurūf*) and not opposed to incorporating the radical beliefs of Fażl Allāh Astarābādī into his analysis. If his departure

⁸⁹ On this event, and specifically its dating, note: İlker Evrim Binbaş, “The Anatomy of a Regicide Attempt: Shāhrukh, the Ḥurūfīs, and the Timurid Intellectuals in 830/1426-27,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series, 23, no. 3 (July 2013): 391–428.

⁹⁰ The thought of Fażl Allāh and his inheritors will be discussed more carefully in chapter 2. Overviews of his life and works may be found in: Shahzad Bashir, *Fazlallah Astarabadi and the Hurufis*, *Makers of the Muslim World* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005); Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, *Words of Power: Ḥurūfī Teachings Between Shiʿism and Sufism in Medieval Islam: The Original Doctrine of Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī*, Shiʿi Heritage Series 3 (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2015); Hellmut Ritter, “Studien zur Geschichte der islamischen Frömmigkeit, II. Die Anfänge der Ḥurūfisekte,” *Oriens* 7, no. 1 (1954): 1–54.

⁹¹ Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks*, 146-149. On Šāʿin al-Dīn Turka’s negative opinion towards the Ḥurūfiyya, see: Matthew Melvin-Koushki, “The Quest for a Universal Science: The Occult Philosophy of Šāʿin al-Dīn Turka Işfahānī (1369-1432) and Intellectual Millenarianism in Early Timurid Iran” (Ph.D., United States – Connecticut, Yale University, 2012), 428-433.

from Khurasan for Mecca and India in approximately the *hijrī* year 830 was coincidental, then it is a striking coincidence, indeed.

While Āzarī has consistently been mentioned as a figure of note in histories of the Bahmanid Sultanate, he seems to have not deemed his time in Bidar a topic worthy of extensive discussion for the *AJA*. In his autobiographical introduction to this second esoteric compendium, Āzarī merely confirmed that he traveled to the territory of Aḥmad Shāh “Ghāzī” and presented a copy of the *AMA* to the sovereign before returning back almost to his homeland in Khurasan.⁹² Unfortunately for the purposes of Bahmanid history, this is the extent of the discussion in the *AJA*. Of greater importance for re-telling the biography of Āzarī are the later chronicles of the Muslim sultanates of South India, which do greater justice to his short stay at the court of Aḥmad I. While considerably later than the biographical dictionary of Dawlatshāh, the major Persian chronicle sources of Indian history, such as the history of Firishta (in two recensions, the *Gulshān-i Ibrāhīmī* and the subsequent *Tārīkh-i Nawras-nāma*) or the *Burhān-i Ma’āsir* of Ṭabāṭabā, may give some additional insight into the actual relationship between the Bahmanid sultans and Āzarī. First, in the *Burhān*, Āzarī appeared in Bidar on the occasion of the construction of the new Bahmanid palace there, where a large gift from Aḥmad I is given as a reward for the two lines recited by Āzarī in description of this new abode.⁹³ While delivering a witty line in initially refusing the funding (100,000 Deccani *tankas*, or 1,000 *tumans*) to the delight of Aḥmad I – “none shall bear your gifts except your own steeds” – the episode of Āzarī refusing the funds on account of his own principles, which appears in Dawlatshāh,⁹⁴ is not

⁹² Āzarī, *AJA*, 2b.

⁹³ Ṭabāṭabā, *Burhān*, 71.

⁹⁴ Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā’*, 720.

perfectly replicated in the Indian sources. On the contrary, Aḥmad is so satisfied by this response that he adds an additional 25,000 *tankas* to his original gift. While made bashful (*iḥtishām*) by the excessive nature of this award, so too is Āzarī described as joyful (*surūr*) at the offer. It would also seem that Āzarī was not the only Ṣūfī present at the court at this time, as his lines in praise of the new palace were written out in calligraphy for inscription by the Ni‘mat-allāhī follower Mawlānā Sharaf al-Dīn Māzandarānī.⁹⁵ The *Burhān* also hinted at the timing of this event: as soon as this narrative section has concluded, it begins a discussion of other Bahmanid political events as taking place “when that peerless, auspicious king had sat on the throne for 12 years.” It is well-established that Aḥmad I would have seized power from his brother, Tāj al-Dīn Fīrūz Shāh, in the year 825/1422. Likewise, as Dawlatshāh refers to Āzarī having spent the last 30 years of his life in Isfarāyīn, this must place his return to Iran from India as happening by 836/1432-3. If counting the year of his ascendance as his first year on the throne, then the year 836 would have constituted the 12th year of his reign. Even accounting for the rough nature of these chronological signifiers – the unspecific nature of the “30 years” in Isfarāyīn in Dawlatshāh, and the fact that the “12 years on the throne” of Ṭabāṭabā is technically in reference to a narrative following that of Āzarī, not about Āzarī himself – the *Burhān* still places Āzarī as receiving a gift from Aḥmad I and returning to his homeland of Isfarāyīn at roughly the same time as Dawlatshāh. More curious than these chronological specifics, though, is the fact that Ṭabāṭabā hardly has Āzarī playing the role of a Ṣūfī renunciant who happened to be passing through India in the course of other travels. Rather, Āzarī seems to be returning to his roots as a court poet, reciting verses in praise of the sultan and being handsomely rewarded for it.

⁹⁵ Ṭabāṭabā, *Burhān*, 71.

The history of Firishta paints a picture of a Āzarī who is even more closely tied to the Bahmanid Sultanate in the period of Aḥmad I than has been indicated by the *Burhān*. Perhaps of greatest note is the aforementioned assertion of Firishta that Āzarī was the composer of a verse history of the Bahmanid Sultans, the *Bahman-nāma-yi Dakkanī*, (*The Epic of the Deccanī Bahmanids*), and that it is this same *Bahman-nāma* discussed in close proximity to the full genealogy of ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Ḥasan Bahman Shāh, the founder of the dynasty, back to the figure of Bahrām Gūr.⁹⁶ This was not the first time a Bahmanid chronicler sought to establish this Iranian connection, as an earlier attempt to connect the Bahmanid sultans to the Iranian monarchical tradition is also found in the *Futūḥ al-Salāṭīn* of ‘Iṣāmī.⁹⁷ What is less important for this study than the skepticism towards this genealogy by Firishta is the apparent existence of the *Bahman-nāma* itself, which places Āzarī as an official chronicler of the polity in the early 830s/1430s. As the work itself has apparently been lost, there is no way to review whether the *Bahman-nāma* drew from ‘Iṣāmī, for example, or the attitude towards the Bahmanid sultans present in the work. What comes through clearly from this account, however, is the fact of Āzarī working in the service of the Bahmanid sultans as an historian for the regime. Later on in his chronicle, Firishta will give Āzarī a familiar title, as the poet is said to have been known as the Poet Laureate, *malik al-shu‘arā’*, at Bidar.⁹⁸ If Firishta is to be believed, then, the career of Āzarī as a high-ranking court poet was hardly put fully to rest with his departure from the court of Shāhrukh, and on the contrary, he functioned in an equally prestigious role in Bidar.

⁹⁶ Firishta, *Tārīkh-i Firishta*, 2:250-1.

⁹⁷ ‘Iṣāmī, *Futūḥ al-Salāṭīn*, ed. A.S. Usha (Madras [Chennai]: University of Madras, 1327 [1948]), 9-10; 578-9.

⁹⁸ Firishta, *Tārīkh-i Firishta*, 2:377.

The image of Āzarī presented throughout *Firishta* is one that, while relating certain common points of historical fact also present in the earlier *tazkira* literature, is nonetheless significantly different from what is seen in Dawlatshāh or Gāzurgāhī. There is one account in particular that must be emphasized here: having composed his history of the Bahmanid sultans in the *Bahman-nāma* through the early reign of Aḥmad I, Āzarī – someone who had received “worthy reward[s]” from the Bahmanids for his poetic talent – sought leave from the court so that he might return to his homelands, that is, Isfarāyīn. Troubled by this request, the king made an emotional appeal to his poet laureate:

I have become greatly vexed by the death of my lord, Sayyid Muḥammad Gīsū Darāz, and your arrival has been a lightening of the matters of grief and sorrow. It would be unbearable that I also be captive to your departure.⁹⁹

The account of Gīsū Darāz arriving in the Deccan and putting his spiritual and political weight behind Aḥmad at the expense of his brother, Fīrūz Shāh, in 825/1422, only to pass away shortly afterwards, has already received considerable attention elsewhere and does not need to be recounted in full. What is of greatest importance is not merely that Aḥmad I was melancholic over the death of his spiritual patron and (literal) kingmaker, but the way in which Āzarī was practically filling the void left by this great saint at the Bahmanid court.¹⁰⁰ It must again be emphasized that Āzarī in this account is hardly a minor figure in the Bahmanid royal scene, or someone who, in the words of Dawlatshāh, simply “spent time” (*chandgāh dar ān diyār bi-sar burd*) in Indian lands. Rather, the image is of a court poet and Šūfī writer who, following the

⁹⁹ *Firishta, Tārīkh-i Firishta*, 2:374.

¹⁰⁰ This is not to say that Āzarī would have a comparable impact in the broader Deccan cultural sphere as Gīsū Darāz, so much that he was another beloved member of the court – indeed, the dynasty’s preeminent court poet and historian – and contributor towards the legitimacy of the Bahmanids whose departure would be a source of personal misery for Aḥmad. Āzarī’s own considerable spiritual training should allow for an assumption that Āzarī’s role at the court was to be not merely literary but also religious and, by its very nature of being at the court, political.

death of the pre-eminent Šūfī of the lands in Gīsū Darāz, is begged by the Bahmanid sultan to remain in the service of the court.

1.7 Return to Isfarāyīn and the Visit of Sulṭān-Muḥammad b. Bāysunghur

The remainder of the biographical account of Āzarī contained in this section of *Firishta* contains sporadic new details, but largely presents little that has not been seen in other historiographical materials. Included at this point is his aforementioned recitation of lines on the occasion of a new Bahmanid palace which are so well received that they are inscribed on the structure itself.¹⁰¹ These lines set the stage for Āzarī, overwhelmed with homesickness, to finally gain the leave he requested from the sultan. Informed of these verses by the crown prince ‘Alā’ al-Dīn, as well as the offer of Āzarī to give as tribute half of his “recompense” [*ṣavāb*] for the Ḥajj pilgrimage, the sultan immediately summons Āzarī into his presence. In a familiar scene, Āzarī is offered 40,000 *tankas*,¹⁰² dutifully refusing to accept them out of modesty. The sultan, amused by his rejection, adds an additional reward of 20,000 *tankas*, a special robe, five East African (*ḥabashī*) servants, and five Indian servants to the total gift. Perhaps knowing better than to press his luck, Āzarī this time accepted the gift and pledged to continue composing the *Bahman-nāma* as long as he was able.¹⁰³ Little of what remains in this section of *Firishta* offers

¹⁰¹ *Firishta*, *Tārīkh-i Firishta*, 2:375. Mullā Sharaf al-Dīn Māzandarānī, the Ni‘mat-allāhī adept mentioned in the *Burhān*, appears here, as do a set of otherwise unacknowledged Telugu craftsmen who do the actual inscription of the lines.

¹⁰² *Firishta* equates one *tanka* to one silver *tula*. According to Steingass, a *tula* is 2.5 *miṣqāls*: Francis Joseph Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary, Including the Arabic Words and Phrases to Be Met with in Persian Literature* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1892), 337, 1172. The *miṣqāl* was used as a weight measurement for Islamic currency, based originally on the Byzantine gold *solidus*, and related in weight to the *dirham* by the ratio, *de jure*, of 10:7, and *de facto*, of 3:2. For a definition of terms, including a discussion of specific weights of individual *miṣqāls* across geographical locations, see: Walther Hinz, *Islamische Masse und Gewichte: Umgerechnet ins Metrische System*, Handbuch der Orientalistik, Supplement 1, Issue 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1955), 1-8.

¹⁰³ *Firishta*, *Tārīkh-i Firishta*, 2:375-6. *Firishta* also noted that the *Bahman-nāma*, after the death of Āzarī, was continued on from his last chapter on the reign of Sultan Humāyūn Shāh (r. 862-5/1458-61) and completed through the end of the dynasty by other authors. *Firishta*, *Tārīkh-i Firishta*, 2:376.

information that has not been found elsewhere: his interaction with Ulugh Beg from the *Majālis al-Ushshāq* is recorded almost word-for-word, and the episode concludes with the death date of Āzarī and mention of his using his resources, likely having increased in value through his time in India, to invest in religious institutions in Isfarāyin.¹⁰⁴

While a few additional notes about the later life of Āzarī will still be made before turning to a discussion of his written works and the material to be covered in future chapters, there is a reason for doing such a careful examination in this time in India. This attention to the inconsistencies within the sources is not just textual analysis for its own sake, or to suggest that Āzarī's commitment to a life of poverty and renunciation as seen in the *Tazkira-yi Shu'arā* is baseless hagiography. Rather, it is an attempt to reconsider exactly how connected Āzarī actually was to the Bahmanid sultans, and to what extent he might be considered a major player in the Bahmanid political scene of the 830s/1430s at Bidar. Though the earliest account of Dawlatshāh was composed fewer than thirty years after the death of Āzarī in 892/1486 and in Herat – which is to say, not far from Isfarāyin –, this icon of saintly self-denial is nonetheless being offered great sums of money by Aḥmad I, with little explanation of the circumstances of this gift. It is in the later chronicle sources that the tension seems to be resolved: Āzarī was not simply someone of poetic talents, but the Poet Laureate of Bidar, the very title he had won and almost immediately relinquished at the court of Shāhrukh. Hardly a marginal figure in the Deccan, Āzarī was personally implored to stay at the capital by the reigning sultan while he completed the official history of the dynasty, his *Bahman-nāma*. It is also not an insignificant detail that the poetry of Āzarī appeared in the inscriptions at the palace in Bidar. The reign of Aḥmad I was one

¹⁰⁴ Firishta, *Tārīkh-i Firishta*, 2:377. Firishta also provides an abstract of Āzarī's life overall which mentions briefly his choice to pursue the life of the dervishes and his time in the Ḥijāz prior to his arrival in India.

of intense flux for the Bahmanid dynasty, as the monarchy was violently transferred from Fīrūz to Aḥmad, the capital was moved to Bidar, and Gīsū Darāz, one of the most important Muslim saintly figures in South Asia and the spiritual patron of the regime, had passed away only a few years prior. It cannot be taken lightly that Āzarī, providing literary inspiration for the tangible inscriptions of the palace, and personally adored by the sultan, was at the center of these attempts to make new the Bahmanid Sultanate, both in terms of the political center and of spiritual lineage. If Āzarī was, in fact, not a minor figure passing through Bidar but rather someone closely tied to the Bahmanid court at a time when the polity was being re-formed under Aḥmad I, then his writings both before and after his time in the Deccan cannot be read as wholly insignificant to the Bahmanid project. Given the paucity of extant, contemporary sources over vast swaths of Bahmanid history, the connection of Āzarī to the sultans at Bidar has significance beyond his own biography.

While Āzarī may have departed India in roughly 836/1432-3, in line with Dawlatshāh's statement that he spent the last 30 years of his life back in his homeland, he cannot be thought to have been fully retired from his earlier career as an advisor to political figures of the Timurid world. On the contrary, in accordance with his earlier life, this apparent renunciant of the world of the court happened to have a brief connection with Sulṭān-Muḥammad b. Bāysunghur (d. 855/1452), the Timurid prince who would eventually rebel against his grandfather Shāhrukh.¹⁰⁵ Sulṭān-Muḥammad, a grandson of Shāhrukh, was granted the governorship of Persian Iraq in 847/1443.¹⁰⁶ Seeing an opening for his own advancement in the political confusion following the

¹⁰⁵ See Binbaş, "The Rebellion of Sulṭān-Muḥammad," in *Intellectual Networks*, "51-67.

¹⁰⁶ Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks*, 18.

illness of Shāhrukh in 848/1444-5, he rose in rebellion against his grandfather. The *Tazkira-yi Shu‘arā’* discusses the period as follows:

It is said that the great prince, Sulṭān-Muḥammad b. Bāysunghur, when he was passing through ‘Irāq, came to visit Shaykh Āzarī. The Shaykh gave him useful advice on the laws of justice and mercy, and pure belief was given to the prince at the hand of the Shaykh. He ordered that a large bag of gold be poured out for the Shaykh, and the Shaykh refused that money, reciting this line:

The gold that you take and pour out?
There is nothing better than to not take it.¹⁰⁷

To clarify the matter of chronology, while Rajā’ī has placed the meeting between Sulṭān-Muḥammad and Āzarī as occurring after Shāhrukh’s death, with Sulṭān-Muḥammad on the way to claim the territories of “Fārs, ‘Irāq-i ‘Ajam, and Māzandarān,”¹⁰⁸ Binbaş has identified it as taking place when Sulṭān-Muḥammad was on the way to the territories (“Tabaristan, Daylaman, Kurdistan, and Persian Iraq”) granted to him by Shāhrukh in 847/1443, and thus would have occurred prior to his becoming settled in Qum.¹⁰⁹ Based on the language within the *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā’*, with Sulṭān-Muḥammad described as “moving towards ‘Iraq” (*‘azīmat-i ‘irāq*) when he met with Āzarī, I am inclined to agree with the position of Binbaş. The *topos* of the saint refusing the patronage of a sultan (or in this case, prince) is less significant than the fact that, once again, Āzarī found himself at the center of a major political transition in the middle of the 9th/15th century Persianate world. A bit of cynicism about the hagiographical nature of the earliest biographical entries on Āzarī may again be called for at this moment: what would a major political player on the Timurid scene, Sulṭān-Muḥammad, want with Āzarī in the first place? The episode is framed by Dawlatshāh as being one of a political figure seeking out the

¹⁰⁷ Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā’*, 721.

¹⁰⁸ Rajā’ī, “Āzarī Ṭūsī,” *Elr.*

¹⁰⁹ Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks*, 56.

blessing of a Šūfī saint, which is hardly an uncommon episode in the 9th/15th century, and in fact, Sulṭān-Muḥammad was not alone in seeking out the company of Āzarī:

[Āzarī] did not seek refuge at the door of the house of anyone from the people of the government [*dawlat*], but rather, in blessing, the people of religion and the world, and the lords of kingdom and the people [*arbāb-i mulk va millat*], sought out an audience with him, and were constantly showing supplication in service to his nobility.¹¹⁰

One might think that Sulṭān-Muḥammad was simply seeking an audience with a prominent local saint while passing through Khurasan were it not for the fact that the shaykh granted him advice on both “pure belief” (*i ‘tiqādī ṣāfi*) and the “customs of justice” (*qānūn-i ‘adālat*). In other words, Āzarī – who will be shown throughout the following sections to be not only a figure with certain connections to well-known Šūfī networks such as the Kubrawiyya, but also a full-blown occult scientist who dabbled in the writings of the Ḥurūfiyya movement – was providing counsel to Sulṭān-Muḥammad at a critical point in the career of this ambitious Timurid prince. As such, he cannot be considered only a footnote in a broader history, but rather a well-connected occultist intimately tied to both the Bahmanid and Timurid political scenes.

1.8 Personal Connections: Colleagues and Rivals

There is scant information regarding additional personal connections of Āzarī, both friendly and hostile, beyond what has already been discussed, and what few details can be pieced together are largely scattered throughout the *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā*. Āzarī is mentioned in passing as having been one of a series of contemporaries of the poet Amīr Shāhī Sabzavārī (d. 857/1453-4), placing him alongside other well-known poets of Khurasan such as Kh^wāja Fakhr al-Dīn Awḥad Mustawfī; Mawlānā Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā-yi Sībak, better known as Fattāḥī Nīshāpūrī,

¹¹⁰ Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā*, 721.

the composer of the *Dastūr-i ‘Ushshāq/Husn u Dil* (d. 852 or 853/1448-49);¹¹¹ and Tāj al-Dīn Ḥasan Salīmī-yi Tūnī.¹¹² There is also evidence that Āzarī himself served as a mentor to other contemporary poets, as Ṭālib Jājarmī (d. 850/1454) is said to have been one of his students.¹¹³ Dawlatshāh also shares a direct report from Amīr Nizām al-Dīn Aḥmad Suhaylī that the latter spent some time as a young man studying under Āzarī.¹¹⁴ It should also be noted that the pupils of Āzarī were not necessarily those pursuing the Ṣūfī path, despite Āzarī himself likely having donned the robes of the dervishes by the time he was taking on students. Ṭālib-i Jājarmī was a poet of some good repute, having dedicated one of his works to a grandson of Shāhrukh, Sulṭān-‘Abd Allāh b. Ibrāhīm Sulṭān,¹¹⁵ but he does not seem to have earned a reputation as a Ṣūfī or occultist, as was the case with Āzarī. As for Aḥmad Suhaylī, he would have had a similar background to Āzarī – he had both served in a courtly capacity¹¹⁶ and spent time among the dervishes –,¹¹⁷ though his meeting with the older shaykh (as recorded by Dawlatshāh) was said to have been focused on his selection of a poetic pen-name (*takhalluṣ*).¹¹⁸ There is mention in Dawlatshāh of religious endowments left by Āzarī in Isfarāyīn, which would imply a sort of lineage of instruction in his name, though this alone is not enough to suggest a distinctive

¹¹¹ On the long influence of this work in Indian writing in both Persian and Urdu, see: Allesandro Bausani, “Fattāhī,” *EF*².

¹¹² Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tazkira al-Shu‘arā’*, 776-77.

¹¹³ Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tazkira al-Shu‘arā’*, 767.

¹¹⁴ Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tazkira al-Shu‘arā’*, 911

¹¹⁵ Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tazkira al-Shu‘arā’*, 768; Thomas William Beale, *An Oriental Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Henry George Keene (London: W.H. Allen & Co., Limited, 1894), 399.

¹¹⁶ Khwāndamīr, *Ḥabīb al-Siyar*, 4:159.

¹¹⁷ Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tazkira al-Shu‘arā’*, 910.

¹¹⁸ Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā’*, 911-12.

“Āzarīan” school. For all of his admirers, Āzarī was not universally beloved. Jāmī in his *Bahāristān* covers Āzarī in only a few lines, with the caveat that his poetry contained a good deal of “incoherent words” [*tāmāt*].¹¹⁹ There is also a record of a brief competitive back-and-forth between Āzarī and Kh^wāja ‘Alī Shihāb Turshīzī, reminiscent of Āzarī’s earlier battles with Kh^wāja ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Ūdī.¹²⁰ There is likewise at least a single example of one of the *ghazals* of Āzarī being help up for parody by the satirist Jamāl al-Dīn Abū Ishāq Ḥallāj Aṭ‘ima-yi Shīrāzī (known as Bushāq), in which an ostensible love poem of Āzarī’s is converted (in fitting fashion for the *Dīvān-i Aṭ‘ima*, itself preoccupied with gastronomy) into a poem about various foods.¹²¹ In sum, based on the sources written closest in time to the life of Āzarī, there is evidence that he remained engaged with networks of poets in Khurasan after his return to Isfarāyīn, serving as an advisor to a handful of acolytes while inspiring a certain amount of parody or disapproval among others.

To complete the account of Āzarī’s life, little is recorded in the sources on Āzarī after 847/1443. It can be said with certainty that he died in Isfarāyīn in 866/1461-2, and that his remaining possessions were dedicated to the construction of religious institutions in this town.¹²² It should by this point be clear that, despite a deceptively short biography, the life of Āzarī intersects at a number of points with key events in the Persianate world, from Tabriz to Herat to Bidar. Such intersections were also not happenstance, as his service at a number of his stops was

¹¹⁹ ‘Abd al-Rahmān Jāmī, *Bahāristān va Rasā’il-i Jāmī*, ed. A‘lā Khān Afshāzād, Muḥammad Jān ‘Umarāf, and Abū Bakr Ḥuhūr al-Dīn (Tehran: Mirās-i Maktūb, 1379 [2000]), 150. This criticism inspired a harsh rebuttal in defense of Āzarī by Shushtarī in the *Majālis al-Mu‘minīn*: Shūshtarī, *Majālis al-Mu‘minīn* 2:131-34.

¹²⁰ Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Taḏkira al-Shu‘arā’*, 705.

¹²¹ Abū Ishāq Ḥallāj Shīrāzī Bushāq Aṭ‘ima, *Kulliyāt-i Bushāq Aṭ‘ima-yi Shīrāzī* (Tehran: Markaz-i Mirās-i Maktūb: Bunyād-i Fārs’shināsī, 1382 [2003]), 157-8.

¹²² Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Taḏkirat al-Shu‘arā’*, 727; Firishta, *Tārīkh-i Firishta*, 2:377.

very much in an official capacity. Āzarī is not simply notable as the alleged author of a South Indian history in the form of the *Bahman-nāma*, or a poet of high repute in Khurasan. Rather, he is someone who must be taken seriously as playing a considerable advisory role in both Timurid and Bahmanid contexts. The details of this biographical sketch of Āzarī, then, demand a more detailed consideration of his extant written works: the contents of his writings would have implications not only for his own membership in various intellectual networks, but may also give insight into the courtly discourse of which Āzarī was a key contributor in Timurid and Bahmanid realms.

1.9: Source Review 1: Writings of Āzarī

While a serviceable biography of Āzarī can be crafted from available sources with relative ease, the question of his works is a thornier knot to untie, in large part because of availability. One exception to this would be his *dīvān*, which is easily accessible, having been published in a critical edition. However, as my work will ultimately more concerned with, among other things, his esoteric and occult beliefs,¹²³ his less well-understood prose works will be of utmost importance. One major challenge would be the occasional discrepancies among contemporary sources, biographical dictionary entries, and modern academic literature as to what works, precisely, Āzarī actually composed. Dawlatshāh mentions four works: the *Jawāhir al-Asrār*, described as a compendium of “rare things, examples, and explanations of problematic

¹²³ The terms are not always used entirely synonymously, though may appear largely interchangeably in certain fields: Noah Gardiner, “Esotericist Reading Communities and the Early Circulation of the Sufi Occultist Aḥmad Al-Būnī’s Works,” *Arabica*, no. 64 (2017): 409. For example, while the occult sciences deal with realities which may first appear hidden, so too can occult manuals present their findings quite openly. This might be considered distinct from esotericist circles which not only consider multiple, hidden meanings to religious texts, but which likewise retain a certain secretive or obscurantist approach to sharing such meanings outside of particular readers. In the case of the work Āzarī – in which his occult compendia presumably are open revelations of occult “secrets,” but which, as will be seen, do not always speak so freely about deeper levels to certain mysteries – both terms largely apply.

verses;” the *Sa‘ī al-Ṣafā*, established as a history of Mecca and a discussion of the rites of the Ḥajj pilgrimage; the *Ṭughrā-yi Humāyūn* (*The Royal Seal*); and the *‘Ajā‘ib al-Gharā‘ib* (*Wonders of the Unusual*).¹²⁴ The 20th century Iranian scholar Sa‘īd Nafīsī provided the following: the *dīvān*, the *Bahman-nāma*, the *Sa‘ī al-Ṣafā*, the *Masnavī-yi Imāmiyya*, the *Ṭughrā-yi Humāyūn*, the *Gharā‘ib al-Dunyā* (*Wonders of the World*), and the *Masnavī-yi Samarāt*, the *Jawāhir al-Asrār* (*The Gems of the Secrets*, “on the secrets of the letters”) and the *Mafātīḥ al-Asrār* (*The Keys to the Secrets*, “on Sufism”). There are also works known by more than one title, such as the *‘Ajā‘ib al-A‘lā‘* (*Unusual Things of the Elevated [World]*), identified as a translated verse adaptation of the second part of the *‘Ajā‘ib al-Makhlūqāt* (*Wonders of Creation*) of Zakariyyā‘ al-Qazvīnī,¹²⁵ and which is also known as the *‘Ajā‘ib al-Gharā‘ib*.¹²⁶ These are hardly unambiguous lists of works, with inconsistent titling and a range of understanding of content, and do little to definitively form a bibliography of the works of Āzarī.

Additional progress has been made towards a full grasp of the works of Āzarī in the introduction to his published *Dīvān*, written by Muḥsin Kiyānī.¹²⁷ The preliminary introduction of the *Dīvān*, covering the life of Āzarī, draws from Dawlatshāh and Firishta, and as such, this material has been covered already earlier in this chapter. Much more useful for a study of the various writings of Āzarī is that the introduction of Kiyānī provides a reasonably comprehensive and up-to-date listing of the known works of Āzarī based on both the biographical dictionary

¹²⁴ This last phrase is translated more pithily by Steingass as “wonderful and strange things.” This list is contained in: Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā‘*, 727.

¹²⁵ An Arab cosmographer and geographer of the 7th/13th century, d. 682/1283. T. Lewicki, “al-Ḳazwīnī,” *EP*². See the recent monograph on this work: Travis Zadeh, *Wonders and Rarities: The Marvelous Book That Traveled the World and Mapped the Cosmos* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2023).

¹²⁶ Nafīsī, *Tārīkh-i Nazm va Naṣr* 1:294.

¹²⁷ Āzarī, *Dīvān*, xxix–lxxvii.

tradition and existing manuscripts of his works. The list of works discussed includes: *Kitāb-i Mir'āt*, consisting of four parts: *al-Ṭāmma al-Kubrā*, *Gharā'ib al-Dunyā*, *'Ajā'ib al-A'lā*, *Sa'ī al-Ṣafā*; *Jawāhir al-Asrār* (accurately described as essentially remaining faithful to the content of the *AMA*); a gloss of Āzarī on two lines of the poetry of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī; the *Bahman-nāma*; an epistle on Sufism; the poetic *Dīvān* itself; and the lost works of the *Ṭughrā-yi Humāyūn*, the *Maṣnavī-yi Imāmiyya*, and the *Maṣnavī-yi Ṣamarāt*.¹²⁸ Of these, the *Bahman-nāma*, *Ṭughrā-yi Humāyūn*, *Maṣnavī-yi Imāmiyya*, and *Maṣnavī-yi Ṣamarāt* are not known to exist in manuscript.

An inherent challenge to carrying out a source review of the works of Āzarī in full is the considerable variation in both form and genre. The list of works includes writings ranging from two prose compendia on a wide range of occult matters, to a work on oddities and wonders in the *gharā'ib* tradition, to a lost verse history on the history of the Bahmanid sultans of the Deccan. Given the updated list of works in the *Dīvān*, as well as the relatively limited scope of this project itself, it will not be necessary to review each of these works at length. Instead, I will speak most about those works which will be subject to analysis in the coming chapters: the compendia of the *AMA* and *AJA*, and the published *Dīvān*. A more in-depth discussion of the works of Āzarī – particularly works such as the *Kitāb al-Mir'āt*, which has received little attention either in earlier *tazkira* entries on Āzarī or in contemporary literature – can be bracketed for the moment for a future project.

1.9.1 *Miftāḥ al-Asrār*

While some of the veils of obscurity which hang over the thought of Āzarī have begun to be drawn back, one of his early works, the *AMA*, has remained largely untouched. There has

¹²⁸ The edited *dīvān* includes works that have received separately scholarly attention, such as the *'urūjiyya*, which was also the focus of the conference paper of Aḥmad-riżā Yalma-hā, which is in the collection: Shujā'ī and Yūsuf-nizhād, *Mawj-i Daryā-yi Ma'rifat*, 720–33.

been uncertainty both over the exact title of the work, which Nafīsī dubbed the *Maḥfātīḥ al-Asrār* as may have been recorded in certain versions of *AJA*,¹²⁹ and whether the work itself is still extant.¹³⁰ Unlike the later *Jawāhir*, which exists in a number of manuscript copies in Iran,¹³¹ the *AMA* appears to exist in only a single manuscript, #2423 of the Central Library of the University of Tehran (Kitābkhāna-yi Markazī-yi Dānishgāh-i Tih-rān).¹³² The text is written in a clear Persian script, with 17 lines of text per folio, and consists of 225 folios. This manuscript has a colophon indicating that it was copied by the scribe Muḥammad-Taqī b. Aflātūn Gīlānī in the month of Jumādā I 1067/February or March, 1657, meaning it was completed almost exactly two centuries after the death of Āzarī in 866/1461-2.¹³³ The text portrays itself as a compendium of solutions to a wide array of problems in Islamic thought, providing a “secret” (*sirr*[ī]) explanation to otherwise intractable religious questions. After an autobiographical introduction which discusses the life of Āzarī up to the year 830/1427, the body of the text is divided into four parts: on the secrets of the Speech of God (*kalām Allāh*), which is to say the Disconnected Letters of the Qur’ān (*Muqatta’āt*); on the secrets of the prophetic traditions (*aḥādīth*); on the secrets of the sayings of the Ṣūfī masters (*kalām-i mashā’ikh*); and on difficulties in the sayings of the poets (*ishkāl-i kalām-i Shu’arā*). While there is a table of contents included by the author

¹²⁹ Nafīsī, *Tārīkh-i Nazm va Naṣr* 1:294. Vuṣūqī has cited a version of the *Jawāhir al-Asrār* in which Āzarī, in the autobiographical introduction to the work, mentions a *Maḥfātīḥ al-Asrār* rather than *Miḥfātīḥ*. Muḥammad ‘Alī Vuṣūqī, *Ḥamza bin ‘Alī Malik Āzarī-yi Isfarāyīnī: Shā’ir va ‘Arīf-i Nāmī-yi Qarn-i Nuhum*, 203.

¹³⁰ Rajā’ī, “Āzarī Ṭūsī,” *Elr*. The version of the *AJA* cited most frequently throughout this dissertation identifies the work as the *Miḥfātīḥ al-Asrār*, in keeping with what the *AMA* itself says on the matter. Āzarī, *AJA*, 3b; *AMA*, 15b.

¹³¹ Vuṣūqī, *Ḥamza bin ‘Alī Malik Āzarī-yi Isfarāyīnī: Shā’ir va ‘Arīf-i Nāmī-yi Qarn-i Nuhum*, 208.

¹³² The work also is stored in the library at the University of Chicago in microfilm, at which location I was able to access the text.

¹³³ Āzarī, *AMA*, 223a.

himself,¹³⁴ the *AMA* appears to have been designed not as a systematic exposition of a particular argument or series of arguments, so much as an expansive esoteric compendium, speaking to the wide range of issues with which a young occultist following in his footsteps may have had to wrestle over the course of their esoteric education. Beyond the basic guidelines of the text into four parts, then, the *AMA* moves abruptly from topic to topic, with Āzarī raising a difficult point in the Islamic literature, considering a range of views which have been put forth to solve it, and settling on his own preferred interpretation.

A fundamental challenge of analyzing a text such as the *AMA* is the fact that by its very structure, the work itself is functioning as more of an encyclopedia of topics as opposed to a text bearing a single, coherent argument. Such an approach puts Āzarī in an old lineage of occultist encyclopedism, extending back at least as far as the epistles of the *Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ*, including the work of near contemporaries such as Ḥaydar Āmulī (d. after 787/1385),¹³⁵ and continuing on through the work of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Bisṭāmī (d. 858/1454) and beyond.¹³⁶ As de Callataÿ has argued, though, to compose in the genre of the encyclopedia is not necessarily to be derivative or unoriginal: the selection and organization of sources in such a work is an argument in and of itself. Thus, while there are rare moments when the voice of Āzarī breaks through in the *AMA* (“this pauper...”), the “argument” of the text is often held in the choice of Āzarī to invoke certain

¹³⁴ Āzarī, *AMA*, 15b–18a.

¹³⁵ See: Ḥaydar b. ʿAlī Āmulī, *Kitāb-i Jāmiʿ al-Asrār va Manbaʿ al-Anwār ba Inzīmām-i Risālat Naqd al-Nuqūd fī Maʿrifat al-Wujūd*, ed. Henry Corbin and ʿUthmān Yaḥyā, *Ganjīna-yi Navishta-hā-yi Īrānī* 16 (Tehran: Anstūtū-yi Īrān va Farānsa, Pazhūhish-hā-yi ʿIlmī, Qismat-i Īrān/shināsī, 1348 [1969]).

¹³⁶ Godefroid de Callataÿ, “Encyclopaedism on the Fringe of Islamic Orthodoxy: The Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, the Rutbat al-Ḥakīm and the Ghāyat al-Ḥakīm on the Division of Science,” *Asiatische Studien/Etudes Asiatiques: Zeitschrift Der Schweizerischen Asiengesellschaft/Revue de La Société Suisse-Asie* 71, no. 3 (2017): 857–77; Noah Gardiner, “The Occultist Encyclopedism of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Bisṭāmī,” *Mamluk Studies Review* 20 (January 2017): 3–38.

authorities in order to resolve certain matters. As such, it is of major importance that Āzarī not only placed his own mentor, *shaykh-i mā*, in a spiritual lineage extending back to Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, but that a considerable number of citations in the work may be traced back to ‘Alā’ al-Dawla Simnānī (d. 736/1336) and Sa‘d al-Dīn Ḥamuwayī (d. 650/1253), two key figures in what would become the Kubrawī lineage.¹³⁷ That said, the concepts of Simnānī – known as a skeptic of the monistic concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd* – exist comfortably within the *AMA* with those of Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240), who in the thought of Āzarī is considered the *shaykh al-muḥaqqiqīn*, chief among the investigators of higher realities.¹³⁸ Perhaps most notoriously for the time period, early portions of the *AMA* involve many positive invocations of the founder of the Ḥurūfiyya movement, Faḥr Allāh Astarābādī, to such an extent that sections of the work may functionally be considered part of the Ḥurūfī corpus.¹³⁹ While the content of the *AMA* will be discussed more extensively in the following chapters, these individuals are noted here to emphasize that while the intellectual positions represented by these figures may sometimes be in tension, one would have trouble deriving this fact from the *AMA* due to its encyclopedic approach. In this way, Āzarī was not only in the good company of previous composers of occult encyclopedias, but the court society of the 9th/15th century, in which the approach to patronage of nobles in the Persianate world physically mirrored such an expansive textual encyclopedism through efforts to entice experts in any and all subjects to bring their intellectual talents and according prestige to the courtly setting.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Algar, “Kobrawiyya ii.: The Order,” *EIr*. The Kubrawī connections of Āzarī will be discussed at length in chapter 3.

¹³⁸ Āzarī, *AMA*, 137a.

¹³⁹ Notable examples may be found in: Āzarī, *AMA*, 31b–46a.

¹⁴⁰ My thanks to Matt Melvin-Koushki for noting this synchronicity. See, for example, the wide range of figures at the Timurid princely courts: Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks*, 89-96.

1.9.2 *Jawāhir al-Asrār*

Unlike the rarity of the *AMA*, the *AJA* is available in a number of copies in manuscript. From the collection of the Kitābkhāna-yi Majlis-i Shūrā-yi Millī in Iran, in ascending date of manuscript completion, one may find: #8851 (heavily abridged), #5582/2, #8869, #547 #11338,¹⁴¹ #8942 (only the introduction in a larger compilation), and #758. An early copy of the work also exists in the British Library (Delhi Persian #1516), as well as Indian versions in Hyderabad (Telangana Government Oriental Manuscripts Archive, *Taşawwuf* #1502) and Patna (Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Manuscripts Library, Persian #1380). That being said, there are inconsistencies throughout the manuscripts. The earliest available, #8851, is more accurately a shortened precis of the *AJA* than a full copy. #758 of the Majlis library, composed in 1298/1880-81 in a fine nasta'liq script, has been considerably condensed in terms of content. Specifically, there are excisions from the analysis of Āzarī in particularly his analysis of the *aḥādīth* to the tune of removing all references to Fażl Allāh Astarābādī. The hand of the scribal editor was not so noticeable in the earlier version of #5882/2, composed in 1042/1632-33, where these sections of Ḥurūfī analysis remain. This relatively early and complete manuscript, #5882/2, will be most cited throughout the project when referencing the *AJA*, cross-checked with #547 in cases of corruptions or damage to the text. As with most of Āzarī's works, the *AJA* has not been published in a critical edition. Recently, a Turkish translation of the fourth section of the *AJA* on the secrets of the sayings of the poets has been published.¹⁴² Given the relatively wide circulation

¹⁴¹ Not available digitally, but likely identical to the previous entry based on composition date.

¹⁴² Ḥamza b. 'Alī Malik Āzarī-yi Isfarāyinī, *Çözdüm Dünyanın Bütün Müşkillerini: Şairlerin Sözlerindeki Zorlukların İzahı Hakkında: Cevāhiru'l-Esrār Dördüncü Bölüm*, ed. Betül Yeşil (İstanbul: Büyüyenay Yayınları, 1398 [2019]).

of manuscripts of the *AJA*, particularly in comparison to the earlier *AMA*, a critical edition of this text is much needed.

The *AMA* and *AJA* are nearly identical in terms of structure and content, despite the reputation of the *AJA* as being “a more condensed form” than the original *AMA*.¹⁴³ Certain discrepancies have been noted throughout the chapters to come, for example, in the form of certain authorities being cited more frequently in the *AJA* than the *AMA*. In my respective indexing of each text, there did not arise any pressing differences in the contents of the works, their overall framework, or their length which would be sufficient to consider the *AJA* to have been a drastic departure from the earlier *AMA*, and many portions of the *AJA* are essentially exact copies from the *AMA*. There may be some benefit in future analysis into Āzarī taking a much narrower scope than this project and considering the exact permutations of how a particular concept or figure appeared in the *AJA* as distinct from the *AMA*. However, for the major themes which will be explored in the chapters to come, the two works are nearly interchangeable.

1.9.3 *Dīvān*

The *Dīvān* remains the only work of Āzarī for which there is a critical edition, as his collected poetic works were published in Iran in 2010. Appropriate to a poet of his stature, the work consists of a variety of poetic forms, including *qaṣīdas* on religious topics, such as in praise of the Twelve Shī‘ī Imams, or on the nature of divine unity (*tawḥīd*); *ghazals*; the *tarjī‘-band* (a stanzaic form in which a set line re-appears at intervals); the *tarkīb-band*, a variation on the *tarjī‘-band* in which the poem is broken up at similar intervals, though with unique lines at each break-

¹⁴³ Charles Rieu, *Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the British Museum*, vol. 1, 3 vols. (London: British Museum, 1879), 43.

point instead of the single, repeated line; *qaṭa ‘āt* (fragments); quatrains (*rubā ‘iyyāt*); and single lines (*tak-bayt-hā*). As certain notable examples of the verse works contained within the *Dīvān* will be discussed in much greater length in chapter 4 of this project, the structure and makeup of the *Dīvān* will be addressed again at that point.

1.10 Sources, Part 2: Works About Āzarī

As the study of Āzarī’s works themselves is only in its early stages, most of the literature dealing with his life and works has drawn from biographical dictionaries or chronicles of the 9th/15th century onward. The most relevant of these sources have been cited throughout the biography of Āzarī in this chapter. In terms of the earliest material, the *Tazkirat al-Shu ‘arā’* of Dawlatshāh Samarqandī is not only the earliest of the works on Āzarī, as Dawlatshāh was himself a contemporary of Āzarī, but the work at certain points also indicated that it is quoting Āzarī directly. Likewise, there is the only partly reliable *Majālis al- ‘Ushshāq* of Ḥusayn Gāzurgāhī, though the author was born after the death of Āzarī (874/1469-70). Though Āzarī likewise makes an appearance in works of the earlier phase of Timurid historiography, the accounts are largely summaries of the earlier narrative already extant in Dawlatshāh. Accordingly, Āzarī appears briefly in the *Ḥabīb al-Siyar* of Kh^wādamīr in what is essentially an abridgement of the primary entry on Āzarī from the *Tazkirat al-Shu ‘arā’*.¹⁴⁴ While the earlier sources are united in noting the Bahmanid period of Āzarī’s life, there is almost nothing in terms of specific detail of his time there until the later works of the major historians of the Deccan sultanates.

Whether due to a deeper interest in the history of specifically the territories of India, or because of access to a different body of source material, the fact that the works of Firishta,

¹⁴⁴ Kh^wādamīr, *Ḥabīb al-Siyar*, 4:61.

Ṭabāṭabā, and Ibrāhīm Shīrāzī address the travels of Āzarī to Bidar in greater detail means that they constitute a second core group of key sources. It is true that these histories were largely written in the early years of the 11th century *hijrī*/the late 16th-early 17th century CE, approximately a century and a half after the death of Āzarī. This is not to say that they are inherently less reliable than the earlier source material, so much as this fact demands greater attention to what is added to (or subtracted from) the story of Āzarī in these works. It does seem that these histories themselves drew from the previous texts: as mentioned above Firishta recounts almost word-for-word the interaction between Ulugh Beg and Āzarī which is contained in the *Majālis al-‘Ushshāq*.

Following the lead of Dawlatshāh and Gāzurgāhī, Āzarī has had a presence in the *tazkira* tradition from the 9th/15th century into biographical dictionary works written in the 14th/20th century. As the fourth chapter of this work will be devoted to the verse works of Āzarī, particularly in the *Dīvān*, the idiosyncrasies of how both the life and works of Āzarī were transmitted over the centuries in that medium will be discussed in greater length at that point. Two of the appendices to this dissertation likewise contain and charts of the legacy of Āzarī in the *tazkira* tradition from both historical and anthological perspectives.

1.11 Literature Review

There are two bodies of literature which should be considered in setting the context for an analysis of the life and works of Āzarī. First, there is the relatively small set of existing literature which is devoted specifically to Āzarī himself. There is then a second, considerably larger collection of academic literature which speaks to the overall political, social, and intellectual background of the post-Mongol Persianate world of which Āzarī was a part. This second group can roughly be divided into three, overlapping sub-categories: historiographical work on the 8th-

9th/14th-15th century Islamic world, particularly in Timurid, Turkmen, and Ottoman contexts; the intellectual history of the occult sciences as they manifested in both courtly and popular contexts over the course of the Islamic Middle Period; and studies of the Indian Deccan, with a particular eye towards connections between the courts of South Asia with the rest of the Islamic world. I will address each of these in turn.

While not wholly overlooked in the available literature, the existing body of work on Āzarī is quite thin for a figure who held a number of positions of prominence over his lifetime. In terms of material available in European languages, Āzarī has hardly left a mark. For example, in Browne's *A Literary History of Persia*, Āzarī appears both in passing and in the context of an extended quotation from the *Tazkirat al-Shu'arā'* of Dawlatshāh, which occurs in the entry on the poet 'Iṣmat and discusses the Timurid prince Ulugh Beg. The core of the account is that he became attached to Ulugh Beg at a young age, and that he and Ulugh Beg were reunited in the year 852/1448-49 when Ulugh Beg passed through Isfarāyin,¹⁴⁵ all of which was already established in the aforementioned biography. There is also the short article of Rajā'ī in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, "Āzarī Ṭūsī," which provides a workable biography of Āzarī that is largely based on the entry dedicated to Āzarī in the *Tazkirat al-Shu'arā'* and the entry of Sa'īd Nafīsī on Āzarī.¹⁴⁶ While essentially useful in transmitting this information in English, the article is likewise in need of updates. Nothing is said of the thought of Āzarī beyond his being Shī'ī, a Ṣūfī, and a disciple of Shāh Ni'mat Allāh Valī. More importantly, neither the content of his poetry – which has received greater attention in both the *tazkira* tradition and in the existing

¹⁴⁵ E.G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia, Volume III: The Tatar Dominion (1256-1502)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), 501–3.

¹⁴⁶ Rajā'ī, "Āzarī Ṭūsī," *EI*; Nafīsī, *Tārīkh-i Nazm va Naṣr* 1:293-4.

Persian literature on Āzarī – nor his highly significant work in the occult sciences are treated. Likewise, while the list of sources of Āzarī which may be found in Dawlatshāh is included, the *AMA* was still thought lost at the time of the composition of this encyclopedia entry.

To these might be added an article of Özyurt focused specifically on the manner in which ‘Alī b. ‘Alī Ṭālib is covered in the *Dīvān* and its implications for the confessional affiliation of Āzarī.¹⁴⁷ While the poetry of Āzarī is highly imamophilic even beyond an environment where ‘Alid loyalism was quite common among writers and poets from any variety of intellectual trends,¹⁴⁸ a closer analysis of his work will reveal that though Āzarī may well have been *Ithnā‘asharī* Shī‘ī, there is little in his prose works that is normatively Shī‘ī, and much that would likely be considered outside the fold by *Ithnā‘asharī* Shī‘ī scholars.¹⁴⁹ To put it simply, the image of Āzarī which can be gleaned solely by European language sources is incomplete at best.

A slightly more complex image of Āzarī may be drawn from Persian-language literature, though this material, too, is badly in need of expansion. The most frequently-cited work is likely the entry on Āzarī in the first volume of the encyclopedic work of Sa‘īd Nafīsī, *Tārīkh-i Nazm va Naṣr dar Īrān va dar Zabān-i Fārsī: tā Pāyān-i Qarn-i Dahum-i Hijrī*.¹⁵⁰ The fundamental

¹⁴⁷ Güneş Muhip Özyurt, “‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib in Shaykh Āzarī’s Qasidas,” *RumeliDe Dil ve Edebiyat Araştırmaları* 18 (2020): 378–403.

¹⁴⁸ On the concept of ‘Alid loyalism, see the definition in: Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization Volume 1: The Classical Age of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 260.

¹⁴⁹ The introduction to the *Dīvān* of Āzarī opens its section on his confession by recalling a story of a traveler to Karbalā’ who, to the surprise of the supervisor of his rest-house, could pray in both the Shī‘ī and Sunnī manners. This is a fitting anecdote, as Āzarī was at the least heavily exposed to what one might call “Sunnī” thought, and in fact, might be thought of as passing fluidly between what are now sometimes thought of as the sealed vessels of Shī‘ism and Sunnīsm. Āzarī, *Dīvān*, xlvi–xlvi.

¹⁵⁰ Nafīsī, *Tārīkh-i Nazm va Naṣr* 1:293–94.

information with regard to the biography and works of Āzarī in Nafīsī contains only minor errors, but by virtue of the passage being an entry in a biographical dictionary, is necessarily incomplete in terms of detail. There are then two short Persian biographies of Āzarī by Muḥammad-‘Alī Vuṣūqī, *Shaykh Āzarī Isfarāyīnī: Aḥvāl va Ash‘ār*, and Ḥamza bin ‘Alī Malik Āzarī-yi Isfarāyīnī: *Shā‘ir va ‘Arif-i Qarn-i Nuhum-i Hijrī*.¹⁵¹ Both of these texts serve the useful function of gathering a good deal of extant material on Āzarī into single monographs, though neither provide extensive analytical consideration of the thought of Āzarī. There are valuable observations included in a collected volume of conference papers devoted to the life and works of Āzarī titled, *Mawj-i Daryā-yi Ma‘rifat: Majmū‘a-yi Chakīdah-hā va Barguzīdah-yi Maqālāt-i Hamāyish-i Bayn al-Milālī-i Shaykh Āzarī*.¹⁵² Certain papers of particular note will be cited throughout, and generally speaking, the observations shared in a number of these items contain useful observations that may contribute to future work on Āzarī. Likewise, the biographical information is primarily constructed based on what is present in the *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā* of Dawlatshāh. The introduction to the critical edition of the *Dīvān* of Āzarī, however, includes one of the most up-to-date considerations of his scholarly output, and was thus cited heavily in the previous section on the writings of Āzarī.

Though the existing scholarly work on Āzarī is still in its early stages, there has been considerable work on other historiographical themes of the post-Mongol world which have informed the structure and approach of this dissertation. The first and likely most relevant of these would be those works which could, broadly-speaking, be considered as speaking directly to

¹⁵¹ Vuṣūqī, *Ḥamza bin ‘Alī Malik Āzarī-yi Isfarāyīnī: Shā‘ir va ‘Arif-i Nāmī-yi Qarn-i Nuhum*, 2011; Vuṣūqī, *Shaykh Āzarī-yi Isfarāyīnī: Aḥvāl va Ash‘ār*.

¹⁵² ‘Abbās Shujā‘ī and Yūsuf ‘Alī Yūsuf-nizhād, eds., *Mawj-i Daryā-yi Ma‘rifat*.

the political, social, and intellectual history of the 8th-9th/14th-15th century Islamic world. This would include scholarship dealing with the serious crises of legitimacy faced by the polities of the Islamic world in the aftermath of the Mongol invasions, in which the previous models of governmental approval flowing through the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate were largely disrupted, with the exception of the “shadow caliphs” of Cairo.¹⁵³ This is an intellectual debate with which Āzarī was fully conversant, as will be seen in the discussion of the caliphate, imamate, and *mahdī* in the second chapter of this dissertation. As such, the dissertation has drawn off of the previous work of John Woods on the history of the Timurids and the Turkmen Aq Quyunlu confederation, including but not limited to the crucial concept of “confessional ambiguity,” which was tangible throughout many religio-political debates in the 9th/15th century Islamic world.¹⁵⁴ As Āzarī himself drew from a highly variegated set of intellectual influences, whether Shī‘ī confessional sources, Ṣūfī networks of the 9th/15th century, or networks of occult intellectuals, it would be helpful to consider the similarly diverse appeals to sources of legitimacy in the Mongol period and beyond as examined by Judith Pfeiffer.¹⁵⁵ Given the close connections of Āzarī to Timurid courts throughout most of his lifetime, this project has also drawn from the work on Beatrice Manz on dynamics of power and legitimacy in Timurid realms.¹⁵⁶ Also informative on this topic would be the work of Cornell Fleischer on comparable dynamics in Ottoman territories, in which

¹⁵³ On the phenomenon of the shadow caliphate, see the work of Mustafa Banister: Mustafa Banister, *The Abbasid Caliphate of Cairo, 1261-1517: Out of the Shadows*, Edinburgh Studies in Classical Islamic History (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021).

¹⁵⁴ John E. Woods, *The Aqqyunlu: Clan, Confederation, Empire* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1999).

¹⁵⁵ Judith Pfeiffer, “Confessional Ambiguity vs. Confessional Polarization: Politics and the Negotiation of Religious Boundaries in the Ilkhanate,” in *Politics, Patronage and the Transmission of Knowledge in 13th–15th Century Tabriz*, ed. Judith Pfeiffer, Iran Studies 8 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2014), 129–68.

¹⁵⁶ Beatrice Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion in Timurid Iran*, Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilisation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

the political challenges of the post-Mongol period saw a number of creative solutions to determining the rightful holders of authority, including appeals to the occult sciences, as well as a sort of “monarchical messianism.”¹⁵⁷ In fact, the Ottoman case is often highly useful for comparing and contrasting with Timurid political thought throughout the lifetime of Āzarī, and recent works of Hüseyin Yılmaz and Christopher Markiewicz will also be of use in considering intellectual spheres which were contemporary to Āzarī and his Timurid and Bahmanid patrons.¹⁵⁸ On this same note of patronage, this work has drawn heavily from the pioneering studies of Jean Aubin on networks of patronage and intellectualism in the Timurid period, as well as the work of Evrim Binbaş on intellectual networks stretching across a wide range of the Persianate world and the dynamics of occult experimentation at the courts of the Timurid world.¹⁵⁹

In addition to the issues of self-presentation and patronage at the courts of the 9th/15th century, several of the works listed above and a number of other pieces of scholarly literature have explored the intellectual history of networks which were not limited to courtly spheres. For example, the 9th/15th century Persianate world was a crucial period for the development of Şūfī *networks* as they gradually became more solidified into institutionalized Şūfī *orders*. Given the

¹⁵⁷ See in particular: Cornell Fleischer, “A Mediterranean Apocalypse: Prophecies of Empire in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 61, no. i–ii (2018): 18–90; Fleischer, “Ancient Wisdom and New Sciences: Prophecies at the Ottoman Court in the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries,” in *Falnama: The Book of Omens*, ed. Massumeh Farhad and Serpil Bağcı (London: Thames & Hudson, 2009).

¹⁵⁸ Hüseyin Yılmaz, *Caliphate Redefined: The Mystical Turn in Ottoman Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018); Christopher Markiewicz, *The Crisis of Kingship*.

¹⁵⁹ Jean Aubin, “Le mécénat timouride a Chiraz”; İlker Evrim Binbaş, “Timurid Experimentation with Eschatological Absolutism: Mīrzā Iskandar, Shāh Ni’ matullāh Walī, and Sayyid Sharīf Jurjānī in 815/1412,” in *Unity in Diversity: Mysticism, Messianism and the Construction of Religious Authority in Islam*, ed. Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, *Islamic History and Civilization: Studies and Texts* 105 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 277–303; Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks*.

connections of Āzarī to, particularly, the Kubrawī Ṣūfī network, which will be discussed in detail in chapter 3, this dissertation has drawn heavily from the work of Devin DeWeese on Iranian and Central Asian Ṣūfī networks and the ebb and flow of Yasawī, Kubrawī, and Naqshbandī networks-orders over the course of the post-Mongol period.¹⁶⁰ One might productively compare the life and works of Āzarī and his role as a transmitter of important information related to the Kubrawī Ṣūfī network to such contemporaries as Zayn al-Dīn Kh^wāfī (d. 838/1435), a “*ṭarīqa*-founding” Ṣūfī who likewise had connections to Timurid courts and claimed a certain connection to the Kubrawī spiritual lineage.¹⁶¹ There are also many valuable conclusions to be drawn from comparing the life and works of Āzarī to a more notable Kubrawī of the period in the form of the messianic figure of Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh, as considered in the work of Shahzad Bashir.¹⁶² Nūrbakhsh was likewise hardly the only figure to claim *mahdī*-hood in the post-Mongol period, and in fact, the lifetime of Āzarī would have seen a great profusion of messianic activity bubble up on a popular level away from the major courts. As such, this dissertation will draw from the observations of Michel Mazzaoui on the interplay of “mainstream” Imāmī Shī‘ī discourse, “exaggerator” movements (*ghulāt*), and messianism in the 9th/15th century.¹⁶³ With Āzarī having

¹⁶⁰ See particularly: Devin DeWeese, “Spiritual Practice and Corporate Identity in Medieval Sufi Communities of Iran, Central Asia, and India: The Khalvatī/Ishqī/Shatṭārī Continuum,” in *Religion and Identity in South Asia and Beyond: Essays in Honor of Patrick Olivelle* (London; New York: Anthem Press, 2011), 251–300; DeWeese, “The Eclipse of the Kubravīyah in Central Asia,” *Iranian Studies*, no. 1/2 (1988): 45–83; DeWeese, *An ‘Uvaysī’ Sufi in Timurid Mawarannahr: Notes on Hagiography and the Taxonomy of Sanctity in the Religious History of Central Asia*, Papers on Inner Asia 22 (Bloomington, Ind.: Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 1993); DeWeese, “Sayyid ‘Alī Hamadānī and Kubrawī Hagiographical Traditions,” in *The Heritage of Sufism: The Legacy of Medieval Persian Sufism*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn, vol. 2 (London: Oneworld Publications, 1999), 121–58.

¹⁶¹ Mustafa İsmail Kaya, “Zayn al-Dīn Kh^wāfī (757-838/1356-1435): The Life and Work of a *Ṭarīqa*-Founding Sufi” (Ph.D. Diss., University of Chicago, 2019).

¹⁶² Shahzad Bashir, *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions: The Nūrbakhshīya between Medieval and Modern Islam*, Studies in Comparative Religion (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003).

¹⁶³ Michel M. Mazzaoui, *The Origins of the Ṣafawids: Šī‘ism, Ṣūfism, and the Ġulāt*, Freiburger Islamstudien 3 (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1972);

been born in the sometimes-chiliastic Sarbadārid polity, and having been a contemporary to both the radical Musha‘sha‘ī movement in Khūzistān and an increasingly militant Ṣafavid network in Ardabīl, the work of both Mazzaoui and William Tucker is of considerable importance in understanding the religious dynamics of the period.¹⁶⁴

One underlying theme to which a great number of the already-cited works have already spoken either directly or tangentially is the major role played by the esoteric/occult sciences, *‘ulūm-i gharība* in Persian, in intellectual and political discussions of the 9th/15th century. Even a casual observer of the intellectual dynamics of the period could not help but see a nearly omnipresent interest in, for example, the “science of the letters” (*ilm-i ḥurūf*) across the entirety of the Islamic world, and taken up even by those figures not always associated with the occult sciences. With Āzarī himself having composed two occult compendia in the form of the *AMA* and *AJA*, the approach of this dissertation to matters of lettrism and the occult in the 9th/15th century has been informed by a number of recent works which are themselves dedicated to analyzing the legacy of this field of the sciences in the post-Mongol period. Included among these would be the work of Matthew Melvin-Koushki on, among other figures, Ṣā‘in al-Dīn Turka, whose own life and beliefs – though hardly identical to Āzarī, as will be seen in chapter 2 – provide both considerable context and a useful methodological guide to a microhistorical approach to the life and works of the occult scientists of the Timurid world.¹⁶⁵ Also of key importance to understanding the background of research into the occult sciences of which Āzarī

¹⁶⁴ William F. Tucker, *Mahdis and Millenarians: Shi‘ite Extremists in Early Muslim Iraq* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Michel Mazzaoui, “Musha‘sha‘iyān: A Fifteenth Century Shī‘ī Movement in Khūzistān and Southern Iraq,” *Folia Orientalia* 22 (1984 1981): 139–62.

¹⁶⁵ Matthew Melvin-Koushki, “Quest”; Melvin-Koushki, “The Occult Challenge to Philosophy and Messianism in Early Timurid Iran: Ibn Turka’s Lettrism as a New Metaphysics,” in *Unity in Diversity: Mysticism, Messianism and the Construction of Religious Authority in Islam*, ed. Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, Islamic History and Civilization: Studies and Texts 105 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 247–76.

was a part would be the work of Noah Gardiner, not only on Aḥmad al-Būnī (d. *ca.* 622 or 630/1225 or 1232-1233) – a figure himself cited by Āzarī in the bibliographical portion of the *AMA* – but ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Bisṭāmī, the occultist of primarily Ottoman realms, who lived during an almost identical time period as Āzarī.¹⁶⁶ One curiosity of the thought of Āzarī, which will be discussed in considerable detail in chapter 2, would be his affinity not only towards lettrism as explored by figures such as Bisṭāmī, but the gnostic-millenarian lettrist speculations of Faḏl Allāh Astarābādī and his Ḥurūfī movement, which the selfsame Bisṭāmī would have harshly rejected. As such, the writings of both Bashir and Orkhan Mir-Kasimov have influenced my own consideration of the Ḥurūfiyya and the citation of certain texts of Faḏl Allāh throughout the *AMA* and *AJA*.¹⁶⁷ This approach to the Islamic occult is naturally also informed by work on the various iterations of magic in Islamic thought of Emilie Savage-Smith.¹⁶⁸

Finally, though the life and career of Āzarī are transregional in a way perfectly fitting to the fluidity of the 9th/15th century, his brief stop in Bidar to serve the Bahmanid court left a quite strong impression in, for example, the *tazkira* literature, as will be discussed in chapter 4. As such, a complementary body of literature related to the sultanates of South Asia and the considerable connections between these polities and the rest of the Islamic world has informed certain portions of this dissertation. This would certainly include such foundational work related to the Deccan sultanates in general, and the Bahmanid sultans in particular, as may be found in

¹⁶⁶ Noah Gardiner, “Esotericism in a Manuscript Culture: Aḥmad al-Būnī and His Readers through the Mamlūk Period” (Ph.D. Diss., University of Michigan, 2014); Gardiner, “Occultist Encyclopedism.”

¹⁶⁷ Shahzad Bashir, *Fazlallah Astarabadi and the Hurufis*; Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, *Words of Power*.

¹⁶⁸ See the author’s chapter, alongside other studies, in: Emilie Savage-Smith, ed., *Magic and Divination in Early Islam, Formation of the Classical Islamic World* 42 (Aldershot, Hants, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate/Variorum, 2004).

the writings of Haroon Khan Sherwani.¹⁶⁹ There is likewise the key study of the history of Sufism in specifically Bahmanid realms of Muḥammad Suleman Siddiqi, which has provided important background context.¹⁷⁰ However, there are likewise more modern studies of the nature of the Muslim polities of South Asia which have informed this dissertation’s approach in terms of Āzarī and his travels to Bidar. This would include the recent monograph of Emma Flatt, which in addition to a number of useful observations related to the courts of the Deccan sultanates themselves, includes significant work into Iranian intellectuals traveling between Iranian lands and the Deccan, as well as the considerable significance of the occult sciences at these courts in a manner complementary to what was seen across the rest of the Islamic world at the time.¹⁷¹ This project has also drawn from the work of Richard Eaton on both the development of Ṣūfī orders in South Asia in roughly the 9th/15th century, as well as ongoing debates related to the nature of the Muslim sultanates of Hindūstān and their engagement with what might be considered the “Persian Cosmopolis.”¹⁷² While these works on the Deccan are directly relevant to Āzarī by virtue of his own relationship with the Bahmanids, they are far from the only literature in the history of pre-modern South Asia more broadly which have informed certain elements of my approach to the life and works of Āzarī. For example, the work of Muzaffar Alam has been valuable in informing, among other things, the relationships between Ṣūfīs and sultans in North India in a manner which has guided my own approach to considering the presence of Āzarī (and

¹⁶⁹ Sherwani, *The Bahmanis of the Deccan*; Sherwani, *Maḥmūd Gāwān, The Great Bahmani Wazir*.

¹⁷⁰ Muhammad Suleman Siddiqi, *The Bahmani Ṣūfīs* (Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delhi, 2009).

¹⁷¹ Flatt, *The Courts of the Deccan Sultanates*.

¹⁷² This issue of the “cosmopolis” will be revisited in chapter 5. Richard Maxwell Eaton, *India in the Persianate Age, 1000-1765* (London: Allen Lane, an imprint of Penguin Books, 2019); Eaton, *A Social History of the Deccan 1300-1761: Eight Indian Lives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur, 1300-1700: Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978).

other Ṣūfī figures) at the Bahmanid court in the early 9th/15th century.¹⁷³ Likewise, as the project is in many ways a microhistory of widely-traveled figure – and the methodology of the dissertation will be dealt with shortly – the approach is inspired in part by the work of Sanjay Subrahmanyam in terms of approaching the issue of world history through the lens of the individual.¹⁷⁴

1.12 Research Questions

There are two fundamental questions on which the project will hope to shed light. First, there is the simple issue that many gaps remain in understanding the thought of Āzarī itself. Though most of the literature on Āzarī discusses his poetry in some depth, and his skill in this field is well-established, the study of his additional writings is still in only the earliest stages. The *AMA*, the earliest crystallization of the esoteric writings of Āzarī, has gone almost completely untouched. Even the later *AJA*, about which have been written some minor studies, has not been studied extensively nor specifically used as a companion text to the earlier *AMA*. That is, there is worth in examining the work of Āzarī on its own merits: what are the contents of these understudied works of an accomplished poet, historian, and occultist? Are there influences in the work of Āzarī that have gone unnoticed in previous studies, and which may give some hint as to Āzarī's being a member of certain intellectual or Ṣūfī networks of the 9th/15th century? What was his approach to the occult sciences, which were very much in vogue during his period of greatest activity? A close reading of the texts of Āzarī which have to this point received little scholarly

¹⁷³ Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam: India 1200-1800* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004); Muzaffar Alam, "The Mughals, the Sufi Shaikhs and the Formation of the Akbari Dispensation."

¹⁷⁴ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Three Ways to Be an Alien: Travails & Encounters in the Early Modern World* (Waltham, Massachusetts: Brandeis University Press, 2011).

attention is an opportunity to see the original opinions of a prolific writer and prominent courtier on the religious debates which were under discussion in the Islamic world in the Timurid and Bahmanid period.

For the second, broader question, these issues regarding the thought of Āzarī cannot be plucked from their context of Iran and India in the 8th-9th/14th-15th centuries, and the project is not merely a hermetically-sealed analysis of the *AMA*, *AJA*, and *Dīvān*. Rather, to ask questions about the life and times of Āzarī is to wonder about the intellectual and political dynamism of, particularly, the 9th/15th century Persianate world. What are the implications of a figure of such ambiguous intellectual origins as Āzarī – blending the Shī‘ī and the Sunnī, the Kubrawī and the Ni‘mat-allāhī, and all of these with the Ḥurūfī – being held in such high regard from Tabriz to Bidar? The post-Mongol period saw an intense concern with religious and political legitimacy following the disruption of the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate and an extended period of Mongol rule throughout many core Islamic lands; did the writings of Āzarī take up the issue of where legitimate authority would lie in this world? Relatedly, how do his occult writings compare with those of his contemporaries across the Islamic World? While the project will deal with the Bahmanid Sultanate primarily in the context the period of Āzarī’s brief stay in the Deccan, he was present in Bidar during a key moment of transition in the reign of Aḥmad Shāh I, and was perhaps the Bahmanids’ most important contemporary historian. As such, this study will periodically both add to what is known already regarding the Bahmanid Sultanate and note the deep connections between India and Iran, despite the fact that they are often split in the context of modern area studies scholarship.

1.13 Methodology

The overall approach of the project straddles the particular and the general: the individual figure of Āzarī, and the Islamic world in the 9th/15th century of which he was a prominent member. It is true that many elements of this work will involve a discussion of the life and times of Āzarī as one would expect to find in the field of biography, but it is, more properly speaking, a microhistory which will employ the figure of Āzarī to examine the larger question of the occult sciences and their prominent role in the courtly societies which Āzarī frequented.¹⁷⁵ For through the lens of Āzarī, one might consider the Islamic world from the edge of Anatolia to the core of the Indian Deccan, the Kubrawiyya and Ni‘mat-allāhiyya Sūfī networks, the courtly societies of the Timurids and Bahmanids, the far reaching presence of the subversive Hurūfiyya, and the essentially ambiguous nature of identity among Islamic intellectuals of the Timurid period. To consider Islamic history is to be forced to also account for global history, and as Subrahmanyam has explored, the unit of the individual can be a productive starting point for considering much broader issues than the specific woman or man under investigation.¹⁷⁶ It is unsurprising, then, that this method has been put to good use in the field of the Islamic occult, and in many ways this project is treading on the familiar domain of using a microhistory of a particular occultist to better understand the wider Islamic world.¹⁷⁷ This project, then, will follow a familiar form in

¹⁷⁵ This distinction draws from the work of Jill Lepore: Jill Lepore, “Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography,” *The Journal of American History* 88, no. 1 (June 2001), 129-44.

¹⁷⁶ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Three Ways to Be an Alien*, 1–22. On the promise of “global microhistory,” see the recent studies of the 2019 supplemental issue of the *Past & Present* journal, including: John-Paul A. Ghobrial, “Introduction: Seeing the World like a Microhistorian,” *Past & Present* 242, no. Supplement_14 (November 2019): 1–22.

¹⁷⁷ See, for example, the work of Fleischer on ‘Abd al-Rahmān Bisṭāmī, Binbaş on Sharaf al-Dīn ‘Alī Yazdī, Markiewicz on Idrīs Bidlīsī, Gardiner on Aḥmad al-Būnī, and Melvin-Koushki on Sā’ in al-Dīn Turka. Cornell Fleischer, “Ancient Wisdom”; Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks*; Markiewicz, *The Crisis of Kingship*; Noah Gardiner, “Esotericism in a Manuscript Culture”; Matthew Melvin-Koushki, “Quest.”

acting primarily as a microhistory of the figure of Āzarī, but using this widely-traveled individual to comment upon the highly-connected Islamic world as it existed in his time.

On a more technical level, the project has undertaken a textual analysis of a series of sources relevant to the figure of Āzarī, including chronicles, biographical dictionaries, and esoteric compendia. The research has relied heavily upon Persian paleography, as the vast majority of the work of Āzarī is neither printed nor critically edited, with the exception of his *Dīvān*. For those sources written by Āzarī himself, they have been closely read with a particular focus on themes of esotericism and the occult which are known to have been *en vogue* in the 9th/15th century, when the scholarly output of Āzarī began. This analysis of the thought of Āzarī in his own words has been supplemented by a prosopographical study of his life based on chronicles which cover the Timurid and Bahmanid periods, as well as the manner in which he appears in biographical dictionaries (that is, the *tazkira* tradition). The works of Āzarī are not so concerned with precise historical detail, and as such, the timeline of his life must be constructed by also incorporating the writings of others. There is, then, an important philological element to this project, though it is largely instrumental: accessing the relatively obscure works of Āzarī in manuscript form is the means to a larger end, which is to comment on how Āzarī might fit into the much broader intellectual currents at work in the Islamic world in the Timurid and Bahmanid eras.

1.14 Structure

The remainder of the work is structured thematically based on the works of Āzarī. Following this initial introductory chapter, the second chapter, “Āzarī and the Hurufiyya” will focus on the writings of Āzarī related to the *mahdī*, the messiah figure of Islam, particularly as they intertwined with the thought of the teachings of Fażl Allāh Astarābādī. As the 9th/15th

century saw a great surge of messianic activity across the Islamic world, and there appear to have been even certain messianic tendencies among the Sarbadārids, the thoughts of Āzarī on the subject will be of particular relevance. Āzarī would then have spent much of his adult life in Iranian lands of the 9th/15th century, in which the messiah figure of the *mahdī* and the implications of the inherent authority of *mahdī*-ship were a topic of great concern from the urban centers of the courts, where intellectuals developed intricate theories of monarchical messianism, to the rural territories from which militant messianic groups emerged to challenge the existing order. Accordingly, the question of the *mahdī* is one to which Āzarī devoted a considerable amount of attention. This chapter will carry out a close reading of Āzarī's discussion of the *mahdī* as a means of elucidating his idiosyncratic synthesis of *Ithnā 'asharī* Shī'ī discourse and, more importantly for Āzarī, the writings of the founder of the Ḥurūfiyya order, Faḏl Allāh Astarābādī.

The third chapter, "Āzarī Between Spiritual Networks," will reconsider the various ideological affiliations of Āzarī. Discussed often as a Shī'ī, a Ṣūfī, and a follower of Ni'mat Allāh, the chapter will note that the pre-eminent influences in the occult writings of Āzarī are largely that of Kubrawī thinkers, and particularly Sa'd al-Dīn Ḥamuwayī, to whom Āzarī felt a direct, spiritual connection. The encyclopedic approach of the esoteric compendia of Āzarī is in essence a reflection of his own approach to knowledge, as he incorporated diverse and, at times, conflicting teachers and texts into his occult analyses. In this way, Āzarī was a reflection of his own time, in which Neopythagorean occult concepts – deeply tied as they were to the *coincidentia oppositorum*, the ultimate unity of opposites – were part of the courtly intellectual discourse, and when it was not unheard of for a prince or poet to be not Sunnī or Shī'ī, but Sunnī and Shī'ī. This atmosphere was tangible at the Bahmanid court of Aḥmad Shāh, a sovereign who

within his reign both married his crown prince into a family which claimed descent from ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb and also sent great sums of money to Karbalā’ in honor of Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.¹⁷⁸ While there is a limited use in discussing Āzarī in terms of these specific identifiers of Kubrawī, Ni‘mat-allāhī, Ḥurūfī, Shī‘ī, or Sunnī, they are not overly reified by the author himself, whose identification may be best described as “all of the above.”

The fourth chapter, “Gnosticism in the Poetics of Āzarī,” will turn from the lesser-studied prose writings of Āzarī in the *AMA* and *AJA* to his more widely-known poetic works, namely, his *Dīvān*. While there has been some amount of research into certain features of the poetry of Āzarī, it is difficult to find literature which reads his *Dīvān* through the lens of his occult compendia. With the change in form from the encyclopedic prose works of the *AMA* and *AJA* to discrete *qaṣīdas*, *ghazals*, and *qīṭa‘as*, was there a concurrent change in the function of his poetry? Or, might the poetic output of Āzarī contain themes already on full display in the *AMA* and *AJA*, reinforcing what is put forth in these prose works in a different medium? The significant footprint of the poetics of Āzarī in the *tazkira* footprint, alongside open questions related to the reading community for his works, means that the stakes of the poetry of Āzarī and its often gnostic overtones go beyond simply his *Dīvān*, itself.

The conclusion will tie together the otherwise disparate threads considered in the previous chapters: Āzarī as a poet and historian, as a devotee of the Kubrawiyya, as a supporter of radical Ḥurūfī doctrine, and attendant to some of the most powerful centers of political power in the 9th/15th century. In many ways, Āzarī served as a mirror to his age, reflecting in his own life and writings the larger trends which dominated much of the intellectual life of the Persianate

¹⁷⁸ Wolseley Haig, “The Religion of Ahmad Shah Bahmani,” *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* No. 1 (January 1924): 73–80.

world in the post-Mongol period. Yet, it is exactly one of these trends – an encyclopedic and eclectic approach to knowledge which Āzarī fully embraced in his own inquisitive compendia – in which Āzarī is not merely a reflection of the work of others but an original thinker in his own right. The conclusion will build from the case study of Āzarī on display in this project in observing useful areas for future research on such questions as the occult in the 9th/15th century, the formation of Ṣūfī networks in the post-Mongol period, and the political, social, and cultural dynamics of the Deccan sultanates of the Islamic Middle Periods.

Chapter 2: Āzarī and the Ḥurūfiyya

حق تعالی چون گل آدم سرشت
سی و دو خط بر رخ نوشت

When God formed the clay of Adam,
He wrote 32 lines into his face.

Faḏl Allāh Astarābādī, *Arsh-nāma*, as quoted by Āzarī.¹

2.1 Introduction

In abandoning the Timurid courtly spheres in which he had excelled as a poet and seeking out the guidance of spiritual mentors such as Muḥyī al-Dīn Ṭūsī Ghazālī and Ni‘mat Allāh, Āzarī had also incidentally removed himself from Herat at a time when his role as an occult scholar with a particular interest in the science of the letters had become a risky status to hold. In what must have been only a short time after Āzarī had given up the luxury of the courtly lifestyle, the court of Shāhrukh faced a major crisis following a nearly-successful assassination attempt against the monarch after the Friday prayer on 23 Rabī‘ II 830/21 February 1427 by an individual named Aḥmad-i Lur.² No mere political discontent, the Timurid historical sources suggest that this Aḥmad-i Lur was connected to a certain ‘Azūd al-Dīn, a follower (and possible relative) of the founder of the Ḥurūfiyya movement, Faḏl Allāh Astarābādī.³ Though Shāhrukh survived his injuries, the response of the state was predictably swift, as the Timurid intelligence

¹ Āzarī, *AMA*, 32a; Faḏl Allāh Astarābādī, *Kulliyāt-i Ash‘ār-i Faḏl Allāh Na‘īmī Astarābādī*, ed. Muḥammad Darzī, *Majmū‘a-yi Intishārāt-i Adabī va Tārīkhī*, Mawqūfāt-i Duktur Maḥmūd Afshār 227 (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Duktur Maḥmūd Afshār: bā Hamkāri-i Intishārāt-i Sukhan, 1398 [2019]), 147.

² On the dating, see, İlker Evrim Binbaş, “Anatomy,” 398. Having completed his earliest written work of the *Miftāḥ al-Asrār* in 830/1436-7, one must wonder how Āzarī’s departure related chronologically to this event. On this dating, see: Āzarī, *AMA*, 8b-11b.

³ Binbaş, “Anatomy,” 399-401.

services pursued not only those who had had direct connections with the attacker, such as Azud al-Dīn or the calligrapher, Maʿrūf-i Khaṭṭāt, but even those who might be considered to have merely been more broadly interested in esoteric and occult matters. This backlash would extend to include not only the popular Ṣūfī figure Qāsim-i Anvār (d. 837/1433), a copy of whose *dīvān* was allegedly found in the room of the would-be assassin and who was accordingly expelled from Shāhrukhid realms, but also intellectuals such as Ṣāʿin al-Dīn Turka and Sharaf al-Dīn ʿAlī Yazdī (d. 858/1454), both of whom were compelled to write lengthy tracts in their own defense to remove themselves from suspicion in the eyes of the authorities.⁴ Though both certainly interested in the science of the letters, the *ʿilm-i ḥurūf*, one could hardly consider Ṣāʿin al-Dīn or Sharaf al-Dīn to have been “Ḥurūfī” followers themselves, and on the contrary, these same scholars would have singled out Fażl Allāh and his followers for pointed criticism.⁵ Clearly, the environment in Herat around the time of Āzarī completing the *AMA* would not have been warm to a figure who showed a clear interest towards such mainstays of the *ʿilm-i ḥurūf* as the esoteric interpretation of the *Muqattaʿāt*, the Disconnected Letters of the Qurʾān, to which Āzarī had devoted great effort in his *AMA*.⁶

⁴ See: Binbaş, “Anatomy,” 402-4; Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks*, 48; Matthew Melvin-Koushki, “Quest,” 58-68.

⁵ In other words, one might make a distinction between a “Ḥurūfī” and a “ḥurūfī,” the former being a follower of the teachings explicated in the writings of Fażl Allāh Astarābādī specifically, and the latter being categorized under a much broader umbrella of those interested in letterist analytical techniques which would not be limited only to the beliefs of Fażl Allāh. In fact, many of those figures in the latter camp would have been harshly critical of the former, believing the Fażl-allāhī approach to the science of the letters to be badly mistaken. For evidence of this distinction, see: Melvin-Koushki, “Quest,” 62-68, in which – among other topics – Ṣāʿin al-Dīn is dismissive towards movements such as the Ḥurūfiyya in no uncertain terms. Similar vehemence may be seen from the Ottoman esotericist, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Bisṭāmī, who considered Fażl Allāh a “friend of Satan.” Cornell Fleischer, “Ancient Wisdom,” 235.

⁶ Āzarī, *AMA*, 18a-24b. See my article: Zach Winters, “Reading the Book of Creation in the *Miftāḥ al-Asrār* of Āzarī Isfārayīnī,” *La Rosa di Paracelso* No. 2 (2020): 13–25.

In fact, Āzarī had much greater reason to be concerned about the intelligence arm of the Shāhrukhid court than Šā’in al-Dīn Turka or Sharaf al-Dīn ‘Alī Yazdī. It is true that, just like these contemporaries, Āzarī would have shown an interest in the science of the letters and what this science might reveal about both the mundane and celestial worlds. However, it is highly unlikely that either of these other figures would have referred to Fażl Allāh Astarābādī as *mawlānā*, “[our] master,” wished for the mercy of God upon him, and cited with approval the well-known Ḥurūfī works of the *Jāvidān-nāma* (*Epistle of Eternity*) and *‘Arsh-nāma* (*Epistle of the Throne*), all of which appear in many points throughout the *AMA* and later *AJA*. Recalling the previous chapter, the biography of Āzarī would add circumstantial evidence as to the likelihood of his coming into contact with Ḥurūfī concepts. He would have spent considerable time in Tabriz in his youth, the very site where the “manifestation of glory” (*zuhūr-i kibriyā*) of Fażl Allāh – an experience of intense spiritual inspiration as to the true nature of the cosmos which will be detailed below – took place in 775/1374, and where there still would have been an active Ḥurūfī community both when Āzarī arrived in Tabriz from Khurasan at some point in 800/1397-8 on the way to join the campaigning court of Tīmūr Bārīlās by 802/1399, as well as when he passed back through the city prior to 803/1400-1 as he returned to his homeland.⁷ This time in Tabriz would not be the only time Āzarī spent in the first half of the 9th/15th century in an area of ongoing Ḥurūfī activity, as his own home province, Khurasan, would have been under the guidance of Sayyid Iṣḥāq, a Ḥurūfī *khalīfa* (successor) of Fażl Allāh and author of the *Maḥram-nāma*, which was composed at almost the same moment as the *AMA*.⁸ Even Sabzavār, the capital

⁷ See the introduction on the dating for Āzarī passing through Tabriz. The Ḥurūfī community in Tabriz would have been present following the life of Fażl Allāh, with this community’s eventually being purged in the lifetime of Jahānshāh of the Qarā Qoyunlu in 845/1441. See: Muḥammad Jawād Mashkūr, “Fitna-yi Ḥurūfiyya dar Tabrīz,” *Barrāsī-hā-yi Tārīkhī* 4, no. 4 (1969/70): 133–46; Hamid Algar, “Horufism,” *Elr*.

⁸ Sayyid Iṣḥāq notes in the *Maḥram-nāma* that he was inspired to write his material on 21 Rabī‘ I 828/10 February 1425, though later references in the text make clear that the writing of the work itself was not completed

of the polity of the Sarbadārid polity which the relatives of Āzarī had served, would have seen a brief visit from Faḏl Allāh around 761-2/1360, a visit which this chapter will review in more detail shortly.⁹ In terms of the biography of Āzarī, it is the ten years between the *AMA* and *AJA* in which there is the most doubt. Based on the *AMA* and what can be gathered from the Timurid historiographical sources, it is known that Āzarī must have been back in the broader realms of Khurasan and completing his first esoteric compendium at some point during 830/1427.¹⁰ Rabī‘ II being an early month in the Muslim calendar, it would not be unreasonable to suppose that Āzarī was completing the *AMA*, complete with fond references to Faḏl Allāh, possibly even after the assassination attempt against Shāhrukh. While Āzarī himself is coy with regard to his autobiography in the later *AJA*, one will recall he first set off for Syria, followed by an additional trip to the holy sites of Mecca and Medina, then to the Bahmanid realms of Sulṭān Aḥmad “Ghāzī” in Bidar.¹¹ In other words, having put to pen a work not only interested in the *‘ilm-i ḥurūf* in general, but Ḥurūfī doctrine in particular, at the same general time period that a Ḥurūfī assassin attempted to kill Shāhrukh followed by a pursuant crackdown on lettrist intellectuals, Āzarī found himself rushing away from Khurasan and only gradually making his way back home to complete the *AJA* in 840/1436-7. It is true that there are many missing specifics with regard to the itinerary of Āzarī, but it is, if nothing else, a happy coincidence that he found himself far from Khurasan at the precise moment when his beliefs would likely have been under intense scrutiny by his former patrons at the Shāhrukhid court. The lack of precise dates regarding the

until at least 831/1427-8. Clément Huart, *Textes persans relatifs à la secte des houroufīs*, E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Series 9 (Leiden; London: Brill; Luzac & Co., 1909), 20; 71.

⁹ Bashir, *Fazlallah Astarabadi and the Hurufis*, 12-14.

¹⁰ Āzarī, *AMA*, 15b.

¹¹ Āzarī, *AJA*, 3b.

journey of Āzarī means that it is difficult to precisely align his travel with the repressive actions against lettrism following the failed assassination attempt against Shāhrukh, but one must likewise ask whether Āzarī might have had good reason to take leave from Khurasan for many years following the completion of his *AMA*.¹²

Assuming a certain amount of political awareness on the part of the poet, it would have been wise of Āzarī to not be near Herat following the dissemination of his first work. If Qāsim-i Anvār was held in suspicion merely due to the perpetrator, Aḥmad-i Lur, having a copy of his *dīvān*, one could imagine the arm of the state falling in a far harsher manner upon Āzarī. The first matter is the simple content of the *AMA* (itself then revisited in the *AJA*): while specific instances will be discussed in detail shortly, the fact of the matter is that even a brief review of early sections of the work would see glowing references to Fażl Allāh, a familiarity with his works, and an understanding of core Ḥurūfī concepts related to the science of the letters and the role of the human being in the cosmos. Though one will not find an outright declaration of “membership” in the Ḥurūfī network of the 9th/15th century in the works of Āzarī, one might still reasonably conclude that Āzarī should be considered to have been a part of this network on account of exactly these features of his works. This is not to say that Āzarī was *only* a Ḥurūfī, or even that being a Ḥurūfī was his most important intellectual affiliation – his additional intellectual affinities will be discussed in the next chapter – but it does mean that the life and works of Āzarī cannot be sufficiently examined without taking into consideration his affection

¹² This possibility was also hypothesized on page 649 of the paper of Majīd Naşrābādī: Majīd Naşrābādī, “Ḥurūfiyya va Shaykh Āzarī bā Takya bar Kitāb-i «Jawāhir al-Asrār»,” *Mawj-i Daryā-yi Ma‘rifat: Majmū‘a-yi Chakīdah-hā va Barguzīdah-yi Maqālāt-i Hamāyish-i Bayn al-Milālī-i Shaykh Āzarī*, ed. ‘Abbās Shujā‘ī and Yūsuf Alī Yūsuf-nizhād (Mashhad: Kitābdār-i Tūs, 1390 [2011]), 640–50. I am inclined to agree with the circumstantial evidence for the flight of Āzarī from Khurasan, though this particular paper would benefit from greater care to distinguish the Ḥurūfiyya as a network from those interested in lettrist (‘ilm-i ḥurūf) topics: Şā’ in al-Dīn Turka, for example, was certainly not a Ḥurūfī, as mentioned on page 648.

for the Ḥurūfiyya. This fact, which has received only scant attention in the existing literature on Āzarī,¹³ would place him in transgressive company, not only in the environs of Herat but across much of the Islamic world. More importantly than what this discovery might entail for the biography of Āzarī is what it might say about the nature of the Ḥurūfiyya in the 9th/15th century: what might a follower of Ḥurūfī doctrine in Khurasan at the time have believed? To which Ḥurūfī documents might he or she have had access? Are there any hints in the work of Āzarī as to from whom he may have learned portions of the *Jāvidān-nāma* or *‘Arsh-nāma*? While answers to these questions may not be immediately obvious from the work of Āzarī in the *AMA* and *AJA*, what is needed is a closer examination of Ḥurūfī doctrines in the esoteric works of Āzarī, and the potential implications of his being even a tangential follower of the Ḥurūfiyya during both a key moment of crisis for the movement in Khurasan, and a time of great personal flux for Āzarī.

This chapter will involve both a close reading of certain key sections in the works of Āzarī, as well as an analysis of the significance of such works in understanding certain broader contours of the intellectual life of the Persianate world in the first half of the 9th/15th century. Before diving into the *AMA* or *AJA* themselves, a certain amount of preliminary background material will need to be discussed: Why is it significant that Āzarī himself emerged from the context of the Sarbadārid “republic” of Khurasan, itself a unique fixture in Iranian lands in the 8th/14th century? What is meant by “Ḥurūfī beliefs,” such that they could be easily identified in the compendia of Āzarī? It will not escape the notice of the reader that from his birth, Āzarī had connections in one way or another with prominent messianic movements of his time, and so, the chapter must necessarily begin with a brief section of historical background. Secondly, references to Fażl Allāh in the esoteric compendia of Āzarī will be considered in their entirety to

¹³ For one rare exception, see the conference paper of Naşrābādī in the note above.

consider what sorts of Ḥurūfī concepts may have made their way into the *AMA* and *AJA*. While these works are far from being *entirely* Ḥurūfī, certain early sections will be shown to be heavily infused with Ḥurūfī concepts related to the creation of humanity and the linguistic underpinnings of the universe as articulated by Faḏl Allāh and his successors. Finally, the chapter will turn to an issue which would have been of supreme importance the intellectual circles of Āzarī: the nature of the caliphate, the imamate, and the person of the *mahdī* in a period long after the disruption of the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate by the Mongol invasion, when polities from the Balkans to Bidar found themselves pursuing new and sometimes radical solutions to solve the question of who would be a legitimate holder of religious and political power in the Islamic world. As Āzarī presented a copy of his *AMA* to his patrons in the Bahmanid sultanate, and given that he served, albeit briefly, as a high-ranking advisor to Aḥmad Shāh I, it would be of immense importance to know how Āzarī himself may have conceived of these questions of legitimacy. His status in Bidar and his works having spread to the Bahmanid sultanate at an important transitional moment of the polity itself will make it all the more notable that in considering the caliphate and imamate he resolved this question of authority through explicit reference to Ḥurūfī concepts. What will emerge is a figure in Āzarī who, though following a similar path as many of his contemporary intellectuals interested in the occult sciences, was far from a carbon copy of these other 9th/15th century figures who served as high-ranking advisors to political figures in the Persianate world. On the contrary, the works of Āzarī might be read as setting forth their own, distinctive argument regarding the esoteric foundations of political leadership – an argument to which many of these competing intellectuals would have been skeptical at best, and outright hostile, at worst.

2.2. The Sarbadārid Background of Āzarī

The connections, vague as they may be, between the extended family of Āzarī and the Sarbadārid movement were mentioned in passing in the introduction, but deserve additional scrutiny. Though the basic outlines of Sarbadārid history in Khurasan leading up to the birth of Āzarī are well known,¹⁴ the specifics of his extended family remain frustratingly obscure. What little about the family of Āzarī which might confirm that he had Sarbadārid connections in the report of Dawlatshāh that the father of Āzarī, Khwāja ‘Alī Malik, was a local notable (*ṣāhib-ikhtiyār*) in Isfarāyin for the Sarbadārids, and that Āzarī had a lineage reaching back to “*ṣāhib-da ‘wa*” Mu‘īn al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Ramajī al-Hāshimī.¹⁵ To reiterate, Āzarī was not only incidentally born and raised in Isfarāyin in the later days of the Sarbadārid polity, but had family serving in governmental posts only about 100 kilometers away from the capital of Sabzavār. More compelling than his father’s rather vague title of *ṣāhib-ikhtiyār* is his ancestor being *ṣāhib-da ‘wa*, “master of proselytization,” which raises the question of what, precisely, was being proselytized. While the conclusion may have to remain speculative, one might reasonably turn to the very origins of the Sarbadārid state to find a potential solution.

Untangling the matter of Sarbadārid origins is still not an entirely straightforward process. Though Mazzaoui alluded to a “communistic” ethos among the Sarbadārids,¹⁶ and

¹⁴ The Sarbadārid polity at the time of the early life of Āzarī will be discussed in further detail shortly, but the major studies would certainly include: John Masson Smith, *The History of the Sarbadar Dynasty, 1336-1381 A.D. and its Sources*; Jean Aubin, “La fin de l’état sarbadār du Khorassan” Shivan Mahendrarajah, “The Sarbadars of Sabzavar: Re-Examining Their ‘Shi‘a’ Roots and Alleged Goal to ‘Destroy Khurasanian Sunnism,’” *Journal of Shi‘a Islamic Studies* 5, no. iv (2012): 379–402. See also the work of Petrushevskii, available in Persian translation: I. P. Petrushevskii, *Nahzat-i Sarbadārān-i Khurāsān*, trans. Karīm Kashāvarz (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Payām, 1351 [1972]).

¹⁵ Less likely *sarbadālān*, “the arrogant,” as included in the most recent version of the *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā’*. Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā’*, 718.

¹⁶ Michel M. Mazzaoui, *The Origins of the Ṣafawids*, 67.

Minorsky deemed the Sarbadārīds a “republic,” exhibiting the “democratic traditions” of Iran,¹⁷ Scarcia-Amoretti has rightly described the essential structure of the Sarbadārīd movement as diarchical, consisting of a “political” military wing of local aristocratic notables and a “religious” wing, led by the head of the Shaykhīd-Jūrīd Ṣūfī movement (Shaykhiyya) and of a lower economic class.¹⁸ It is true that the earliest days seem to reflect economic grievance more than religious protest. The campaigns of the Chinggis-khānid Īlkhān Ṭaghāytīmūr (d. 754/1353), as noted by Smith, had led to considerable local financial pressure on the people of Khurasan, sparking increasing resentment against governmental revenue officials.¹⁹ If the Sabadārīd movement emerged from a dispute over tax revenues, from what source has come the characterization of this “republic” as having a messianic Ṣūfī-Shī‘ī orientation?²⁰ It was the reign of the second Sarbadārīd commander, Mas‘ūd (d. 745/1344-45), which saw the enactment of a policy which would set the long-term trajectory of the Sarbadārīd polity and give it the reputation which has remained with it in the existing literature, namely, the recruitment of the Ṣūfī-Shī‘ī leader Ḥasan Jūrī (d. 743/1342) to complete the Sarbadārīd diarchy. According to Ḥāfīz-i Abrū, Ḥasan Jūrī was the disciple of a certain Shaykh Khalīfa (d. 736/1335), a Shī‘ī preacher in Sabzavār whose religious commitments placed him in the bad graces of the local

¹⁷ Vladimir Fedorovich Minorsky, “Iran: Opposition, Martyrdom and Revolt,” in *Unity and Variety in Muslim Civilization*, ed. Gustave E. von Grunebaum, Comparative Studies of Cultures and Civilizations (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), 192.

¹⁸ B. Scarcia-Amoretti, “Religion in the Timurid and Safavid Periods,” 612–13.

¹⁹ Smith, quoting Dawlatshāh: Smith, *The History of the Sarbadar Dynasty, 1336-1381 A.D. and Its Sources*, 104. One will note that this was not the only instance of a localized rebellion by local notables and members of the artisan and religious classes which took on the moniker sarbadār. A short-lived uprising with leaders also bearing the title of sarbadārs took place in Samarqand in 766/1365, though the exact circumstances differed considerably the Sarbadārīds of Sabzavār. For the details of this other group of “sarbadārs,” see: V.V. Bartol’d, “Narodnoye dvizheniye v Samarkande v 1365 g. (‘A Popular Uprising in Samarqand in 1365’),” trans. J.M. Rogers, *Iran* 19 (1981): 21–31.

²⁰ Scarcia-Amoretti, “Religion in the Timurid and Safavid Periods,” 612.

Sunnī community. With the Īlkhān Abū Sa‘īd (d. 736/1335) choosing to defer on the matter despite the entreaties of these Sabzavārī Sunnīs, the opponents of Shaykh Khalīfa took matters into their own hands and murdered him.²¹ Though a major figure in the spiritual lineage of half of the Sarbadārid whole, the evidence for what, exactly, Shaykh Khalīfa would have been preaching is slim. The apparent circumstances of his murder, at least, suggest a Shī‘ī confessional affiliation. Likewise, there is a passage in the history of Mīrkh^wānd in which, asked by ‘Alā’ al-Dawla Simnānī about which religious school (*madhhab*) he followed, Shaykh Khalīfa responded, “I seek a school that is superior to those four.”²² This enigmatic statement has been used to suggest not only a Shī‘ī affiliation for Shaykh Khalīfa, but that he was specifically influenced by Nizārī Ismā‘īlī thought.²³ It is true that the followers of Shaykh Khalīfa, as will be discussed further momentarily, had periods in which they espoused messianic beliefs in the sense of expecting the imminent return of the *mahdī*. It can also be determined by the names of Sarbadārid figures that many of the residents of Sabzavār who were attracted to this movement were members of trades, including butchers, corpse-washers, and other artisans.²⁴ These observations may be fit into a broader hypothesis of a Nizārī Ismā‘īlī “underground” following the sack of Alamūt, in which the Ismā‘īlīs adopted the general aesthetics of Sufism, could be found in guild organizations, and infused Ṣūfī doctrine with Ismā‘īlī beliefs.²⁵ However

²¹ Smith, *The History of the Sarbadar Dynasty, 1336-1381 A.D. and Its Sources*, 112.

²² That is, the four “canonical” Sunnī *madhhabs*, Ḥanafī, Mālikī, Shāfi‘ī, and Ḥanbalī. Cited in Shivan Mahendrarajah, “The Sarbadars of Sabzavar,” 387.

²³ Mahendrarajah, “The Sarbadars of Sabzavar,” 390–91.

²⁴ Note the Sarbadārid official Ḥaydar Qaṣṣāb, “Ḥaydar the butcher.” Smith, *The History of the Sarbadar Dynasty*, 133.

²⁵ On the potential for a fusion of Ismā‘īlism with elements of Sufism in the post-Alamūt period, see: Farhad Daftary, “Ismā‘īlī-Sufi Relations in Early Post-Alamūt and Safavid Persia,” in *The Heritage of Sufism Volume 3: Late Classical Persianate Sufism (1501-1750)*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn and David Morgan, (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999), 275–89. On the matter of Ismā‘īlīs after Alamūt blending into the Ṣūfī fold, see the specific

compelling such circumstantial evidence may be, there is little textual evidence on which to base much of an argument as to the specifics of the belief of Shaykh Khalīfa.

A more productive avenue of inquiry, both for the Shaykhiyya and the early Sarbadārid period, would be in examining the successor to Shaykh Khalīfa, Ḥasan Jūrī. In Ḥasan Jūrī, one finds the approximation of future militarized messianic movements that are not found so clearly in the strictly military-aristocratic wing of the Sarbadārids. The evidence, though still scant, points to Ḥasan Jūrī expecting the return of the *mahdī*, which is to say the Twelfth Shī‘ī Imam, at any moment. More notable than this messianic expectation would be the practical steps taken by Ḥasan Jūrī in organizing the Shaykhiyya around this messianic principle. Ḥasan not only organized an armed order of followers made up mostly of artisans, but also traveled beyond the boundaries of Khurasan to spread his mission and establish a wide-ranging network of followers in expectation of an armed rebellion at a later date.²⁶ It is in this tactic that one might begin to see an omen for what would later come with the Ṣafavid movement, which was itself powered by its successful and far-ranging recruitment efforts across Eastern Anatolia, the Caucasus, and Northern Iran.²⁷ Seeing an opportunity to build his own base of support by aligning himself with this popular religious leader, the Sarbadārid Mas‘ūd joined forces with Ḥasan Jūrī in 741/1340²⁸ and the Sarbadārid movement at last became its fully-fledged diarchy: the *shaykhīyān*, the followers of Ḥasan Jūrī, and the *sarbadārān*, the followers of Mas‘ūd.²⁹ The balance between the

example of Nizārī Quhistānī in: Nadia Eboo Jamal, *Surviving the Mongols: Nizārī Quhistānī and the Continuity of Ismaili Tradition in Persia*, Ismaili Heritage Series 8 (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002).

²⁶ Smith, *The History of the Sarbadar Dynasty, 1336-1381 A.D. and Its Sources*, 112-3; Mahendrarajah, “The Sarbadars of Sabzavar,” 398–390.

²⁷ Mazzaoui, *The Origins of the Ṣafawids*, 71–73.

²⁸ Smith, *The History of the Sarbadar Dynasty, 1336-1381 A.D. and its Sources*, 112–13.

²⁹ Smith, *The History of the Sarbadar Dynasty, 1336-1381 A.D. and its Sources*, 114.

two factions proved to be ultimately unstable, as in the course of a campaign against Herat, Ḥasan Jūrī himself was killed by a Sarbadārid soldier, likely at the instigation of Mas‘ūd himself.³⁰ While this dynamic was not completely static and would recur over the course of the Sarbadārid period,³¹ it is worth considering a tangential question relevant to the broader time period: do the origins of the Sarbadārid polity place them in the same general messianic milieu as the Nūrbakhshīyya, Musha‘sha‘īyya, or Ṣafaviyya? The answer is both yes and no. The earliest signs of rebellion by the Sarbadārids were not messianic or Ṣūfī oriented, as the revolt under the founder ‘Abd al-Razzāq does appear more clearly to be a local notable rejecting the tax burden placed upon the territory by the central government. There are elements of the Shaykhiyya order, specifically, which do share notable characteristics with the Ṣafavid Order, including their vast recruitment efforts, their messianic expectations, and their function as a militarized Ṣūfī order.³² But the dualistic nature of the Sarbadārids alone, including the prominent role for the military wing, should call into question whether this polity as a whole can be discussed in the same breath as the Ṣafavids or Musha‘sha‘īyya.

Just as the Sarbadārid diarchy would come and go over time, there is a considerable amount of fluidity in the nature of Sarbadārid religious affiliation, thus adding to the difficulty in understanding the environment in which Āzarī would have been born and raised. The notable

³⁰ Smith, *The History of the Sarbadar Dynasty, 1336-1381 A.D. and its Sources*, 115–17.

³¹ Even ‘Alī Mu‘ayyad, a promoter of Shī‘ism as the official doctrine of the Sarbadārids, would turn against the dervishes with some force after initial cooperation. Smith, *The History of the Sarbadar Dynasty, 1336-1381 A.D. and its Sources*, 146–47. This too might echo the Ṣafavid period, which would eventually witness the Ṣūfī order which bolstered the polity’s own rise to power fall out of favor with the state. The relationship between the Ṣafavid Empire and Ṣūfī orders in Iran has also been addressed in: Ata Anzali, “The Safavid Opposition to Sufism,” in *“Mysticism” in Iran: The Safavid Roots of a Modern Concept*, Studies in Comparative Religion (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2017), 25–68.

³² Mazzaoui, *The Origins of the Ṣafavids*, 71–82.

connection between the later Sabardārid ruler ‘Alī Mu’ayyad and the Shī‘ī scholar Muḥammad b. Makkī might well suggest that the Sarbadārids were a Shī‘ī polity through and through, and the periodic presence of the militarized and apparently Shī‘ī-messianic Shaykhiyya order is no small matter of importance. There are also statements in the literary sources, as in the case of Ibn Baṭūṭa, that the Sarbadārid authorities fully embraced Shī‘ism.³³ However, the numismatic evidence available for the Sarbadārid period should call into question these sorts of blanket categorizations. The majority of Sarbadārid coins from the beginning of the rebellion in 737/1337 up to 759/1357-8 do not include any Shī‘ī signifiers, such as listing the names of the Twelve Imams of *Ithnā‘Asharī* Shī‘ism, or including the line from the Shī‘ī the profession of faith [*shahāda*] of, ‘*Alī walī Allāh*, “‘Alī is the friend of God.” Rather, these early coins list the first four caliphs of Islam, the so-called “Rightly Guided Caliphs,” and the Sunnī profession of faith.³⁴ It was not until after 759/1357-8 that one would have more consistently see coins with Shī‘ī features minted in Sarbadārid domains.³⁵ In the early period, one might potentially have seen both a political and religious dichotomy in the Sarbadārid diarchy, with the Shaykhiyya Order being more inclined towards Shī‘ism and the military aristocracy of Sabzavār largely of a Sunnī cast. There is some hint in the literary sources that the confessional commitments of these two branches contributed at least in part to political tensions, with Ḥasan Jūrī encouraging a more stringent official religious program following the conquest of Nīshāpūr than Mas‘ūd

³³ Technically, Ibn Baṭūṭa used the pejorative *rifḍ/rāfiḍa* as a marker of Shī‘ī affiliation. Smith, *The History of the Sarbadar Dynasty, 1336-1381 A.D. and Its Sources*, 55.

³⁴ Smith, *The History of the Sarbadar Dynasty, 1336-1381 A.D. and its Sources*, 77.

³⁵ Smith, *The History of the Sarbadar Dynasty, 1336-1381 A.D. and its Sources*, 77–78; A.H. Morton, “The History of the Sarbadārs in the Light of New Numismatic Evidence,” *The Numismatic Chronicle*, Seventh Series, 16, no. 136 (1976), 256–57; Stephen Album, *Checklist of Islamic Coins*, 3rd ed. (Santa Rosa, CA: Stephen Album Rare Coins, 2011), 252-3.

preferred.³⁶ What is most important for the matter at hand is that while the Sarbadārid regime in its earliest manifestation had both Shī‘ī and Sunnī elements, with the more dominant Sunnī faction minting coinage accordingly, the polity was largely Shī‘ī by the last few decades of the 8th/14th century, when Āzarī would have been born.

When Āzarī was born in the latter part of the Sarbadārid experiment, at nearly the exact moment of the march of Tīmūr and his forces through Sabzavār, the polity would have taken on a different appearance. The rise of ‘Alī Mu’ayyad to preeminence in the Sarbadārid leadership saw not only the longest lasting Sarbadārid administration – where the average Sarbadārid sovereign ruled for only two years, ‘Alī Mu’ayyad ruled for 20 – but also the Sarbadārid polity become fully Shī‘ī in its confessional affiliation. Though the commander of the military aristocracy, ‘Alī Mu’ayyad minted coins with Shī‘ī legends and encouraged the composition of the Shī‘ī text, *al-Lum‘a al-Dimashqiyya*.³⁷ It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the adoption of a more unified Shī‘ī stance across the Sarbadārid diarchy would bring with it a more peaceful relationship between the military and dervish wings. On the contrary, the later period of the Sarbadārid polity saw old trends re-emerge anew. Seeking a partner in his machinations against his rival, Ḥasan Dāmghānī, ‘Alī Mu’ayyad entered into an alliance with the leader of the Shaykhiyya, Dervish ‘Azīz, and the two were able to seize control of the Sarbadārids by 763/1361-2.³⁸ This was not the first foray of Dervish ‘Azīz into politics: just prior to this episode, the Ṣūfī leader had himself taken control of Tūs in a sort of messianic rebellion, exhorting his

³⁶ Smith suggests that Mas‘ūd likely calculated such a policy as the enforced establishment of Shī‘ism as the official doctrine of the polity to be risky, given Sarbadārid political precarity. Smith, *The History of the Sarbadar Dynasty, 1336-1381 A.D. and Its Sources*, 117.

³⁷ Smith, *The History of the Sarbadar Dynasty, 1336-1381 A.D. and its Sources*, 147.

³⁸ Smith, *The History of the Sarbadar Dynasty, 1336-1381 A.D. and its Sources*, 145–46.

followers to the belief that the return of the *mahdī* was imminent and founding his “theocracy in the name of Sulṭān Muḥammad [b. Ḥasan al-‘Askarī], the *Mahdī*.”³⁹ Though this attempt would soon fail, with Ḥasan Dāmghānī forcing Dervish ‘Azīz into exile, the latter was able to return triumphantly to Sarbadārid domains in lockstep with ‘Alī Mu’ayyad. Such an episode is nearly a direct recurrence of the early alliance between Mas‘ūd and Ḥasan Jūrī, in which the commander of the military wing and leader of a messianic order found pragmatic reasons to enter into a partnership. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that the partnership of ‘Alī Mu’ayyad and Dervish ‘Azīz came to a similar end as to that of their predecessors. Just as Mas‘ūd found cause to purge Ḥasan Jūrī from the joint Sarbadārid ranks not long after their initial successes in Khurasan, the forces of ‘Alī Mu’ayyad eviscerated any semblance of dervish power within a year of the success of their united front. Finding reason to execute Dervish ‘Azīz on a charge of “disloyalty,” it is reported by Mīrkh^wānd and Dawlatshāh that the military wing under ‘Alī Mu’ayyad went so far as to persecute the rank-and-file of the Shaykhiyya and desecrate the tombs of Shaykh Khalīfa and Ḥasan Jūrī.⁴⁰ While marking the conclusion of the uneasy coordination between the military

³⁹ Smith, *The History of the Sarbadar Dynasty, 1336-1381 A.D. and its Sources*, 144.

⁴⁰ Smith, *The History of the Sarbadar Dynasty, 1336-1381 A.D. and its Sources*, 146. There is an imperfect parallel again to be found with the Ṣafavid Order-turned-Empire. Despite being the military backbone of the Ṣafavids during their precipitous rise to dominance in the Iranian plateau, the Qizilbāsh tribes also were a perpetual source of insecurity for much of the first century of Ṣafavid rule. Indeed, the first ten years of the “reign” of Tahmāsp, the successor to Shāh Ismā‘īl I, involved constant conflict among various Qizilbāsh factions, brought on by a *de facto* war among the tribes that broke out upon his succession and put down with great difficulty. Though temporarily quelled, internecine Qizilbāsh quarrelling arose once more at the end of the reign of Tahmāsp, and the Qizilbāsh factions remained powerful in the Ṣafavid polity throughout the administrations of Ismā‘īl II and Muḥammad Khudābanda. It was not until the reign of Shāh ‘Abbās I that the Ṣafavid state, bolstered by contingents of non-Turcoman troops and thus unburdened by Qizilbāsh confederate loyalties, was able to decisively weaken this military force. The analogy partially breaks down when considering the chronology of the Sarbadārid polity, both in terms of the initial rebellion being directed by the military aristocracy and the Ṣūfī order being added as a partner later on, and in the fact that the Shaykhiyya – while periodically key to Sarbadārid military fortunes – were something of a junior partner to non-dervish sources of power. They could hardly be thought of as equivalent in relative strength and importance as the Qizilbāsh were for the Ṣafavid Empire. Nonetheless, there is a certain sort of continuity between the two in the potential for rapidly-escalating conflict between a military/administrative apparatus and armed Ṣūfī orders in the polities of post-Mongol Iran. On the fortunes of the Qizilbāsh over time, see Hans Roemer, “Die Turkmenischen Qizilbaş: Gründer und Opfer der safawidischen Theokratie,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 135 (1985): 227–40. A version of this same article as also published in:

and dervish wings of the Sarbadārids, the Shaykhiyya order would continue to be present in surrounding lands, suggesting a certain amount of staying power for this militarized, messianic movement.⁴¹

This brief review of the Sarbadārid polity as it developed over the course of the 8th/14th century should provide necessary context for both the environment where Āzarī spent his early life, and the social dynamics of Khurasan at a moment when popular, messianic Ṣūfī movements were appearing across the Islamic world. The nature of the Sarbadārid partnership meant that there was undeniably a popular Ṣūfī movement present in Khurasan and involved at key points of Sarbadārid history, and that some leaders of this movement were actively awaiting the return of the *mahdī*. By the same token, while the Sarbadārids were not Shī'ī from their earliest founding, the leadership of the movement had essentially embraced *Ithnā'asharī* Shī'ism before the birth of Āzarī.⁴² With this in mind, there are two observations to be drawn from this discussion of the Sarbadārids that would be key for setting the historical context in which Āzarī was working. The more basic matter is that whatever the origins of the Sarbadārids, the Sarbadārid “republic” when the relatives of Āzarī were in its services was almost certainly Shī'ī

Hans Roemer, “The Qizilbash Turcomans: Founders and Victims of the Safavid Theocracy,” in *Intellectual Studies on Islam: Essays Written in Honor of Martin B. Dickson*, ed. Michel M. Mazzaoui and Vera B. Moreen (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1990), 27–39.

⁴¹ Jean Aubin, “La fin de l'état sarbadār du Khorassan,” 100–102.

⁴² One might object that 'Alī Mu'ayyad rejected his Shī'ī affiliation at the time of his submission to Tīmūr, stating that as subjects follow the religion of their leaders, so too would he, as a follower of Tīmūr, take on Sunnism. I would agree with the judgment of Aubin, however, that what should be emphasized in this anecdote is the ruthless pragmatism of 'Alī Mu'ayyad, rather than seeing a sea change in Sarbadārid confessional alignment. Likewise, as the Sarbadārids continued to participate in a number of Timurid campaigns as loyal vassals, appearing in both the conquests of Azerbaijan and the Timurid raids into India, the successors of 'Alī Mu'ayyad were granted governorships in 'Arab 'Iraq, which is to say, lands of immense importance in Shī'ī Islam in which a significant Shī'ī population would have resided. Aubin has thus suggested that the Sarbadārids were well chosen for such an assignment, given their ability to both lead as “moderate” Shī'ī governors and to sniff out “dangerous underground tendencies,” given their previous clashes with the Shaykhiyya. Aubin, “La fin de l'état sarbadār du Khorassan,” 106–114.

in its affiliation, as seen in the discussion of the literary and numismatic evidence from the period of ‘Alī Mu’ayyad above. The more pressing question, though, is on the question of *messianic* Shī‘ism, given that Āzarī discusses the *mahdī* at such length in the *AMA*. While the Shaykhiyya were no longer affiliated with the Sarbadārids at the time of his birth, they were still present throughout Khurasan: there is evidence that when the Shaykhiyya marched against the Sarbadārids with the support of the Muẓaffarid Shāh Shujā‘ (d. 786/1384), a number of their followers emerged from hiding and joined the rebellion in Sarbadārid domains.⁴³ Put differently, the Shaykhiyya would have been widespread throughout the region even after their being officially forced out of the Sarbadārid diarchy by ‘Alī Mu’ayyad. This information should be taken in concert with the fact that Iranian lands saw an explosion of messianic activity in the early-to-mid 9th/15th century. There can be little doubt that an atmosphere of intense messianic speculation would have been present in Isfarāyin and beyond in Āzarī’s early life.

2.3 The Ḥurūfiyya and the Sarbadārids of Sabzavār

While the Sarbadārids can typologically be placed alongside such near-contemporary movements as the revolt of Shaykh Badr al-Dīn, the Musha‘sha‘iyya, the Nūrbakhshiyya, or the Ṣafaviyya as sharing certain qualities which exemplify the near-constant messianic fervor of the 9th/15th century, they may be discussed in the same breath as the Ḥurūfiyya for the more practical reason that the Ḥurūfī founder, Faẓl Allāh Astarābādī, himself visited the polity in its heyday. The exact reason for his travel to Sabzavār is somewhat unclear, though it can be estimated that he passed through Sarbadārid realms in the early 760s/1360s.⁴⁴ The visit is recorded in the writings of the Ḥurūfiyya themselves, thus bringing a certain hagiographical bent to Faẓl Allāh

⁴³ Aubin, “La fin de l’état sarbadār du Khorassan,” 101–2.

⁴⁴ Bashir, *Fazlallah Astarabadi and the Hurufis*, 14.

visiting the Sarbadārid regime and accurately predicting a moment of tension between the military and Šūfī wings of the polity.⁴⁵ Even with certain chronological ambiguities about when *exactly* such a visit would have occurred,⁴⁶ the core of the matter remains that the hagiographical accounts of Fażl Allāh link him directly to Sarbadārid lands and have him displaying his mastery of dream interpretation just two decades prior to the birth of Āzarī. The connections between the Sarbadārids and the emerging network of the Ḥurūfiyya were likewise deeper than even this single hagiographical narrative would suggest. The *Maḥram-nāma* of Sayyid Ishaq notes that Amīr ‘Alī Dāmghānī, father of the Sarbadārid commander and rival of ‘Alī Mu’ayyad, Ḥasan Dāmghānī, had served as a courtier (*muqarrab*) to the Jalāyrid leader Sulṭān Uvays before departing his post to become a follower of Fażl Allāh.⁴⁷ The Ḥurūfiyya, then, can at least be placed in Khurasan with known sympathizers among the political elite of the Sarbadārids, though deeper information about connections with other Šūfī networks or the broader populace requires additional investigation of Ḥurūfī networks of the time.

2.4 The Ḥurūfī Doctrine of Fażl Allāh

While the possible intellectual links between the followers of Fażl Allāh Astarābādī and the 8th/14th century Sarbadārids are tangible but brief, the eventual messianic claims of Fażl Allāh

⁴⁵ According to the Ḥurūfī sources, Fażl Allāh met with a local notable of Sabzavār named Khwāja Jamāl al-Dīn, who was a nephew of the aforementioned Sarbadārid commander, ‘Alī Mu’ayyad. Khwāja Jamāl al-Dīn requested an interpretation from Fażl Allāh of his dream visions – cooking pigeons which miraculously grew wings and fled, and single candle in the window of his palace lighting many others – which Fażl Allāh judged to mean that the military wing of the Sarbadārids would expel the Shaykhiyya order from Sabzavār at a later date, only to see them return after a year. The narrator of the story states that, in confirmation of Fażl Allāh’s predictive ability, his interpretation was verified 15 years after it was made. Bashir, *Fazlallah Astarabadi and the Hurufis*, 13–14.

⁴⁶ Bashir, *Fazlallah Astarabadi and the Hurufis*, 14.

⁴⁷ In the dialect of Sayyid Ishaq: *īn amīr ‘Alī az muqarrabān-i Sulṭān Uvays bī [būd] va tark-i malāzamat karda mulāzīm-i majlis-i ḥā’ šā’ il jīm ḥā’ bī [=mulazim-i majlis-i khudā, Fażl Allāh, jalla ‘izzahu, būd]*. Note the lists of symbols and specialized terminology in: Huart, *Textes*, 188-210. The discussion of ‘Alī Dāmghānī is on page 43 of the edited Persian text of the same volume. See also the footnote of Huart (*Textes*, 23) in the French translation of the *Maḥram-nāma* related to the obscure acronym, *šā’ il*, which is likely used to refer to Fażl Allāh.

himself are better established. According to the accounts of his followers, Fażl Allāh would come to have a moment of spiritual inspiration in which he considered himself not only an interpreter of the world of dreams *par excellence*, but also the *mahdī* himself. These particular claims of Fażl Allāh would have occurred after he had made his way to Jalāyirid Tabriz in the second half of the 8th/14th century. Over the course of a 40-day spiritual withdrawal from society, Fażl Allāh claimed to have received a revelation (*zuhūr-i kibriyā*) in which he saw that he was not only on the rank of the prophets of Islam in terms of spiritual achievement, but that he was foremost among them. As noted by Bashir, this was no small claim: to put oneself on a spiritual rank above the prophet Muḥammad would certainly fly in the face of Islamic conventions which emphasized Muḥammad as the last of the prophets and his being the “best of all humans.”⁴⁸ This first experience in 775/1374 would be complemented by a later moment in 788/1386-7, when Fażl Allāh, over the course of an additional dream vision, not only accepted his position as the propagator of perfect scriptural interpretation and a figure on the rank of the prophets, but accepted his calling to actively preach his doctrine.⁴⁹ Finally, it is in the Ḥurūfī “Book of Sleep,” the *Nawm-nāma*, in which it is recounted that Fażl Allāh had dreams in which ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib pledged allegiance to him, and where he saw himself wearing the garb of the *mahdī*.⁵⁰ In other words, the path of quietism was no longer open to Fażl Allāh, and he saw inherent in his mission the active preaching and conflict which could be expected in the life of the messiah. Indeed, Fażl Allāh saw in his own moment of enlightenment the beginning of the apocalypse, in which he would emerge as the pre-eminent figure of a new cosmic cycle, with the end of the apocalypse

⁴⁸ Bashir, *Fazlallah Astarabadi and the Hurufis*, 26.

⁴⁹ Bashir, *Fazlallah Astarabadi and the Hurufis*, 29.

⁵⁰ Bashir, *Fazlallah Astarabadi and the Hurufis*, 29–32.

coming with the collapse of the material world following his successful mission.⁵¹ In this way, Fażl Allāh would become one of many individuals in the Islamic world in the post-Mongol period who would claim the title of *mahdī*, with all of the authority in both religious and political spheres which would accompany such a claim.

What was it about Fażl Allāh’s supposed *mahdī*-hood which distinguished him from others who saw themselves fit for such a messianic role in the 8th-9th/14th-15th centuries? While he was hardly the only religious leader of the time period to show a deep interest in the esoteric sciences, the following which sprung up around him was aptly described as “Ḥurūfī,” that is, “lettrist.” The entire project of Fażl Allāh and his followers was underpinned by a radical extension of Islamic thought on the nature of language and the divine, with the Ḥurūfī leader the consummate interpreter of this new system. The potential for great attention to linguistic specificity has been part and parcel of Islamic thought nearly from the beginning, in no small part because of the great emphasis placed upon the Qur’ān as the inimitable word of God.⁵² It would follow naturally that each letter in the text, having sprung from a divine source, was essential to the revelation contained within this scripture, expected by those who held it dear to be the last scripture of its kind necessary for humanity. The weightiness of this premise helped to inform those exegetes who devoted themselves wholeheartedly to interpreting the disconnected letters, the *Muqatta’āt*, not content to let these elements of revelation be assumed to be beyond human comprehension, no matter obscure they might first appear.⁵³ There is also the

⁵¹ Bashir, *Fazlallah Astarabadi and the Hurufis*, 63.

⁵² Note the stakes of Qur’ānic inimitability as discussed in: Richard C. Martin, “Inimitability,” *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān* vol. 2, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2001-6).

⁵³ For a summary of approaches towards the *Muqatta’āt*, see, Keith Massey, “Mysterious Letters,” in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, vol. 3, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2001-6). For a discussion of, specifically, the early traditionist attitude towards the *Muqatta’āt*, see: Martin Nguyen, “Exegesis of the Ḥurūf al-

paradigmatic description of creation as found in the Qur’ān: *innamā yaqūl^u la-hu kun fa-yakūn*, “He says only: ‘Be,’ and it is.”⁵⁴ The very creation of the cosmos is tied up with language, as it is the primordial speech act of God that gives shape to the material world. While such a conception of creation can spawn any number of theological dilemmas for the close-reading exegete – does speech necessarily involve the mechanics of the mouth, tongue, and lips? How can speech, which in human experience is basically formless, lead to the creation of the material world? – those are more pressing for the *kalām* debates of prior centuries of Islamic intellectual thought than in the context of Faḏl Allāh. In the Ḥurūfī conception, the *kun fa-yakūn* formula was meant to be taken quite literally, as it was the actual “articulat[ion]” of the phrase that led to the creation of the entire cosmos.⁵⁵ All of existence, culminating with the creation of the first human in Ādam [Adam], would therefore have to involve an admixture of the material and the linguistic.

This idea that the very foundations of the world were based on the speech of God would have implications not only for Ḥurūfī cosmology, but also for the messianism which came to be tied into the mission of Faḏl Allāh. For the means of creation, which is to say the language of God, was not completely hidden by the divine, but was rather shared with Ādam – the “names” which, per the Qur’ānic account, were taught to him by God. To escape some of the theological matters mentioned above, it should be noted that in the Ḥurūfī conception, what was taught to Ādam was not purely an alphabetical language but also a “metalanguage” of a higher order.⁵⁶

Muqatta’a: Polyvalency in Sunnī Traditions of Qur’anic Interpretation,” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 14, no. 2 (2012): 1–28.

⁵⁴ Q2:117.

⁵⁵ Bashir, *Fazlallah Astarabadi and the Hurufis*, 48.

⁵⁶ Bashir, *Fazlallah Astarabadi and the Hurufis*, 50.

After all, prior to the creation event, God could not have been “speaking” to any other being. The first language would be better thought of, as noted by Mir-Kasimov, as “the divine Word which emanated from the unfathomable essence.”⁵⁷ This foundational Word could then be broken into its constituent pieces, the letters of the Arabic and Persian alphabets, which translate this primordial concept onto the level of human speech. It is important to note at this point that for Fażl Allāh, ‘Īsā [Jesus] was equivalent to both the “pre-eternal Divine Word” and the “primordial Voice and Speech,” through which the Word and its “components,” the 28 Arabic/32 Persian letters are expressed.⁵⁸ The *Jāvidān-nāma* of Fażl Allāh thus is pre-occupied not only with this role of ‘Īsā with the Word of God, but also with incorporating the tradition of the return of ‘Īsā at the end of the world into the lettrist system of the Ḥurūfiyya. In this emanatory scheme of Fażl Allāh, there is unquestionably a connection to be drawn between the letters of the Arabic and Persian alphabet – particularly the latter for the Ḥurūfiyya – and the initial Word or “metalanguage” which was articulated by God at the moment of creation. The science of letters, the *‘ilm-i ḥurūf*, granted the keys to the lock of the secrets of the universe for the seeker to pursue a more subtle interpretation of the meaning of the material world, which is to say, they are the means of *ta’wīl*, esoteric interpretation. As ‘Īsā constituted the Word of God, his eschatological role would involve the “culmination and completion of the *ta’wīl*,” in which the ultimate “metaphysical truth of the divine Word” could be taught to all of humanity. With this

⁵⁷ Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, “Jesus as Eschatological Savior in Islam: An Example of the ‘Positive’ Apologetic Interpretation of the Christian Apocalyptic Texts in an Islamic Milieu,” *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 6 (2018): 345fn40.

⁵⁸ There is a great interest in Christology throughout the *Jāvidān-nāma* of Fażl Allāh which almost certainly drew from works within the pseudo-Clementine Arabic work of the *Book of the Rolls*, including both the *Cave of Treasures* and the *Arabic Apocalypse of Peter*. Mir-Kasimov, “Jesus as Eschatological Savior,” 343–44. This interest is understandable given that the Qur’ān itself refers to Jesus as a “word from [God],” *kalima minhu*. Q3:45.

incomparable *ta`wīl* could come the unification of the world under the banner of a single religion and speaking in a single tongue, as humanity would be taught perfect interpretation by `Īsā and perceive from every element of creation the speech of the divine Word.⁵⁹ In sum, `Īsā is a key figure in the eschatological speculations of the Ḥurūfiyya, as his presence was key to such signs of the apocalypse as the final *ta`wīl* of the secrets of the universe and the subsequent coming together of humanity in a single world religion and language – which, given the primordial sacred role of the letters, was essentially one and the same. Faḏl Allāh saw himself as not only the true Ādam, “formed in God’s image and endowed with all his essential attributes,”⁶⁰ but as the *mahdī* himself, whose lifetime would begin the process of the final apocalypse and who possessed mastery of interpretation, *ta`wīl*. To bring the system together wholly, Faḏl Allāh presented himself not only as able to fully perceive the linguistic secrets which underpinned the material world, but as one whose very possession of these powers was full of eschatological significance.

With these basic outlines of Ḥurūfī doctrine determined, what is necessary now is to turn directly to the esoteric compendia of Āzarī, the *AMA* and *AJA*. It is clear from the discussion above that Ḥurūfī doctrine would bring with it not only an interest in the science of the letters, which itself was nearly omnipresent in the 8th-9th/14th-15th century Persianate world, but also a novel understanding of the relationship between the letters of the Persian alphabet and materiality, the conception of the figure of the *mahdī*, and the relationship between this occult science and prophecy in the Islamic tradition. In short, Ḥurūfī concepts provided provocative readings of certain elements of Islamic doctrine which were in many cases received poorly by

⁵⁹ Mir-Kasimov, “Jesus as Eschatological Savior,” 348–49.

⁶⁰ Bashir, *Fazlallah Astarabadi and the Hurufis*, 81.

other Muslim intellectuals, even those well-versed in lettrism and esoteric interpretation. One was unlikely to cite Fażl Allāh by accident. The fact that he appears in the work of Āzarī, then, determines a closer analysis to understand how this poet and Şūfī of the 9th/15th century would have answered certain questions of religion through recourse to the writings of the Ḥurūfiyya.

2.5 Āzarī, the Ḥurūfī

Not only would Āzarī have undoubtedly lived in the correct time and in a number of the right places to have had some exposure to Ḥurūfī thought, but most signs point to him having had access to either the works of Fażl Allāh, or to an instructor well versed in Ḥurūfism.⁶¹ There are a number of quite explicit references to Fażl Allāh, key Ḥurūfī works such as the *Jāvidān-nāma* or *‘Arsh-nāma*, and what might now be recognized as core Ḥurūfī concepts, spread throughout the works of Āzarī. It is true that works such as the *Maḥram-nāma* of Sayyid Işāq do not mention Āzarī as an associate of the Ḥurūfī core in Khurasan, but the absence of Āzarī in Ḥurūfī works does not itself prove that Āzarī would not have had at least a fond opinion of elements of Ḥurūfī thought, if not an outright admiration for Fażl Allāh and his teachings. As the focus here is primarily on the life and works of Āzarī, one might instead begin with his texts and work outward, noting areas where Fażl Allāh or his works are invoked, analyzing the contents of these sections, and then comparing them to what is already known in the sources and literature of Ḥurūfī thought in the period of the lifetime of Āzarī. What will emerge is evidence about the

⁶¹ This instructor was likely not the well-known first Şūfī teacher of Āzarī, Muḥyī al-Dīn Ṭūsī Ghazālī. The narrative historiographical sources of the time do not mention any attachment to the Ḥurūfiyya on his part, and indeed, provide little detail about his thought, whatsoever. There exist multiple copies of a work of Muḥyī al-Dīn, the *Kanz al-‘Ashiqīn* (*The Treasure of the Lovers*), though they are largely filled with commonplace anecdotes and exhortations which would encourage an individual on the Şūfī path to trust in God and look to the reward of the next world rather than the fleeting pleasures of the material realm. Muḥyī al-Dīn Ṭūsī Ghazālī, *Kanz al-‘Ashiqīn* (Kolkata, 11th-12th/17th-18th c.), #1238, Asiatic Society of Bengal; *Kanz al-‘Ashiqīn* (Paris, n.d.), Ms. Pers. 105, Bibliothèque universitaire des langues et civilisations (BULAC). On the life of Muḥyī al-Dīn, see the citations from Mīrkh^wānd, Kh^wāndamīr, and Jāmī already referenced in chapter 1.

belief system of Āzarī that is not merely circumstantially Ḥurūfī, and what references to Faḏl Allāh or his followers in the *ahl-i ḥurūf*⁶² may be found in the esoteric works of Āzarī align quite closely with the brief details of Ḥurūfī teaching already outlined above. There are three significant areas that must be reviewed: the nature of the letters in the work of Āzarī, and particularly the resonance of the 32, the *sī u du*, of the Persian alphabet; the relationship between the human being, the letters, and the cosmos; and the Ḥurūfī approach to earlier prophets, such as Mūsā and ʿĪsā, which will prove to be of immense importance in understanding the Ḥurūfī conception of the caliphate, imamate, and *mahdī*.

Even accounting for the near-omnipresence of lettrist speculation throughout the Islamic world in the 9th/15th century, there are certain shibboleths which would distinguish a Ḥurūfī approach from those lettrist thinkers who would be diametrically opposed to the Ḥurūfiyya. One of the clearest of these, as already noted above, would be the role of the 32 Persian letters, and to a lesser extent the 28 Arabic letters, in an understanding of both the higher and lower worlds. Accordingly, Āzarī stated openly that the “words of all of the compositions of the heavenly books, and the bases of all of the sciences both worldly and otherworldly [*mulkī va malkūtī*], are these 29, which in reality are the 32.”⁶³ To put the matter beyond doubt, Āzarī then articulated an explanation of the role of the Persian language and the prophetic “metalanguage” that would be perfectly at home in any Ḥurūfī manual:

It is as has been mentioned in the gnosis of the *lām-alif* that there four letters are which are unrepeated. For articulating those four, which are in the book of Ādam,

⁶² Āzarī himself did not use the term “Ḥurūfiyya” or “Ḥurūfī” in his works to designate those who, for example, saw the 32 lines in the face of Ādam as reflective of the 32 letters of the Persian alphabet, though this is easily recognized as a Ḥurūfī concept. The followers are discussed as *ahl-i ḥurūf*, the “people of the letters,” while the knowledge brought by Faḏl Allāh would be *ilm-i ḥurūf*, the “science of the letters.” Āzarī, *AMA*, 44b; *AJA*, 45a.

⁶³ Āzarī, *AMA*, 73a. The statement is 29 and not 28 because of the periodic consideration of *lām-alif* as a distinct letter, as stated by Āzarī on this same folio.

and Mūsā and ʿĪsā, peace be upon them, and which are not in the Qurʾān, [they are:] چ گ ژ پ. Thus, the *lām-alif* is the completion of the Muḥammadan speech, such that it would be uniform with the speech of Ādam. However, the individual letters of the Torah and the Gospels are under the individual letters of the Qurʾān, such that the Torah is deficient by 10 letters from the Qurʾān, while the letters of the Gospels likewise are deficient by 8 letters from the Qurʾān. It is as they say about *Hindiyya*: 40 letters will be born from the arrangement of these individual letters.⁶⁴

This brief discussion alone serves as an apt summary of many key Ḥurūfī concepts. For Faḏl Allāh, the *lām-alif* was indeed a marker of the finality of the speech of Muḥammad, as it was ultimately a symbol of a “new dispensation,” with the four phonemes of *lām-alif* [ا ل ف م] being symbols for the four new Persian letters [چ گ ژ پ] which were themselves markers of the transition from the cycle of Arabic to the cycle of Persian.⁶⁵ Given what is known about Ḥurūfī doctrine regarding the cycle of prophecy, the fact that the Persian letters are described as having been a part of the “books” of earlier prophets may be resolved through the concept of the ultimate, higher “metalanguage” of prophecy, as discussed by Bashir: from the beginning of humanity, what had been taught to Ādam was a metalanguage which, though distinct from languages as understood in terms of the material world, could most closely be approximated by Persian.⁶⁶ Persian was “present” in the teachings of previous prophets to the extent that their speech would have been in accordance with a metalanguage which could be signified through references to the Persian alphabet, rather than literally through Mūsā or ʿĪsā speaking in the Persian language as historically understood. In fact, in gesturing to the literal speech of the

⁶⁴ Āzarī, *AMA*, 73a. There is a question of what is meant by *Hindiyya* which cannot be easily answered – this may perhaps be a reference to the Sanskrit alphabet, which regardless, would contain more than 40 letters – but the ultimate meaning is unchanged.

⁶⁵ Bashir, *Fazlallah Astarabadi and the Hurufis*, 69-70.

⁶⁶ Bashir, *Fazlallah Astarabadi and the Hurufis*, 59.

earlier prophets, Āzarī confirmed that they were not literally speaking Persian, as the speech of Mūsā in Hebrew (22) was deficient to the Qurʾān – by which, arithmetically, Āzarī must mean the Persian alphabet, despite his recognition that the four additional Persian letters are not literally in the Qurʾān – by 10 letters compared to the 32 of Persian, while the speech of ʿĪsā would be lacking by 8 letters, by which is meant the Greek alphabet of 24 letters. The attitude of Āzarī towards previous prophets when writing through a Ḥurūfī lens will be dealt with in subsequent sections, but the key Ḥurūfī concepts of the primacy of the 32 Persian letters, as well as the function of the *lām-alif* as a transition letter past the cycle of Arabic, are tidily summarized in the work of Āzarī as early as the *AMA*.

This analysis of the *lām-alif* and the 32 Persian letters is already enough to suggest that Āzarī was at least broadly familiar with Ḥurūfī doctrine, though it is itself only part of the Ḥurūfī equation. For Faʿl Allāh and his followers, the letters were not merely a representation of the metalanguage taught to Ādam, though they were still this. Rather, these keys to unlocking the secrets of the cosmos would also have been quite literally inscribed into the physical body of Ādam, easily visible in the very form of the human face. This, too, is a concept with which Āzarī would have been deeply familiar, and which was explained throughout his own occult writings in quite explicit detail. These concepts may be seen clearly, for example, in his analysis of the well-known ḥadīth, *man ʿarafa nafsahu fa-qad ʿarafa rabbahu*, “he who knows himself has known his Lord.” For Āzarī, the external form of the human body (*zāhir-i badan-i insān*) is the tablet upon which the individual letters are inscribed, and made up from those 28 and 32 letters which are themselves the attributes and names of God (*murakkab-ast az bīst u hasht va sī u du ḥurūf ki asmā va šifāt-i khudā-yand*).⁶⁷ To this is added a quotation from the *ʿArsh-nāma* of Faʿl Allāh, in

⁶⁷ Āzarī, *AMA*, 31b; *AJA*, 19b.

which it is reaffirmed that the 32 letters have been “written” onto the visage of Ādam through the lines of his face, with a detailed explication of where these lines might be counted.⁶⁸ So too has Āzarī reaffirmed the Ḥurūfī system in which the fundamental, cosmic connection between the human body and the 32 letters may be proven through numerological calculations. With the letters of Ādam (آدم) adding up to 46 and his partner Ḥawwā (حوّاء) adding up to 21 through *abjad* calculation, their sum of 67 is equal to that of God, الله. Ādam nonetheless being the site of manifestation for the 32 may be determined by the fact that Ḥawwā, a possessor of 14 lines, at the time of her creation from Ādam subtracted these 14 from his name-value of 46 to leave only 32.⁶⁹ These concurrences in the Ḥurūfī worldview, then, may well be pithily summarized as Āzarī has done: knowledge of the self is knowledge of the letters, which is the knowledge of God.⁷⁰ The section itself, which is indeed a summary of core Ḥurūfī concepts related to the relationship between the letters and the human, speaks to more than a passing interest in the Ḥurūfīyya, with numerous citations of the *Jāvidān-nāma* and *‘Arsh-nāma* of Faḏl Allāh, and a directness in sharing these often abstruse metaphysical speculations in a clear and concise language that would indicate a comfort with the material.

While this discussion alone would be sufficient to show an affinity between Āzarī and the Hurufiyya, there is further material in the writings of Āzarī which again displays a close familiarity with Ḥurūfī doctrine related to the organization of the universe. Lettrism in the Ḥurūfī understanding was not only useful for the understanding of the human body, though it was key for self-knowledge (*kh^wud-shināsī*), but could also be extended to higher levels of material

⁶⁸ Āzarī, *AMA*, 32a; *AJA*, 19b-20a

⁶⁹ Āzarī, *AMA*, 32a-32b; *AJA*, 20a.

⁷⁰ *kh^wud-shināsī ḥurūf-shināsī [bāshad] va ḥurūf shināsī khudā shināsī bāshad*. Āzarī, *AMA*, 32b; *AJA*, 20a.

creation by virtue of a microcosmic-macrocosmic relationship existing between the human being and the heavenly spheres. As such, on the authority of Fażl Allāh, Āzarī has asserted that the spheres, too, are arranged in concordance with the human body, based on the foundation of the letters, in a “particular manner.”⁷¹ The particularity presented would be the numerological agreement between the components of the revolution of the heavens (*ajzā`-yi dā`ira-yi falak*), 360, and the 360 human joints (*mafāṣil*), tendons (*‘aṣab*), and veins (*rag*), based specifically on a passage from the *‘Arsh-nāma* related to this astronomical-anatomical equivalence, to which also could be added flesh (*gusht*) and bones (*ustukh`wān*).⁷² The number of elements of the body which number 360, five in total, is more relevant than it may first appear, as this will be key to the manner in which the letters are incorporated into this system. With the 28 and 32 letters adding up to a total of 60, this is paralleled in the fact that the 5 sets of 360 in the human body – each one equivalent in number to the 360 divisions of the heavenly rotations – may be multiplied by the 12 houses of the Zodiac to also equal 60, and with both equivalent to the 60 minutes (*daqīqa*) which make up a single astronomical-astrological degree.⁷³ The idea of the human being as the microcosm (*ādam-i ṣaghīr*) which is in agreement with a macrocosm (*ādam-i kabīr*) is not unique to the Ḥurūfiyya, and Āzarī does continue to discuss the microcosm-macrocosm in the next section of his chapter in discussing the writings of the People of Investigation (*ahl-i muḥaqqiq*).⁷⁴ However, it is the cabalistic significance of the role of 60 as the sum of 28 and 32

⁷¹ *aflāk-rā ba tarkīb-i jasad-i banī ādam bar qā`ida-yi ḥurūf ba naw`-i makhṣūṣ ast.* Āzarī, *AMA*, 101a; *AJA*, 89b.

⁷² Āzarī, *AMA*, 101a; *AJA*, 89b.

⁷³ Āzarī, *AMA*, 101a-101b; *AJA*, 89b-90a.

⁷⁴ See, for example, the invocation of the *insān kabīr* and *insān ṣaghīr* in the much earlier writings of Nāṣir-i Khusraw in his *Kitāb-i Jāmi‘ al-Ḥikmatayn*, on the compatibility of reason and revelation, in his discussion of the “houses of the sun and the moon.” The *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā* also discussed the microcosm-macrocosm in their Third

which sets this portion of text apart as unmistakably the Ḥurūfī position related to the microcosm and macrocosm. What again may be drawn from both the *AMA* and *AJA* is a comfort with the Ḥurūfī teachings in the writings of Faḏl Allāh that might reasonably lead one to conclude that Āzarī himself held many of these positions, which would have placed him in the company of one of the more transgressive intellectual networks of his time. Perhaps Āzarī was not *only* a Ḥurūfī follower, and more detail regarding his numerous intellectual affiliations will be shared in the following chapter. That being said, there can be little doubt that he was familiar with major, early Ḥurūfī sources, that he held Faḏl Allāh Astarābādī in a place of high respect, and that he found Ḥurūfī teachings to be suitable to answer certain difficult questions related to Islamic doctrine.

Though the Persian alphabet would be the most apt manner of accessing the higher metalanguage of all creation, the system of Faḏl Allāh and his followers likewise assiduously avoided *reifying* the 32 letters as spoken on a human plane, with Āzarī dutifully following suit. This may appear counterintuitive, given that so too did the Ḥurūfiyya set forth an intimate connection between language and materiality, with the 32 letters literally represented by the 32 lines which can be divined upon the (masculine) human face.⁷⁵ However, the fact that the Persian alphabet of humanity is ultimately limited in grasping higher linguistic-cosmic realities was not a neglected topic in Ḥurūfī writing. Consider, for example, the *Maḥram-nāma* of Sayyid Iṣḥāq, in whose “second introduction” (*muqaddima-yi ṣānī*) it was clarified that the 32 letters function on the level of attributes, *ṣifāt*, not on the level of absolute essence, *‘ayn-i muṭlaq*.⁷⁶ Just as behind

Epistle on the Rational Soul (*al-risāla al-thālitha min al-naḥsāniyyāt al-‘aqliyyāt*). Nāṣir-i Khusraw and Eric L. Ormsby, *Between Reason and Revelation: Twin Wisdoms Reconciled: An Annotated English Translation of Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s Kitāb-i Jāmi’ al-Ḥikmatayn*, vol. 17, The Institute of Ismaili Studies: Ismaili Texts and Translations Series; (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 243-255; Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ wa-Khullān al-Wafā’*, vol. 3 (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir lil-Ṭibā’ah wa-al-Nashr, 1377 [1957]), 212-230.

⁷⁵ Bashir, *Fazlallah Astarabadi and the Hurufis*, 48-53.

⁷⁶ Huart, *Textes*, 15.

the individuated attributes of the divine would be a unified, singular essence, so too is this true for the lettered attributes, in which, “[as for] the expression for *alif*, *bi*, *ti*, etc., it is by that interpretation that all of them are one, united singularly and purely.”⁷⁷ An almost identical reference is found in both esoteric compendia of Āzarī in exploring this question of the ultimate unity of the letters, in which the *ahl-i ḥurūf* – for Āzarī, this is consistently the designation used for the Ḥurūfiyya – state that the 32 letters are themselves one, and the one is the 32 (when viewed through its 32 *ṣifāt*/attributes).⁷⁸ This tracing back of not only the 32 letters, but all of material creation, to the singularity of the single point of God is expressed in further detail in the *AJA*:

All of the sciences, or rather, all things with a compounded or composed form, are these 32 letters, whether repeated or un-repeated; and these individual letters are the differentiated form of the *alif*; and the *alif* is an image of the repetition and differentiation of the point. There is nothing prior to one point.⁷⁹

There are limits, then, to the reality of the letters of the Persian alphabet, even as the 32 are carved into the face of the human and serve an exalted position as the attributes of God. For these letters themselves must still trace back to increasingly unified realities, first the *alif* which initiates the alphabet, then the point, from the extension of which this *alif* might be formed. What would remain is only the point, undifferentiated, an expression of the unity of God. The basis of all of the sciences, *‘ulūm*, being found within this understanding of the science of the letters and

⁷⁷ *‘ibārātī az alif bi ti alakh. ba-ā [ān] i ‘tibār ki hama yik-and va mujarrad va munazzah bu-band. Huart, Textes, 15.*

⁷⁸ *īn sī u du kalima yak kalima ast va yak kalima sī u du ḥarf ast. Āzarī, AMA, 116b; AJA, 108a. The AJA does not include the second construction (va yak kalima sī u du ḥarf ast), but the citation of the beliefs of the ahl-i ḥurūf is otherwise identical.*

⁷⁹ *jamī ‘-yi ‘ulūm balki jamī ‘-yi ashyā ‘-yi ṣūrat-i tarkībī va ta ‘līfī īn sī u du ḥarf-and kh‘āh ba-takrār va kh‘āh ba-lā takrār va īn ḥurūf-i mufrada ṣūrat-i mutafarriqa-yi alif ast va alif ṣūrat-i takrār va tafarraqa-yi nuqta chī nuqta pīsh nīst. Āzarī, AJA, 61b.*

the point is consonant with the phrasing cited in the previous section: that through, first, self-knowledge (*kh^wud-shināsī*) comes letter-knowledge (*hurūf-shināsī*), which is itself equivalent to knowledge of God (*khudā-shināsī*). To trace back through those compounded beings – of which Adam and humanity would be included – would lead first to the 32 *hurūf*, which may themselves be traced back to the divine unicity of the point. The key connector between the vastness of creation and the pure unity of God would be this understanding of the 32 letters as would have been expressed by both Fażl Allāh and his successors.⁸⁰

There is a final notable plank of the Ḥurūfī platform which finds a prominent place in the writings of Āzarī, and to which was already alluded in the above discussion of the “gnosis of the *lām-alif*,” the attitude of the Ḥurūfiyya toward the pre-Islamic prophets, and in particular, Mūsā (Moses) and ʿĪsā (Jesus). Both of these figures would certainly have been respected within an Islamic context, and both are frequently mentioned in the Qurʾān itself. However, what is seen in Ḥurūfī writings is not merely a respect for the prophetic predecessors of Muḥammad or a familiarity with certain anecdotes from the genre of the “accounts of the prophets,” *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, but a wholehearted engagement with texts from the Jewish and Christian traditions.⁸¹ It is true that the post-Mongol period in which the Ḥurūfiyya were active would have seen a number of thinkers and movements who took a less narrowly confessional approach to religious identity, with movements such as the rebellion of Shaykh Badr al-Dīn in Ottoman lands

⁸⁰ The statement of Āzarī that all of the sciences may be brought together within an understanding of the *hurūf* is in line with Ḥurūfī doctrine related to the supremacy of understanding the 32, though the Ḥurūfiyya were hardly the only figures in the 9th/15th century to be putting forward lettrism as a supreme science. Note, for instance, the hierarchical understanding of the sciences in the work of Ṣāʿin al-Dīn Turka and the exalted position of those who understood the *ʿilm-i hurūf*: Matthew Melvin-Koushki, “The Occult Challenge to Philosophy,” 259-60.

⁸¹ See the references throughout: Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, “The Ḥurūfī Moses: An Example of Late Medieval ‘Heterodox’ Interpretation of the Qurʾan and Bible,” *Journal of Qurʾanic Studies* 10, no. 1 (2008): 21–49.

attracting followers from outside the boundaries of Islam,⁸² and the high messianic temper of the 10th/16th century witnessing interlocutors from multiple Abrahamic faiths speaking in a similar apocalyptic register.⁸³ Such a phenomenon could flow easily from a situation in which a messianic figure would claim access to higher knowledge beyond the temporal human world with its divisions of religion and sect, and who felt they were carrying out the imperative of the *mahdī* to unite the peoples of the earth under a single religion and banner. Though not unique to Faḏl Allāh and his followers, an intense interest in particularly the figures of Mūsā and ʿĪsā is palpable throughout Ḥurūfī doctrine, and this accordingly has carried over into the work of Āzarī. Consider, for example, the discussion of the “Tent of Meeting,” *khaymat al-maʿād*, which in the earlier source material of the Torah served as the structure housing the Tabernacle, the construction of which is described in granular detail.⁸⁴ For Faḏl Allāh, this structure had the added significance of serving as a symbolic representation of the science of the letters and its concordance with the human body. As such, not only does the tent itself represent the “locus of manifestation” for the “divine Verb, the origin of creation,” but the cloths measuring 28 cubits discussed in Exodus 26:2 signify not only the 28 letters of the Arabic alphabet, but also the 28 bones contained in the hands and feet of Ādam.⁸⁵ So too are the tablets of Mūsā a representation of the *ʿilm al-ḥurūf* and the human body, with the broken tablets corresponding to the centerline division of the human face, itself etched with signs of the 28 and 32.⁸⁶ In fact, this discussion

⁸² On the rebellion of Shaykh Badr al-Dīn, see: Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks*, 122-140. The interreligious makeup of the revolt might be seen on 124-5.

⁸³ Cornell Fleischer, “A Mediterranean Apocalypse.”

⁸⁴ See in particular Exodus 26.

⁸⁵ Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, “Ḥurūfī Moses,” 29-30.

⁸⁶ Mir-Kasimov, “Ḥurūfī Moses,” 36-38.

from the *Jāvidān-nāma* – the Tent of Meeting corresponding to the form of Ādam, the ropes of the Tent representing the ligatures of the human and the 28-cubit-length cloths aligning with the 28 Arabic letters, the broken tablets of Mūsā being equivalent to the splitting of the face of the human – is faithfully reported in these same terms in the *AMA* of Āzarī, in resolution of the question of the meaning of the ḥadīth, “God created Ādam in His image” (*inna Allāh khalaqa Ādam ‘alā šūratihī*).⁸⁷ For Āzarī, via Fażl Allāh, the Tent indeed signified the speech of God, which is also to say that it represented Ādam/the human being, on whose person may be found the 32 letters which are themselves the attributes of the divine.⁸⁸ In fact, this portion of the work of Āzarī attributes to the form of Ādam the bringing together of not only the divine attributes, *šifāt*, but the essence, *zāt*, itself.⁸⁹ Given what is known about Ḥurūfī teachings and the frequent citations of Fażl Allāh in the works of Āzarī, it is unsurprising that the 32 letters would be key to resolving the question of how it could be that Ādam was created in God’s own “image.” What is more notable at this juncture is the choice of Āzarī to not only invoke concepts which can be seen clearly in the *Jāvidān-nāma*, but also to follow closely the Ḥurūfī model in terms of understanding the significance of the biblical prophets through the lens of the lettrist science put forward by Fażl Allāh.

Of even greater significance for Āzarī than the Tent of Meeting of Mūsā and its concordance to the body of Ādam and the letters is how to best understand the position of ‘Īsā. The position of both Āzarī and the Ḥurūfīyya towards the figure of ‘Īsā will require a more thorough discussion than this brief consideration of Mūsā, as understanding the cosmic role of

⁸⁷ Āzarī, *AMA*, 44b-45b.

⁸⁸ Āzarī, *AMA*, 45b.

⁸⁹ *ān šūrat jāmi‘a-yi zāt va šūrat-i ilahī-st.* Āzarī, *AMA*, 46a.

‘Īsā will prove to be key to unlocking the positions of Āzarī on a number of other issues of major importance, most important among them being the question of the *mahdī*. This messianic figure was hinted at only briefly in the analysis of Āzarī of the Tent of Meeting, in which it was stated that this same tent of Mūsā would be reconstructed by the *mahdī*.⁹⁰ While this may nod towards the broader interreligious messianism discussed above, the role of ‘Īsā will provide for Āzarī an opportunity to address the question of the *mahdī* head-on. Given his Ḥurūfī predilections, this, too, is a predictable element of the *AMA*, as the *Jāvidān-nāma* itself took an intense interest in ‘Īsā and the apocalypse.⁹¹ In contrast to the shorter pieces of evidence of Āzarī’s acceptance of Ḥurūfī teachings shown above, this section of the text deserves a closer reading, as Āzarī confronted the question of ‘Īsā and the apocalypse specifically as a result of his addressing one of the most closely debated questions of his time: the matter of where legitimate authority was to be found in the post-Mongol period.

2.6. Caliphate and Imamate in the writings of Āzarī

Given the contentious debates over rightful leadership and messianic speculations which were sweeping through the Islamic world in the 8th-9th/14th-15th centuries, it is not surprising that Āzarī’s esoteric works would take up these two pressing issues. The interpretation of Āzarī of the prophetic tradition, “he who dies and does not know the imam of his age dies ignorantly,”⁹² addresses each of them in turn, and it will quickly become clear the extent to which Āzarī was conversant with the ongoing debates held by his contemporaries over issues of political

⁹⁰ Āzarī, *AMA*, 44b.

⁹¹ See: Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, *Christian Apocalyptic Texts in Islamic Messianic Discourse: The “Christian Chapter” of the Jāvidān-Nāma-yi Kabīr by Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī (d. 796/1394)*, vol. 30, *History of Christian-Muslim Relations* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2017); “Jesus as Eschatological Savior,” 332–58.

⁹² *man māta wa-lam ya ‘rif imām zamānihi māta mīta jāhiliyya.*

legitimacy. In terms of overall structure, this section of the *AMA* begins first with the matter of the caliphate and political leadership – which is to say, the lack of a universally recognized caliph in the post-Mongol Islamic world – before turning to matters which are more openly messianic. What will arise from a close reading of the *AMA* on this tradition regarding the imamate will be an author in Āzarī who both could sense the tension over debates of political theory in Timurid lands, and who conceived of their resolution as springing from the messianic claims which grew so popular during his lifetime.

In its discussion of the caliphate, the *AMA*, written as it was in 830/1426-27, very much reads as a product of its times.⁹³ The writing of Āzarī shows a clear awareness of the fluidity of political and military power in the post-Mongol period in Iran, and with it, an attendant anxiety over rightful leadership in a period where the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate had been reduced to a shell of itself in Mamlūk Cairo.⁹⁴ Accordingly, the very opening of the exegesis of Āzarī on this particular “secret” is to state explicitly that the 9th/15th century was a time in which no individual could rightly meet what might be considered the “legalistic” qualifications of the caliph, in which such a leader would defend the borders of Islam, gather alms, or ensure that the land was free of bandits and robbers.⁹⁵ As such, a pessimist might consider the entirety of the Islamic

⁹³ For the sake of specificity in quotations and citations, as well as to emphasize the earliest date in which the concepts at hand appeared in Āzarī’s written works, the following discussion will largely draw from the *AMA*. The same chapter of the *AJA* in the manuscript version cited throughout does not include as lengthy a discussion of Ḥurūfī concepts on this issue as the *AMA* will be seen to contain. However, as seen in the footnotes above, the later *AJA* preserves much of the Ḥurūfī speculation of Āzarī nonetheless, and the absence of Ḥurūfī citations in this particular “secret” does not seem to indicate a massive shift in intellectual position between the *hijrī* years 830 and 840. Āzarī, *AJA*, 20a-28b.

⁹⁴ On the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate in Cairo, see: Banister, *The Abbasid Caliphate of Cairo, 1261-1517*.

⁹⁵ Note the discussion of both the appropriate designation of the leader of the community, as well as his ten duties – which largely are in agreement with the discussion of Āzarī – in the work of al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058), *al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭaniyya*, particularly as they are listed on pages 22-3: ‘Alī b. Muḥammad Māwardī, *Kitāb al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭaniyya wa-al-Wilāyat al-Dīniyya*, ed. Aḥmad Mubārak Baghdādī (Kuwait: Maktabat Dār Ibn Qutayba, 1409 [1989]), 1-29.

community to be “ignorant.”⁹⁶ Adding in a tradition that the caliphate would last only 30 years after the death of the prophet, which would be approximately the length of the so-called Rightly-Guided Caliphates of Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān, and ‘Alī, the initial framing of Āzarī is a hopeless one, indeed. In this discussion of the *AMA*, either the imamate must be interpreted through the lens of the (*Ithnā ‘asharī* Shī‘ī) Imāmiyya, in which there is still a problem of the imam not being physically manifest in service of the community;⁹⁷ or, there is the Sunnī resolution of stating merely that the remaining “imam” for the community is the Qur’ān itself, put into practice by a military commander who is nonetheless lacking the ideal characteristics represented by the first four caliphs.⁹⁸ The challenge taken up by Āzarī is that while either of these interpretations may be acceptable to their respective scholarly communities, both likewise do not involve a “caliph” in the sense of a properly qualified figure who is actively filling a leadership role for the Islamic world. Such a situation might cause consternation in the face of the tradition at hand, which states that knowledge of the imam would be incumbent upon a Muslim believer to avoid being “ignorant” (*jāhil*).⁹⁹

The first solution that Āzarī would consider for this “hopeless knot” is perfectly in line with much of the most popular Islamic political thought of the 9th/15th century: division of the religio-political authority of the imam/caliph¹⁰⁰ into external (*zāhir*) and internal (*ma‘navī*)

⁹⁶ Āzarī, *AMA*, 32b–33a.

⁹⁷ Āzarī will take up the question of the occultation of the Twelfth Imam later in this section.

⁹⁸ Āzarī, *AMA*, 33a–33b.

⁹⁹ The term evokes the “ignorance” of pre-Islamic Arabia in Islamic tradition. “Djāhiliyya,” *EP*.

¹⁰⁰ It is true that the “imamate” and “caliphate” are not quite perfect synonyms, but Āzarī uses them interchangeably throughout this section, stating explicitly that “there is no difference between a caliph and an imam,” Āzarī, *AMA*, 34b. I will report the title as given in each particular sentence being cited throughout, and the reader should note that the two are not being divided in a rigorous manner by the original author.

expressions. The argument is quite similar to what one might find in the writing of political theorists of the time, such as Sharaf al-Dīn ‘Alī Yazdī or Idrīs Bidlīsī.¹⁰¹ For Āzarī, there is a division to be made between the “general imamate” (*imāmat-i ‘amma*) and “particular imamate” (*imāmat-i khāṣṣa*), in which the former requires an individual who both “removes ambiguities by the pen and defends from disputes and conflicts by the sword,” but the latter is “not conditional upon the sword and [having] supporters and allies.”¹⁰² In other words, while the general imam must possess both intellectual and military authority, a particular imam may simply be a learned figure who has no political or military might of which to speak. Āzarī emphasized that such a division can also carry into the “lesser and greater caliphates” (*khilāfat-i ṣuḡhrā va kubrā*), in which the former – also defined as the “spiritual caliphate,” *khilāfat-i ma‘navī* – may be possessed by more than one person at any time, while the latter, which is also the external imamate, *imāmat-i zāhir*, is only suitable for a single individual.¹⁰³ This external imamate, the greater caliphate, thus reads as similar to the “traditional,” juristic caliphate, in terms of the caliph being responsible for both the military and political affairs of the caliphate, as well as the promotion of Islam. What, then, constitutes a “spiritual caliph,” the “lesser imam?” In this schema, the possessor of the *khilāfat-i ma‘navī* enacts the responsibilities of the external caliph/imam upon the spiritual interior: where the external defends the borders from enemies of the caliphate, equips the military, and subdues bandits, the spiritual caliph “defends borders from demons,” “[equips] the army of the intellect and soul (*‘aql va rūh*),” and subdues “the robbers of the [lower] soul (*nafs*).” This is not to say that they are any less important than the external

¹⁰¹ Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks*, 257–61; Christopher Markiewicz, *The Crisis of Kingship*, 240–43.

¹⁰² Āzarī, *AMA*, 33b.

¹⁰³ Āzarī, *AMA*, 33b.

caliph, for were the lesser caliphs to not exist in the world, “there would be no world” altogether.¹⁰⁴ This final point evokes the well-known Ṣūfī concept of there being a pole (*quṭb*) at the peak of a largely unseen spiritual hierarchy whose existence is essential for human spiritual flourishing.¹⁰⁵ Āzarī has also included a citation from one of the figures who appears prominently throughout the *AMA*, Sa‘d al-Dīn Ḥamuwayī, that there is a *quṭb* for each of the seven climes, and in fact, there are *quṭbs* in each neighborhood and house “around whom the affairs of that house and neighborhood pivot.”¹⁰⁶ This reads as a more pragmatic understanding of the *quṭb* in comparison to the way the Pole has appeared in, for example, Ibn ‘Arabī, as it is unlikely that Ḥamuwayī felt that the religious head of each household was on the same exalted level as the unseen hierarchy of the *quṭb* and the *awṭād*. Rather, what Ḥamuwayī is expressing in this particular quotation is the commonplace reality that even without a caliphate/imam in the juridical sense, there are still figures of religious authority to be found in the community. This ultimately reinforces the more important point of Āzarī that even with the disruption of the general imamate, the spiritual/inner imamate has continued on into his time.

In some sense, the debate over the external and internal imamates is merely an excuse for Āzarī to delve into the more complex matter of the *mahdī* and his eventual return. It is notable that Āzarī has spoken in such explicit terms on the question of the dual caliphate, and while his terminology does not perfectly match what is found in the treatises of Sharaf al-Dīn ‘Alī Yazdī

¹⁰⁴ Āzarī, *AMA*, 33b–34a.

¹⁰⁵ The hierarchy is “largely” unseen, as certain Ṣūfī contemplatives have related their interactions with members of these elect. For both a discussion of the Pole, *quṭb*, and the conversation of Ibn ‘Arabī with the “Imam of the Left,” one of the four “pillars,” *awṭād*, and the second in mastery following the *quṭb* himself, consult: Claude Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulfur: The Life of Ibn ‘Arabī*, trans. Peter Kingsley (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 65–67.

¹⁰⁶ Āzarī, *AMA*, 34a.

or Idrīs Bidlīsī, it nonetheless is in conversation with 9th/15th century political thought in Islamic lands more broadly. Unfortunately, though, Āzarī does not dwell at length on the possession of the *khilāfat-i ma‘navī*. While acknowledging its existence, he does not go so far as to attribute it to a particular saintly figure or Timurid prince. The preference of Āzarī would prove to be in a deeper analysis of the imamate as it concerned the Shī‘ī and Sunnī communities, respectively. It is worth quoting Āzarī at length on this topic.

So, there is a spiritual (*ma‘navī*) imam in the world, even if there is not a general (*‘āmm*) imam. In reality, there is no difference between a “caliph” and “imam,” in contradiction to the Imāmiyya. For them, the imamate is more particular, as they have given the name “guide”¹⁰⁷ for such [a figure]. Similarly, elder, exemplar, guide, wise, excellent, perfect and perfected, imam, caliph, pole, master of the age, world-showing cup and cosmos-reflecting mirror, potent antidote, greatest elixir, red sulfur, ‘Īsā-like in the resurrection of the dead, Khizr-like in drinking the water of life, Sulaymān who knows the language of the birds, the unknown one of the age, friend, and other things¹⁰⁸ – know that these [titles] have been articulated in the belief of the *ahl-i sunnat*, for whom the “imamate” has no condition of infallibility [*‘isma*], in contrast to the Shī‘a, for whom infallibility is a condition.¹⁰⁹

There are two notable points to be drawn from this passage. The most striking is the list of titles for the imam/caliph which has been attributed to the *ahl-i sunnat*, in which this figure is clearly *not* merely a possessor of military and political authority. Rather, the language which is used for the caliph among the Sunnīs – the spiritual caliph, specifically, as the world is devoid of a “general” caliph – evokes a figure who is supreme in the Šūfī spiritual hierarchy, who seems to possess certain characteristics of the prophets, and is himself both “perfect and perfected.” I

¹⁰⁷ *rahbar*

¹⁰⁸ *shaykh va pīshvā va hādī va dānā va bāligh va kāmil va mukammal va imām va khalīfa va quṭb va šāhib al-zamān va jāmi-jahān-namā-y, ā‘īna-yi gītī-namā-y va taryāk-i buzurg va iksīr-i a‘zam va gūgird-i aḥmar va ‘īsā-ṣifat dar ihyā-yi amvāt va khizr-ṣifat ki āb-i ḥayvān khūrda ast va sulaymān ki zabān-i murghān dānad va bigāna-yi ‘aṣr va vālī va ghayr-i zālīk.*

¹⁰⁹ Āzarī, *AMA*, 34b.

would suggest that such a list of titles can be seen as further reinforcing the increasing sanctification of the sultan in Islamic political thought of the 9th/15th century, which can be perceived in the writings of Yazdī and Idrīs Bidlīsī, and was indeed palpable throughout, for example, Ottoman and Uzbek political writing in the post-Mongol period.¹¹⁰ The discussion of Āzarī on this matter is also quite neutral as far as confession, and his own framing of the nature of the caliphate from the beginning of this “secret” would not be out of line with the political theory of some of the preeminent Sunnī intellectuals of his time. This would seem to fly in the face of the existing literature on the confessional background of Āzarī, which has argued that he was an *Ithnā‘asharī* Shī‘ī, largely by virtue of his poetry including devotional references to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and the remainder of the 12 imams. However, particularly in the confessionally ambiguous post-Mongol period, this alone is not enough to make a firm determination as to his own beliefs. The *AMA* contains very little which could be considered normatively *Ithnā‘asharī* Shī‘ī, and major authorities within the work are certainly not limited to the *Ithnā‘asharī* tradition. On the contrary, non-Shī‘ī figures such as ‘Alā’ al-Dawla Simnānī are cited with great frequency,¹¹¹ and topics such as *tanāsukh*, typically considered outside the fold of *Ithnā‘asharī* Shī‘ism, are discussed in neutral terms. These facts exist alongside his aforementioned teacher, Muḥyī al-Dīn Ṭūsī Ghazālī, self-consciously presenting himself as writing in the mold of Abū

¹¹⁰ In addition to Bidlīsī, Ottoman authors such as Taṣhköprizade, Dizdar, and Kınalızade all nodded towards Şūfistic understandings of leadership, pointing out the need for a spiritually and morally superior figure, as “shadow of God,” *zill Allāh*, to lead the state. Such discussions would draw heavily from Şūfī discourse: Dizdar, for example, drew from the conception of *zill Allāh* as it appeared in the works of Ibn ‘Arabī. Yılmaz, *Caliphate Redefined*, 187–88. One may also see the titles used for Shaybānī Khān in the *Sulūk al-Mulūk* of Faḫr Allāh b. Rūzbihān Khunjī, *zill Allāh al-raḥmān...imām al-zamān va khalīfat al-raḥmān*. Faḫr Allāh b. Rūzbihān Khunjī, *Sulūk al-Mulūk*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Alī Muvahḥid (Tehran: Shirkat-i Sihāmī-yi Intishārāt-i Khvārazmī, 1362 [1983]), 50.

¹¹¹ In both the *AMA* and *AJA*, Simnānī is one of the most oft-cited authorities. The preferred sources of Āzarī and his relationship with the Kubrawiyya Şūfī network will be discussed in the next chapter.

Ḥāmid Muḥammad Ṭūsī Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), and generally presenting himself as working within the Sunnī tradition.¹¹² As Āzarī will also engage heavily with the Shī‘ī tradition on the *mahdī*, it is worth keeping in mind that Āzarī, in line with the times, cites from such a broad background of material that he might be thought of as both Sunnī and Shī‘ī, or neither.¹¹³

2.7 Understanding the *Mahdī*

Though exhibiting the confessional ambiguity so characteristic of the 9th/15th century Islamic world, Āzarī stayed true to the wide-ranging ethos of his occult compendia in reporting extensively on the circumstances of the 12th Shī‘ī imam, Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-‘Askarī. The text of the *AMA* devotes multiple folios to clarifying the circumstances of his occultation (*ghayba*) against potential criticisms. Specifically, Āzarī was pre-occupied with the charge that it would be absurd for Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-‘Askarī to still be living and be able to return as *mahdī* by the year 830/1426-27, given that by that point, he would have been more than 500 *hijrī* years of age.¹¹⁴ This matter allows Āzarī to prove his familiarity with another science which would have been of great importance to occultists of the 9th/15th century, namely, astrology and the impact of the celestial spheres upon human affairs. There is a rich body of literature by Muslim intellectuals attempting to carefully classify astrology – often referred to as the *‘ilm al-*

¹¹² See the BULAC *Kanz al-‘Ashiqīn*: Muḥyī al-Dīn Ṭūsī Ghazālī, *Kanz al-‘Ashiqīn*, 2b.

¹¹³ On arguments in favor of Āzarī being *Ithnā‘asharī* Shī‘ī, see: Muḥammad‘Alī Vuṣūqī, “Āzarī, Mazḥab va Dushmanī-Hā,” in *Mawj-i Daryā-yi Ma‘rifat: Majmū‘a-yi Chakīdah-hā va Barguzīdah-yi Maqālāt-i Hamāyish-i Bayn al-Milāl-i Shaykh Āzarī*, ed. ‘Abbās Shujā‘ī and Yūsuf‘Alī Yūsuf-nizhād (Mashhad: Kitābdār-i Tūs, 1390 [2011]), 686–709.; Özyurt, “‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib in Shaykh Āzarī’s Qasidas,” 378–403. *Tanāsukh* in the *AMA*, which will be discussed further in the next chapter, is mentioned in: Āzarī, *AMA*, 171b. One may also note that in the later work of Āzarī, *Gharā‘ib al-Dunyā wa ‘Ajā‘ib al-‘Alā*, the author states that “four rivers of the caliphate” flow from the ocean of the prophet Muḥammad, which would seem to be a reference to the four “Rightly-Guided Caliphs,” and with it a tacit endorsement of the Sunnī conception of the caliphate. Ḥamza b. ‘Alī Malik Āzarī-yi Isfarāyīnī, *Gharā‘ib al-Dunyā wa ‘Ajā‘ib al-‘Alā*, (n.d.) #9433, Kitābkhāna-yi Majlis-i Shūrā-yi Millī, 27a. This work mentions the *AJA*, and thus must have been written after 840/1436-7.

¹¹⁴ Āzarī, *AMA*, 34b–35a.

nujūm –, and attention to the celestial spheres is nearly omnipresent in Muslim historical writing of the period.¹¹⁵ For example, one could review the narrative in the chronicle of Firishta of the rise of the polity which would come to patronize Āzarī, the Bahmanids, and find that the astrological provenance of the date of the accession of the monarch was of major importance to the first Bahmanid sultan, ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Ḥasan Shāh Bahmanī, and his courtiers.¹¹⁶ As such, it is not itself surprising that Āzarī proceeded in the *AMA* to provide the exact star chart for the date of birth of Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-‘Askarī as a basis from which to argue that his life could well have stretched into the 9th/15th century.¹¹⁷ Indeed, his argument for the living imam was not simply from textual evidence – such as figures like Nūḥ/Noah, who in the text of the Hebrew Bible lived beyond 500 years¹¹⁸ – but from the idea that the planetary conjunctions at the time of the birth of the *mahdī* might allow for great “additions” to his age.¹¹⁹ In other words, the spheres might not simply be used for predicting certain political events and auspicious dates, but may themselves have such a significant impact on the material realm that they affect the length of one’s life. Without going into more detail on the technical information provided by Āzarī as to the position of the planets and the significant conjunctions at the birth of Muḥammad b. al-‘Askarī, what is key for understanding the thought of Āzarī is the use of the occult in elucidating a particular point of Shī‘ī doctrine.

¹¹⁵ On the generous amount of ink which has been spilled in defining the science of astrology in a Muslim context, see: Ahmet Tunç Sen, “Astrology in the Service of the Empire: Knowledge, Prognostication, and Politics at the Ottoman Court, 1450s-1550s” (Ph.D. Diss., Chicago, University of Chicago, 2016), 59–78.

¹¹⁶ The passage is likewise notable for the fact that it illustrates competition within the court between Hindu and Muslim astrologers: Firishta, *Tārīkh-i Firishta*, 2:237–39.

¹¹⁷ Āzarī, *AMA*, 35a–35b.

¹¹⁸ The father of Noah, Lamech, is held to have lived 777 years, while Noah was already 500 when he begot his sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Genesis 5: 30-32.

¹¹⁹ Āzarī, *AMA*, 35a.

These proofs and calculations to determine that the *mahdī* lived on through the Greater Occultation forced Āzarī to confront another aspect of Shī‘ī messianism: when this *mahdī* would finally emerge, how would his followers be able to recognize his manifesting in the material world? Approximately the next three folios of the *AMA* function essentially as an encyclopedic list of traditions related to the “signs of the *mahdī*,” which is itself a highly-developed subcategory which may be found in both Sunnī and Shī‘ī tradition collections.¹²⁰ Due to both an extreme specificity on the part of Āzarī, as well as the fact that signs of the *mahdī* in Shī‘ī eschatology have been treated in greater detail elsewhere,¹²¹ there is no need to perform a close reading of the messianic expectation in the *AMA* at this moment. It should suffice to note some of the well-known aspects of Shī‘ī expectations for the return of the *mahdī* which are faithfully recorded by Āzarī.¹²² As such, the return of the *mahdī* in the telling of Āzarī will involve such signs as the killing of the “Pure Soul,” *al-naḥs al-zakiyya*; the rise of the Sufyānid, who will oppose the *mahdī* and be defeated; unusual celestial phenomena, such as solar and lunar eclipses; that ‘Īsā, too, will return to Earth at the time of the *mahdī*; that the *mahdī* will be accompanied by 313 companions, many of whom will be from the Islamic East (*al-mashriq*) and not Arab;¹²³ that the companions will be miraculously summoned to Mecca at once by the *mahdī*, such that their appearance will cause confusion among the people of the city; that the *mahdī* will be

¹²⁰ Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi‘ism*, trans. David Streight (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 116.

¹²¹ See footnote below for specific page ranges from: Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi‘ism*; and Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism: The Idea of Mahdī in Twelver Shi‘ism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981).

¹²² Āzarī does cite a *Kitāb al-Mahdī* as the basis for much of his information, though it is unclear what particular text Āzarī chose to consult. The signs of the *mahdī* in the *AMA* are listed throughout: Āzarī, *AMA*, 37a–40b.

¹²³ Āzarī provided a list down to the specific towns from which companions of the *mahdī* would emerge. On the 313, see also: Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi‘ism*, 120–23.

accompanied by the angels Gabriel and Michael; that the *mahdī* will have to defeat a one-eyed Adversary, sometimes identified as the *Dajjāl*, and for Āzarī, Iblīs; that the period of the *mahdī* will be one of great justice; and that the initial *mahdī* may be succeeded by what Āzarī discusses as an indeterminate amount of *mahdīs*,¹²⁴ though ʿĪsā should be considered the most preferred of them.¹²⁵ This is a relatively summary approach to the discussion of the signs of the *mahdī* in the *AMA*, and a more detailed textual analysis of the exact language used and traditions included may well be warranted in future work. What is most notable for the purposes of this particular “secret” of the *AMA* is how closely the examples chosen by Āzarī track with much earlier compilations which came to form the traditionist corpus of *Ithnā ʿasharī* Shīʿī Islam. Even if it is not particularly surprising given the background of Āzarī, the fact that his reports line up closely with what might be found in the works of al-Kulaynī, Ibn Bābawayh “al-Ṣadūq,” al-Nuʿmanī “al-Kātib,” or al-Ṭūsī¹²⁶ suggests an understanding of the *mahdī* for Āzarī that was essentially in accordance with the *Ithnā ʿasharī* traditionist literature.

However, it would be an error to suggest that the faithful reporting of these well-known *Ithnā ʿasharī* traditions on the signs of the return of the *mahdī* means that the *Ithnā ʿasharī* tradition texts would have been the only sources which played a major role in Āzarī’s understanding of the *mahdī*, or even the most preferred sources. On the contrary, these reports only tell part of the story. For one of the traditions on the *mahdī* that was a source of debate for

¹²⁴ Āzarī named eight *mahdīs* in succession following Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, with the admonition that the 8th would “not [be] the last *mahdī*.” Āzarī, *AMA*, 40b.

¹²⁵ For analogues of each of the traditions mentioned here in earlier Shīʿī works, see: Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shiʿism*, 118–23; Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism: The Idea of Mahdī in Twelver Shiʿism*, 158–66; 171–79.

¹²⁶ That is, authors/compilers of important sources on the *mahdī* in the early Shīʿī tradition as discussed by Amir Moezzi: Amir Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shiʿism*, 19–22.

the *Ithnā‘asharī* authors – “there is no *mahdī* save ‘Īsā, the son of Mary” – was also a cause of consternation for Āzarī.¹²⁷ How could there be a basis in the traditions for ‘Īsā being the sole *mahdī* when a competing tradition stated, “the *mahdī* will be of my [Muḥammad’s] progeny, the sons of Fāṭima,”¹²⁸ lending credence to the *Ithnā‘asharī* understanding that the *mahdī* would be Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-‘Askarī? There are two methods used by Āzarī to square this circle. The first, the “transmitted” (*naqlī*), has already been mentioned in passing: there is evidence that may be drawn from the Prophetic traditions that the *mahdī* would not be one figure, but many.¹²⁹ As such, while ‘Īsā might be the “most preferred” individual to hold the title, given the multiplicity of *mahdīs*, one can relieve the tension from the seeming contradiction between the traditions.¹³⁰ This is not where the matter is put to rest, though, for Āzarī was still inclined to provide the rational (‘*aqlī*) interpretation to the identity of the *mahdī*, which would provide the inner, spiritual (*ma‘navī*) sense that ought to be taken from the opposing traditions. For this sense of the messiah, Āzarī would not turn back to the works of the traditionists, but to the exegesis of Faḥr Allāh Astarābādī.

¹²⁷ The tradition is, *lā mahdī illā ‘Īsā b. Maryam*, discussed by Āzarī beginning on Āzarī, *AMA*, 40a. As noted by Sachedina, the exact role of ‘Īsā *vis-à-vis* the *mahdī* was a point of polemic among both the *Ithnā‘asharī* Shī‘a and their opponents. The *Ithnā‘asharī* position would come to be that ‘Īsā, having descended to Earth and killed the *Dajjāl*, would come Jerusalem at the morning prayer. The *mahdī* would attempt to give up his position at the head of the prayer, but ‘Īsā would defer and take a position behind the *mahdī*. The opposing position hewed more closely to the tradition assigning the *mahdī*-ship to ‘Īsā, arguing that the Imam as *mahdī* was without Qur’ānic basis, and seeing in Jesus the figure who would return at the end of time and kill the *Dajjāl*. The dispute is detailed in: Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism: The Idea of Mahdī in Twelver Shī‘ism*, 171–72.

¹²⁸ *al-mahdī min ‘itratī awlād fāṭima*. Āzarī, *AMA*, 40a.

¹²⁹ See footnote on the indeterminate number of *mahdīs* above.

¹³⁰ Āzarī, *AMA*, 40a–40b. This is mentioned as the resolution preferred by the Sunnīs.

2.8 Reading the *Mahdī* through a Ḥurūfī Lens

Just as the discussion of the signs of the *mahdī* tacked closely to the reports found in the works of well-known Shī‘ī traditionists, so too did Āzarī discern the “spiritual” resolution to the question of the *mahdī*’s identity by drawing heavily from the *Jāvidān-nāma* of Faḏl Allāh. Portions of the conclusion to this section of the *AMA* are almost identical the summary of Ḥurūfī cosmology and eschatology given above. For Āzarī, the *mahdī* is the Word of God, *kalām Allāh*, as well as the 28 (Arabic) and 32 (Persian) letters which are the “foundation” (*aṣl*) of the Word.¹³¹ Accordingly, like what might be found in the *Jāvidān-nāma*, Āzarī included allusions to the Christian works upon which Faḏl Allāh weighed heavily in his own understanding of the role of ‘Īsā. The *AMA* included a close paraphrase of the opening of the canonical Gospel of John, noting, “‘Īsā has said that the first thing which came down from heaven was the Word, and God was with that Word, and I am that Word.”¹³² There is a direct citation of the *Arabic Apocalypse of Peter*,¹³³ also noted in Mir-Kasimov as being a key source for the *Jāvidān-nāma*, which has ‘Īsā stating, “I am with all things and I am without all things. Length, width, and depth are not suitable for me.”¹³⁴ Āzarī seems to be applying a Ḥurūfī understanding of this statement, which is that as ‘Īsā is, in reality, the primordial *Kalām Allāh*, the “metalanguage,” and should not be recognized as being in the same category as the rest of humanity.¹³⁵ Finally, there is the

¹³¹ Āzarī, *AMA*, 40b.

¹³² ‘Īsā *gufta ast ki avval chīzī ki az āsmān āmad sukhan būd va khudā bā ān sukhan būd va man ān sukhan-am*. Āzarī, *AMA*, 41a.

¹³³ In this chapter of the *AMA*, the *Kitāb-i Fiṭrūs*.

¹³⁴ *man bā hama ashyā-am va bī hama ashyā-am ṭūl va ‘arz va ‘umq bar man ravā nīst*. Mir-Kasimov, “Jesus as Eschatological Savior,” 346; Āzarī, *AMA*, 41b.

¹³⁵ Mir Kasimov, “Jesus as Eschatological Savior,” 346.

question of the creation of Ādam as it is related in the Hebrew Bible, in which God states that the first human would be created “in [His] own image,”¹³⁶ and the key Qur’ānic narrative of God teaching the names of things to Ādam.¹³⁷ Āzarī understood this again through a quotation from ‘Īsā:

So, the *masīh* [‘Īsā] has said, “I am those names. So first, as I have come, all of those names shall flow from my tongue.” This means, “this time, I shall come as the 28 letters. That of which I have spoken in parable and allusion – I shall make all of it clear.”¹³⁸

First, this is a reprisal of the association of ‘Īsā with not only the initial Word of God, but with its constitutive elements in the specific letters of, in this case, the Arabic alphabet.¹³⁹ However, the latter interpretation is a nod towards not the primordial role of ‘Īsā, but his eschatological function. In the Ḥurūfī conception, with the return of ‘Īsā at the end of time will come not only an interpretation (*ta’wīl*) of his more difficult sayings, but the perfect *ta’wīl* of the cosmic significance of the letters, finally in plain speech and free of prophetic allusion.¹⁴⁰ For Āzarī, the *ma’navī* understanding of the *mahdī* was to be drawn from the Christological analysis of the *Jāvidān-nāma* of Faḏl Allāh, in which the prime eschatological significance of ‘Īsā was not merely in his descent and confrontation with the *Dajjāl*, as might be seen in other traditions, but in his fulfilling the lettrist expectations of the Ḥurūfiyya and teaching humanity the “ontological language of the divine Word.”¹⁴¹

¹³⁶ Genesis 1:27. There is also a well-known tradition which echoes this biblical account, stating, “God created Adam in his own image,” *inna Allāh khalaqa Ādam ‘alā ṣūratihī*. However, Āzarī would invoke this tradition not in this section on the imamate, but in the section immediately following it.

¹³⁷ As per Q2:31-33.

¹³⁸ Āzarī, *AMA*, 41a–41b.

¹³⁹ Mir-Kasimov, “Jesus as Eschatological Savior,” 345.

¹⁴⁰ Mir-Kasimov, “Jesus as Eschatological Savior,” 47–48.

¹⁴¹ Mir-Kasimov, “Jesus as Eschatological Savior,” 349.

While such a passage would seem to establish that Āzarī had access to the *Jāvidān-nāma* and endorsed aspects of the analysis of Fażl Allāh, one might object that the discordance between the traditions on the *mahdī* has not quite been resolved. After all, Āzarī gave equal weight to discussing both the occulted lifespan of Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-‘Askarī and the eschatological role of ‘Īsā as the Word of God, *kalām Allāh*, who would unite the people of the Earth as *mahdī* by means of his interpretation of the lettrist underpinnings of the cosmos. Can these two analyses truly be synthesized, or are they parallel tracks of mahdistic speculation? This chapter of the *AMA* concludes with what Āzarī himself designated a “subtle point” from the “discourse of our master [Fażl Allāh]” which might well resolve this tension:

The *mahdī* is the site of manifestation of the word of ‘Īsā. Or rather, there is, as well, another subtle point which may be known, and this, too, may be understood from the speech of the master: he said there that the *mahdī* was the *qā’im-maqām* of ‘Īsā upon the Earth. Thus ‘Īsā “descends,” meaning he is in the heavens, [and the *mahdī*] would be the *qā’im-maqām* of ‘Īsā, thus meaning that he carries with him the *‘Isavī* secrets.¹⁴²

The argument of Āzarī is that it is not ‘Īsā himself who will appear in a mahdistic role at the end of time, but rather, that the *mahdī* can serve as the place where his Word (*kalima*) makes itself manifest. Rather than using *qā’im-maqām* as a standalone title – in which way it might well appear in other texts on the *mahdī* – it is being used in a more literal sense as the “one who stands in the place [of another],” a vicegerent or deputy. Thus, the *mahdī* is not precisely ‘Īsā, but rather the one who bears the secrets of ‘Īsā, known in Ḥurūfī discourse to be the lettrist basis of the cosmos, in his stead. In this way the competing traditions may be resolved: on the one hand, the *mahdī* is the “site of manifestation” for the word of ‘Īsā and bears the *‘isavī* secrets,

¹⁴² *mahdī maẓhar-i kalima-yi ‘īsā ast balka laḥifa-yi dīgar ham ma’lūm mīshavad va az sukhan-i shaykh nīz īn fahm mītavān kard ki ānjā guft ki mahdī qā’im-maqām-i ‘īsā bāshad dar zamīn va chūn ‘īsā nuzūl kunad ya nī bar āsmān shavad qā’im-maqām-i ‘īsā pas ya nī ḥāmil-i asrār-i ‘isavī bāshad. Āzarī, AMA, 41b–42a.*

thus fulfilling the responsibilities of ‘Īsā at the end of time which are enumerated in the *Jāvidān-nāma*. However, as what has descended is the *kalima* of ‘Īsā and not ‘Īsā, himself, as a separate being, Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-‘Askarī may well be the “placeholder” and vicegerent of ‘Īsā, the *qā’im-maqām*, upon the earth, while ‘Īsā himself remains within the heavens.¹⁴³ In this way, as Āzarī states, “there is no discordance between the traditions,”¹⁴⁴ and the Ḥurūfī and *Ithnā‘asharī* Shī‘ī analyses of the *mahdī* are synthesized. As this constitutes the conclusion of the chapter of Āzarī on the question of how to interpret the tradition, “one who dies and does not know the imam of his age has died ignorantly,” it is difficult not to see a certain primacy being granted by Āzarī to Ḥurūfī teachings on the *mahdī*, even if they have been interpreted as ultimately being in concordance with *Ithnā‘asharī* teachings, and do not seem to acknowledge specifically that Fażl Allāh *himself* had mahdistic aspirations.

While not completely unexpected given what has already been established concerning the life and works of Āzarī, this section is still striking in its endorsement of Ḥurūfī doctrine related to the *mahdī*. To conclude the entire discussion by relying upon the *Jāvidān-nāma*, and to find in the writing of Fażl Allāh the accurate spiritual/inner (*ma‘navī*) interpretation of the identity of the *mahdī* would make Āzarī not only generally aware of Ḥurūfī thought, but himself a Ḥurūfī sympathizer. It is true, though, that there is a general encyclopedic impulse throughout the entire section: as seen in the extensive listing of traditions related to the events of the apocalypse and the characteristics of the *mahdī*, Āzarī was as concerned with the gathering of relevant

¹⁴³ One will note the similarities to the concept of *burūz*, a sort of “extension” in which “a complete soul pours into a perfect being,” which was a key part of Nūbakhshī messianic discourse in the 9th/15th century. While Āzarī does not mention Nūbakhsh in any of his occult works, there are concordances between Āzarī’s resolution of the issue of the *mahdī* and the usage of this *burūz* in the mahdistic dialogue of Nūbakhsh. See: Shahzad Bashir, *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions*, 98-102.

¹⁴⁴ *pas miyān-i aḥādīth tanāquṣ nabāshad*. Āzarī, *AMA*, 42a.

information as with dedicated analysis. There is a counterargument, then, that Āzarī may have simply been aware of the mahdistic discussion in the *Jāvidān-nāma* and felt compelled to include it, just as he did with the extensive listing of material from what he calls the *Kitāb al-Mahdī*. Knowledge of a school of thought should not necessarily be taken to mean sympathy for that same school. But Āzarī was not a disinterested observer of the Ḥurūfiyya, and on the contrary, the analysis of Faḏl Allāh is key to resolving the issues at the very core of this and other “secrets.” There is a definite trajectory to the analysis of Āzarī: first, the definition of the caliphate and imamate, acknowledging the realities of the post-Mongol period; second, a deeper exploration of the identity of the imam – the figure whom the faithful must recognize lest they die ignorantly –, moving beyond the “internal” imams of the 9th/15th century to establish the identity of the imam who would unite religious and political authority, Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-‘Askarī, and the signs of his arrival; and finally, relying upon the Ḥurūfī tradition to resolve a final barrier to his expectation of the (Shī‘ī) *mahdī*, namely, the well-known tradition that “there is no *mahdī* except for ‘Īsā, son of Maryam.” Hence, Āzarī showed a clear understanding of the discussions of the dual caliphate in the 9th/15th century, acknowledging the realities of the post-Mongol Islamic world and the discussions of political theory which were *en vogue* in Timurid Iran, while deviating from the conclusions of other theorists in favor of a Shī‘ī-Ḥurūfī millenarian understanding of the ultimate possessor of rightful authority, the imam and *mahdī*. By the same token, Āzarī shared a bevy of *Ithnā‘asharī* Shī‘ī traditions on the signs of the *mahdī* with such precision that they might as well have been taken word-for-word from some of the major Shī‘ī collections. However, there is once more a turn in the analysis: rather than seeing in ‘Īsā a figure who would return as a key eschatological figure who was nonetheless subservient to the *mahdī*, taking his place behind the *mahdī* at morning prayers, Āzarī instead drew from the

Ḥurūfī tradition to resolve the issue of the *mahdī*-ʿĪsā relationship, with the *mahdī* functioning as the vicegerent of ʿĪsā on earth and the site of manifestation of the word of ʿĪsā. Put simply, the fact that the *AMA* can appear as a storehouse of seemingly contradictory information related to a set of esoteric themes should not distract from the subtle but perceptible voice of Āzarī himself, which underpins the work as a whole.

2.9. Conclusion

The discussion of leadership and authority in the *AMA* both confirms certain suspicions about Āzarī, while also raising additional questions about his precise spiritual education and lineage. As one might expect for a Timurid courtier in the early part of the 9th/15th century, Āzarī was concerned with rightful leadership in the post-Mongol Islamic world, indicating a sense of the concept of the “inner” and “outer” caliphate (even if his terminology does not perfectly match other theorists who would write on the topic). Likewise, having been raised in the context of the Sarbadārid polity at a time when *Ithnā ʿasharī* Shīʿī Islam would have been ascendant in Khurasan, his familiarity with Shīʿī traditions on the signs of the arrival of the *mahdī* is on clear display throughout his analysis. What is of greatest note, though, is the manner in which this section of the *AMA* speaks to the Shīʿī-Ṣūfī messianism which appeared in a number of iterations across Iranian lands in the 8th-9th/14th-15th centuries. By essentially endorsing the thought of Faḏl Allāh Astarābādī, one must consider Āzarī to have been at least a tangential member of a broader Ḥurūfī network of the time.

I would emphasize two particular conclusions from this section of the *AMA*. The first is that the *AMA* is not only a window into the insight of Āzarī, although it certainly illuminates the sources and thinkers that were particularly influential upon him. Rather, it might also be read as an unexpected source for Ḥurūfī thought in its own right, as it provides numerous examples of

how a Ḥurūfī-influenced thinker went about incorporating Ḥurūfī doctrine in resolving a number of thorny issues in Islamic texts. Additionally, there is a key chronological significance to the appearance of Ḥurūfī analyses in the *AMA*. While it has already been established in the literature that certain Ḥurūfī interpretations of scripture appeared in the *AJA*, written 10 years after the *AMA*,¹⁴⁵ these Ḥurūfī-friendly sections of the *AMA* indicate that Āzarī had already absorbed texts such as the *Jāvidān-nāma* and *ʿArsh-nāma* by 830/1426-27. Though this does mean that one can confidently say that his encounters with Ḥurūfī concepts would have occurred at least prior to 830 *hijrī*, this is not a matter which is only significant for developing a fuller understanding of Āzarī’s biography. First, chronologically, one will recall that Āzarī was both associated with the most prominent Timurid courts of his time, as well as the significant Kubrawī and Ni‘mat-allāhī Ṣūfī networks *prior* to the composition of the *AMA*. Though the author does not name a specific mentor through whom he could be connected to known Ḥurūfī networks, the bare historical facts speak to a certain diffusion of Ḥurūfī concepts across the Persianate world such that a figure in such “mainstream” circumstances could read and reflect upon them. How prominent, exactly, were Ḥurūfī concepts in Timurid lands, particularly prior to the 830/1427 assassination attempt and the subsequent backlash? There is another side to this same coin. One will recall that not long after his flight from Khurasan, Āzarī found himself in a high-ranking role at the court of Aḥmad Shāh I Bahmanī and delivered a copy of his *AMA* to the royal library. In other words, one sees a prominent Persianate court employing a figure who showed a deep interest in the gnostic-messianic system of the Ḥurūfiyya, and whose works were apparently well received by this same court. This fact demands additional research into Persianate patronage networks in the 9th/15th century from a number of different directions. To what extent might Āzarī be considered only

¹⁴⁵ Naṣrābādī, “Ḥurūfiyya va Shaykh Āzarī bā Takya bar Kitāb-i «Javāhir al-Asrār».”

one node in a larger network of Ḥurūfī intellectuals not only in Iranian lands, but in South India as well? How did the experience of Āzarī differ from later Iranian émigrés to the Deccan, such as Maḥmūd Gāwān (d. 886/1481) or Zuhūrī Turshīzī (d. 1025/1616)? Put differently, to what extent was it an anomaly for the Bahmanids or other eastern Persianate courts to have Ḥurūfīs on their payroll? Though many of these questions will have to be resolved in future research, it should be clear that the specific case of Āzarī raises a number of pressing, more general questions about the spread of the occult sciences, courtly patronage of masters of esotericism, and the stakes of messianic discourse in the 9th/15th century Persianate world.

Chapter 3: Āzarī Between Spiritual Networks

آستین بر عالم افشانی اگر چون آذری

دست در دامن سعدالدین حموی زن

Āzarī, if you have abandoned the world,
Place your hand on the skirt of Sa‘d al-Dīn Ḥamuwayī.¹
Āzarī, *Ghazal* 454

3.1. Introduction

While a sympathy for the teachings of Faḏl Allāh Astarābādī and the Ḥurūfiyya may be the most provocative of the positions of Āzarī, it is only a fraction of a much larger story relating to his intellectual interests and religious (and political) affiliations. It may well be the case that the sudden flight of Āzarī from Khurasan shortly after the completion of the *AMA* was a result of the crackdown on lettrism broadly understood in Shāhrukhid domains, and the role of the *AMA* and *AJA* in transmitting certain Ḥurūfī ideals to potentially wider reading audience is not a point of minor significance in tracking esoteric intellectual trends in the Timurid era. However, it may just as likely be thought of as a relatively minor affiliation in comparison to other networks to which Āzarī was attached. One will recall from the introduction that the departure from this homeland around 830/1427 was not the first time Āzarī had made himself scarce from the court at Herat where he had once won such acclaim for his skills as a poet. Rather, the episode which is framed in more dramatic terms in both the autobiographical portion of the *AMA* and the report of Dawlatshāh on Āzarī is his initial spiritual conversion of sorts, when the pleasure and frivolity of the court were ostensibly traded in for rigors of the Ṣūfī path. As has already been seen, there is a certain coloring of hagiography to this account: Āzarī hardly abandoned the realms of the

¹ Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 284.

courts altogether, and would shortly find himself in an equally prominent role in Bahmanid Bidar. That being said, whether the conversion of Āzarī towards a life of contemplation was properly “genuine” given his later work is irrelevant to the reality of his fostering connections with Ṣūfī figures after his departure from the role of *malik al-shu‘arā’* at the court of Shāhrukh. Based simply on the biographical dictionary tradition, these would include both Muḥyī al-Dīn Ṭūsī Ghazālī, about whom little is known, as well as the more prominent figure in the history of Sufism, Ni‘mat Allāh. As will be seen in this chapter, this already is only part of the larger picture, as it will be shown that Āzarī self-consciously attached himself to the Kubrawiyya network, claiming an *uwaysī* (Arabic, *uwaysī*)² spiritual lineage and frequently citing such notable Kubrawī figures as Sa‘d al-Dīn Ḥamuwayī and ‘Alā’ al-Dawla Simnānī throughout his works.³ Accordingly, what is most transmitted in the textual tradition surrounding Āzarī is not his interest in certain radical interpretations of the *‘ilm-i ḥurūf*, but rather, his dramatic departure from his previous career as a panegyrist in favor of a role as a Ṣūfī follower.⁴ This alone raises additional questions about the life of Āzarī which must be addressed: in what ways was Āzarī self-consciously a *Ṣūfī* in his writings? That is to say, to which Ṣūfī network(s) did Āzarī see himself most aligned? Are figures within a certain Ṣūfī network cited as authorities in resolving various issues in the *AMA* and *AJA*? Similarly, did Āzarī attach himself to any other well-known

² That is, in the style of Uways al-Qaranī, the early companion of the Prophet Muḥammad who never met Muḥammad in person, but rather communicated with him on the non-material plane. See: Julian Baldick, “Uways al-Qaranī,” *EF*.

³ These dynamics will be discussed in greater detail in the chapter to come – particularly the *uwaysī*-style spiritual attachments of Āzarī – but each of these figures are cited often throughout the occult compendia of Āzarī. Ḥamuwayī would appear on 7 folios of the *AMA* and 15 in the *AJA*; for Simnānī, these counts would be 13 folios in the *AMA* and 30 in the *AJA*. To compare to the previous chapter, Faḏl Allāh is mentioned on 7 folios of the *AMA* and 5 of the *AJA*.

⁴ The *tazkīra* tradition will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 4. For a collation of the biographical details of Āzarī shared in the biographical entries of the *tazkīra* tradition, see the chart in Appendix B.

esoteric networks besides showing certain sympathies for the Ḥurūfiyya? What of the oft-cited but ephemerally defined *ahl-i kashf va taḥqīq*, the people of unveiling and investigation, to which other lettrist intellectuals would have claimed membership in the 9th/15th century? Before sifting through additional, relevant passages of the writing of Āzarī himself, it will be necessary to set the stage by considering each of these in turn: the Ṣūfī context into which Āzarī would have been born and raised, and the nature of the fluid intellectual networks of the Timurid era.

3.2 Sufism in the post-Mongol Islamic World

The moment at which Āzarī would have been turning towards the Ṣūfī path in the 9th/15th century would have been a key transitional period in the development of Sufism across the entirety of the Islamic world more generally. It is true that many of the basic forms of what are now recognized as Ṣūfī thought and practice would have certainly been widely known by the time of the spiritual awakening of Āzarī, such that he would have been embracing a well-trodden path towards the realms of *taṣawwuf* by abandoning the court and seeking the guidance of one or more figures along a particular spiritual route (*tarīqa*) or another. While a full periodization of the development of Sufism is both open to debate and beyond the proper scope of this project, there are a few basic observations to be made as to the state of *taṣawwuf* as it would have existed in the lifetime of Āzarī. After all, Āzarī would have been living in a time when there had already been efforts in earnest within the Islamic tradition to define Sufism as a concept, and to recognize certain major early pietists such as Junayd Baghdādī or Abū Yazīd Bisṭāmī as being foundational figures in varieties of Ṣūfī practice (“sober” and “intoxicated,” respectively) as well as the development of Ṣūfī chains of transmission (*silsila* pl. *salāsil*).⁵ Āzarī would have lived

⁵ For a somewhat simplified account of the development of Sufism from the early pietists to fully-fledged orders (in which, as will be clear from further discussion in this chapter, the development of “orders” is perhaps marked too early in comparison to their actual solidification), see: J. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 1-30. For a discussion of the pietistic environment out of which Sufism would

well after major systematizing works, such as the *Risāla (Treatise)* of al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) and the *Kashf al-Mahjūb (Revealing the Veiled)* of Hujvīrī (d. between 465 and 469/1072 and 1077), each of which would have attempted to trace a history of early Ṣūfī origins, identify certain individuals who ought to be considered as key to the formation of Ṣūfī spiritual lineages, and define specialized terms in Ṣūfī practice.⁶ These works could eventually be read alongside pieces of *ṭabaqāt*⁷ literature dedicated to those figures viewed as significant in the Ṣūfī canon, as in the case of the *Tazkirat al-Awliyā*’ (translated by Losensky as *The Memorial of God’s Friends*) of Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār (d. ca. 627/1230).⁸ Even if, as will be discussed shortly, it is difficult to define the Sufism of the early 9th/15th century as having fully-fledged “orders” – that is, institutionalized organizations in which there would be present such features as well-defined membership, a codified *silsila*, distinguishing features from other orders, or endowed lodges (*khānaqāhs*) for lodging and study⁹ – one could still attempt to define certain “networks” which,

have emerged, without succumbing to teleological arguments in which other pietistic movements naturally gave way or evolved into Sufism, and the early development of Ṣūfī networks, see the first two chapters of: Nile Green, *Sufism: A Global History*, Blackwell Brief Histories of Religion (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

⁶ ‘Abd al-Karīm b. Hawāzin Qushayrī, *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya fī ‘Ilm al-Taṣawwuf*, ed. Ma‘rūf Zurayq and ‘Alī ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Balṭahjī (Damascus: Dār al-Khayr, 1409 [1988]); ‘Alī b. Uṣmān Hujvīrī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, ed. Firīdūn Āsyābī ‘Ishqī Zanjānī (Qum: Mu‘assasa-yi Farhangī va Itṭilā‘-Rasānī-yi Tibyān, 1394 [2015]).

⁷ Literally “generations,” what is meant here is the collection of biographical dictionary entries on a set of individuals around a certain theme, for example, notable individuals from a certain geographical location, or those from a particular vocation. In the case of Ṣūfī literature, this may include collated reports of the events of a saint’s life, up to and including hagiographical accounts of the saints’ miraculous deeds (*karāmāt*). An alternative, oft-used term for the genre would also be that of the *manāqib*, “virtues,” which is not strictly limited to the Ṣūfī sphere, nor to hagiography. However, works of *manāqib* devoted to not merely discussing the fine characteristics of a particular Ṣūfī saint, but to his attendant miracles, would become part and parcel of Ṣūfī literature, and popular works of *manāqib* transmitted through Ṣūfī networks could serve as one method among others by which these networks became increasingly institutionalized. See: J. A. Mojaddedi, *The Biographical Tradition in Sufism: The Ṭabaqāt Genre from al-Sulamī to Jāmī* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001); Jürgen Paul, “Hagiographic Literature,” *Elr*; Charles Pellat, “Manāqib,” *EP*.

⁸ Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār, *Farid Al-Din ‘Aṭṭār’s Memorial of God’s Friends: Lives and Sayings of Sufis*, trans. Paul Losensky (New York; Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2009).

⁹ The early stages of *khānaqāh* institutionalization would nonetheless have begun by the time of Āzarī in the form of the explicit listing of rules for those lodging within these spaces. A key early example would be the guidelines set forth by Abū Sa‘īd-i Abī al-Khayr (d. 440/1049), recorded in the hagiographical *Asrār al-Tawḥīd*,

in many cases, would coalesce in later generations into recognizable orders.¹⁰ Even without what might be considered “full” institutionalization of Ṣūfī orders, there can be little doubt that by the time Āzarī would have been suffering a crisis of conscience at the court in Herat, there would have been centuries of discussion over the person of the saint, the “friend of God” (*walī Allāh*), the characteristics of sainthood (*wilāya/walāya*),¹¹ and the ways in which this sainthood might manifest through certain miraculous acts which the saint may be able to bring about, *karāmāt*.¹² This is not to say that Sufism would have been conceived of as a monolith, and this chapter will explore some of the particularities of Ṣūfī activity in Iran and Central Asia in the lifetime of Āzarī, especially as it related to the Kubrawiyya network. It is, rather, to emphasize that even by the time of the first Mongol invasions of the 7th/13th century, a Ṣūfī discourse would have been emerging for an extended period of time in the Islamic world, including a certain overarching shared vocabulary, but certainly flexible enough to allow for localized expressions of the phenomenon.¹³

compiled by Muḥammad b. Nūr al-Dīn Munawwar. On the specifics of the life of Abū Sa‘īd and mention of the rules for *khānaqāh* residents, see: Gerhard Böwering, “Abū Sa‘īd Abi’l-Ḳayr,” *EIr*. The *Asrār al-Tawḥīd* exists in many printings, including the 1997 version in two volumes: Muḥammad b. al-Munawwar, *Asrār al-Tawḥīd fī Maqāmāt al-Shaykh Abū Sa‘īd*, ed. Muḥammad Rizā Shafī‘ī Kadkanī (Tehran: Mu’assasa-yi Intishārāt-i Āgāh, 1376 [1997]).

¹⁰ For additional discussion of the gradual formation of Ṣūfī networks, see also the studies of Annemarie Schimmel and Ahmet Karamustafa: Annemarie Schimmel, “Sufi Orders and Fraternities,” in *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975); Ahmet T. Karamustafa, “Formation of Communities,” in *Sufism: The Formative Period*, The New Edinburgh Islamic Surveys (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007). For a brief discussion of the utility of speaking in terms of “networks” rather than “orders,” see: Shahzad Bashir, *Sufi Bodies: Religion and Society in Medieval Islam* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2011), 11-12.

¹¹ See the discussion particularly in reference to the thought of Ibn ‘Arabī in: Michel Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn ‘Arabī* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993).

¹² Discussions of Ṣūfī doctrine take pains to distinguish *karāmāt* from prophetic miracles, *mu‘jizāt*, which are a major indicator of prophecy – a prophecy which, in Islamic belief, would have been sealed with the person of the prophet Muḥammad. Accordingly, *karāmāt* are described by Qushayrī as bearing the same basic essence as the *mu‘jizāt*, though in a far diminished degree, as though the workings of the saint are a single “drop of honey” where the powers of the prophet would be a full jar. Qushayrī, *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*, 353-6.

The fact that Sufism, defined even in quite broad terms, allowed for a certain level of continuity through the interchange of both texts and practices (for example, the nearly omnipresent *zīkr*, “remembrance” of God either vocally or silently) while also being embedded within a specific local culture would likely have contributed to its endurance and growth even beyond the Mongol invasions. The pioneering studies of Sufism in the post-Mongol era by scholars such as Jean Aubin, Monika Gronke, and Denise Aigle have emphasized exactly these points of locality and continuity, whether in the case of the *sayyids* of Bam, in the nascent Šafavid network under the guidance of Shaykh Šafī al-Dīn in Ardabīl, or the miracles recorded in a varied set of medieval hagiographies, respectively.¹⁴ As emphasized by Gronke in the introduction to her chapter, for all of the higher-order religious and political implications of the Mongol invasions, there can be little doubt that the practical matter of the incursions themselves would have led to enormous social and economic stress at a local level, whether in the form of “military strife, exploitative taxation, legal insecurity, wars, famine, epidemics, disease, [or] poverty.”¹⁵ The combination of these factors – the physical deprivation and suffering inherent to warfare, as well as the shaking of the foundations of longstanding models of governance – would

¹³ The specific, localized iterations of Sufism existing from the Iberian peninsula to South Asia are well beyond the scope of this particular chapter. One might begin with looking at certain modes of Šūfī practice on a regional level. For the Central Asian case, one might review: Devin A. DeWeese, *Islamization and Native Religion in the Golden Horde: Baba Tükles and Conversion to Islam in Historical and Epic Tradition*, Hermeneutics, Studies in the History of Religions (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994). In the case of South Asia, there is the overarching study of Rizvi: Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, vol. 1, 2 vols. (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1978).

¹⁴ Jean. Aubin, *Deux sayyids de Bam au XVe siècle: contribution à l'histoire de l'Iran timouride.*, vol. Jahrgang 1956, nr. 7, Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur. Abhandlungen der Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse, (Mainz: Verlag der Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur; in Kommission bei F. Steiner, Wiesbaden, 1956); Monika Gronke, “La religion populaire en Iran mongol,” in *L'Iran face à la domination mongole. Etudes réunies et prés. D.Aigle* (Tehran: Institut Français de Recherche en Iran, 1997), 205-30; Denise Aigle, “Charismes et rôle social des saints dans l'hagiographie persane médiévale: (Xe-XVe Siècles),” *Bulletin d'études orientales* 47 (1995): 15-36.

¹⁵ Gronke, “La religion populaire,” 209.

certainly have increased feelings of precarity on the level of the broader populace. It was in this context that Sufism, both in the form of shaykhs of a particular town or region, as well as in what were the early stages of Ṣūfī networks-turned-orders, continued to grow and thrive. This is not a terribly surprising development: as noted in the studies cited above, a Ṣūfī shaykh would often be well-integrated into the town or village in which he and both his ancestors and future descendants would live, and the hagiographical materials on Ṣūfī shaykhs in the Islamic Middle Periods are rife with accounts of miraculous healing, premonitions, the ability to find lost items and individuals, and the like. As such, the Ṣūfī shrine could provide both social and religious continuity, as well as what were perceived as practical, salutary effects, in a period of ideological uncertainty and practical deprivation. This is not to say that Ṣūfī individuals or networks were the *only* outlet for such practice, and Islamic institutions of learning in urban settings (frequently discussed in the literature as being “high” Islam, as opposed to “popular” Islam) would have continued to be sites of intellectual dynamism throughout the Mongol period.¹⁶ The point is simply to emphasize the practical reasons that Ṣūfī figures, already active across much of the Islamic world, frequently living in the countryside, and continuing their missions even after the upheaval of the Mongol irruption, could in certain cases both maintain their position and even expand their base of followers in the Mongol period.

3.3. Sufism in Conversation with Political Power

While the studies mentioned above highlight noteworthy developments in Sufism in the post-Mongol period as they occurred in the towns or the countryside, it would be a mistake to consider Sufism *purely* through this more rustic, “popular” lens. Generally speaking, while one

¹⁶ Note, for example, the discussion of Mazzaoui specifically around the question of the status of Shī‘ī Islam in the post-Mongol period, which nonetheless has implications for institutional/urban/courtly expressions of Islamic learning in the time period more generally: Mazzaoui, *The Origins of the Ṣafawids*, 22-40.

may find associations of Sufism with “low,” “popular” Islam and a Sharī‘a-minded clerical establishment with “high,” “elite” Islam, such a dichotomy would be faulty from multiple avenues.¹⁷ For one, it is a vast oversimplification to demarcate a boundary between Ṣūfī and Sharī‘a-minded discourses. Certainly, there have been cases of antinomian trends under the broad umbrella of Sufism, as in the case of wandering dervishes engaged in transgressive behavior, such as the Qalandarī or Ḥaydarī manifestations of an ecstatic, “intoxicated” Sufism.¹⁸ There are likewise figures well-known in Islamic history for their condemnation of what they perceived of as the excesses of certain Ṣūfī figures, as in the case of Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328).¹⁹ However, each of these examples may easily be countered with the reverse: one can hardly consider the writings of a figure such as ‘Abd Allāh Anṣārī, Ḥanbalī traditionist and major thinker in the development of Sufism, and see in his writings the sort of antinomian libertinism associated with some expressions of wandering dervish movements.²⁰ By the same token, it has even been suggested that Ibn Taymiyya himself had certain sympathies with the Qādirī Ṣūfī network, and his broader intellectual circle would likewise have included those who engaged with Ṣūfī thought.²¹ The issues with these simplistic associations do not end here. There is also

¹⁷ While certain valuable works, such as the chapter of Gronke above, work with the concepts of “high” and “low” Islam, some skepticism towards the utility of these concepts is warranted. Namely, one might consider some of the relevant examples shared by Shahab Ahmed of what might be considered popular expressions of Islam – for example, the musical *qawwali* performance – which nonetheless express positions on philosophical or metaphysical questions more typically associated with the elite institutions of learning such as the *madrasas* or courtly intellectual salons. Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam?*, 279-81.

¹⁸ These varieties of Ṣūfī practice have been examined in: Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *God’s Unruly Friends: Dervish Groups in the Islamic Later Middle Period, 1200-1550* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994).

¹⁹ For both a discussion of the commentary of Ibn Taymiyya on the *Risāla* of al-Qushayrī, as well as a useful collection of literature related to the commentary of Ibn Taymiyya on Sufism, see: Kamal Gasimov, “Muslim Saints Contested: Ibn Taymiyya’s Critique of al-Qushayrī’s *Risāla*,” *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 2022, 1–59. A list of studies of the critiques of Ibn Taymiyya towards Sufism is found on 4fn14.

²⁰ For an overview of the life of ‘Abd Allāh Anṣārī, see: S. de Laugier de Beauceuil, “‘Abdāllah Anṣārī,” *EIr*.

the fact that for whatever manifestations of an ethos of renunciation of the material world and fierce skepticism towards associating with political figures – and these sympathies can surely be found within the Ṣūfī tradition– it would likewise be faulty to read from this that Sufism was focused primarily on the otherworldly, while it was the Sharī‘a-minded judges and jurists more occupied with the affairs of this material world.²²

In fact, as obvious as it may be to reiterate such a point, the fact that Āzarī continued to have certain connections to the courts of his time is, historically speaking, hardly a mark against the earnestness of his turn towards the Ṣūfī path. In the Islamic Middle Periods generally, and particularly the period following the Mongol invasions, it would have hardly been of note for a figure on the Ṣūfī path to have a relationship with a political figure, to dispense advice or criticism based on the political dynamics of the realm in which that Ṣūfī was living, or to threaten to withdraw his divine approval in the case of the missteps of a governor, commander, or sultan. This was not merely a dynamic added after the fact to the hagiographical record, though there are certainly accounts which would suggest that a saint’s *walāya* would even be sufficient to spur such events of world-historical magnitude as the Mongol invasions, as in the

²¹ See: George Makdisi, “Ibn Taymīya: A Ṣūfī of the Qādirīya Order,” *American Journal of Arabic Studies* 1 (1973): 118–29; Arjan Post, “A Glimpse of Sufism from the Circle of Ibn Taymiyya: An Edition and Translation of al-Ba‘labakkī’s (d. 734/1333) Epistle on the Spiritual Way (Risālat al-Sulūk),” *Journal of Sufi Studies* 5, no. 2 (2016): 156–87.

²² It is difficult enough to generalize within specific Ṣūfī networks, much less across Sufism writ large, but there are many networks who have provided examples of both hesitance and engagement towards sultans and their agents. Note, for example, certain quotations from the Chishtī saint Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā’ encouraging the refusal of royal grants, avoiding visits to the courts, and generally preferring the company of commoners to nobles and merchants: Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā’, *Morals for the Heart: Conversations of Shaykh Nizām ad-Dīn Awliya Recorded by Amir Hasan Sijzi*, trans. Bruce B. Lawrence (New York; Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1992), 35-7. It would be only two spiritual generations later when Gīsū Darāz, disciple of Naṣīr al-Dīn Maḥmūd Chirāgh-i Dihlī, who was himself a direct follower of Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā’, would be directly involved in Bahmanid court politics. There is a potential link between Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā’ and the Bahmanids, though not in the directly political manner of Gīsū Darāz: Nizām al-Dīn is said to have seen ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Ḥasan Bahman Shāh before his rise to prominence and predicted that he would one day be a sultan, himself. The account is contained in Ṭabāṭabā: Ṭabāṭabā, *Burhān*, 12.

case of certain accounts shared related to Najm al-Dīn Kubrā (d. 617/1220),²³ or the supposedly remarkable powers of the Ottoman saint, Otman Baba.²⁴ Rather, there are occurrences which occurred within the material world (as opposed to more sublime realms) which speak to a spectrum of relationships between Ṣūfī figures and the princes and sultans competing for their attention and favor. This could take the form of, for example, the reports related to Shaykh Ṣafī al-Dīn, who seems to have maintained good relations with political figures while at Ardabīl, though without the assertive militancy which would come to characterize his descendants.²⁵ This would seem to constitute one end of the spectrum of Ṣūfī political involvement, in which political leaders were not wholly ignored and may be received as visitors to the Ṣūfī shrine, but without involvement by the saint in the particulars of political action.

There are likewise examples of more active cases of political involvement by Ṣūfī figures, as in the instances of the notables of Ṣūfī shrines serving as mediators in the post-Mongol era between political forces in conflict, or even serving as direct advisors to the Kartid dynasty of Herat, as explored by Potter.²⁶ Also included in this level of political involvement could certainly be Gīsū Darāz himself, who did not merely carry out his duties at the shrine in Gulbarga, but actively managed the passage of Bahmanid sovereignty from Fīrūz Shāh to his

²³ Devin DeWeese, “‘Stuck in the Throat of Chingīz Khān:’ Envisioning the Mongol Conquests in Some Sufi Accounts from the 14th to the 17th Centuries,” in *History and Historiography of Post-Mongol Central Asia and the Middle East: Studies in Honor of John E. Woods.*, ed. Judith Pfeiffer, Sholeh Quinn, and Ernest Tucker (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006), 23–60. See especially 42–51.

²⁴ Halil Inalcik, “Dervish and Sultan: An Analysis of the Otman Baba Vilayetnamesi,” in *Manifestations of Sainthood in Islam*, ed. G.M. Smith and C.M. Ernst (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 1993), 209–23; Nevena Gramatikova, “Otman Baba - One of the Spiritual Patrons of Islamic Heterodoxy in Bulgarian Lands,” *Études Balkaniques* 38, no. iii (2002): 71–102.

²⁵ Gronke, “La religion populaire,” 225–26.

²⁶ Potter, “Sufis and Sultans in Post-Mongol Iran,”

brother Aḥmad.²⁷ From what is known of the biography of Āzarī, this would likely be the sort of dynamic he maintained after having turned to the Ṣūfī path: though keeping a certain distance from political power both physically through residing in Isfarāyin, and symbolically by periodically refusing the gifts of sultans, he nonetheless had few qualms about serving in an advisory role to a number of powerful personages. In this way he stopped short of the most politically assertive end of the Ṣūfī spectrum in the post-Mongol period, in which the Ṣūfī orders themselves became militarized, and the sanctity of the shaykh was sufficient to demand political leadership in his person. There are hints of this distinct stream in the very roots of Āzarī's childhood, as the Shaykhid-Jūrid Ṣūfī network of the Sarbadārid diarchy certainly had few qualms about not only being part of a political coalition, but periodically administering territory themselves.²⁸ His lifetime would also see the emergence of the Musha' sha' iyya movement in Khūzistān, with the founder, Sayyid Muḥammad b. Falāḥ, himself serving as the head of an independent polity in Huvayza and claiming to be operating as the representative (*nā'ib*) of the soon-to-return *mahdī* as understood in the *Ithnā'asharī* tradition.²⁹ It would likewise have been in the final decades of the life of Āzarī when the Ṣafavid network became fully militarized,

²⁷ Sherwani, *The Bahmanis of the Deccan*, 164-70.

²⁸ See the example shared by Smith of the Ṣūfī Rukn al-Dīn of the Shaykhid-Jūrid network briefly managing the affairs of both Sabzavār and Nīshāpūr in the later days of the Sarbadārid polity: Smith, *A History of the Sarbadār Dynasty*, 154.

²⁹ Many key observations related to the history of the Musha' sha' iyya are contained in the articles of Werner Caskel: Werner Caskel, "Ein Mahdī des 15 Jahrhunderts: Saijjid Muḥammad Ibn Falāḥ und Seine Nachkommen," *Islamica*, 1929, 48–93; Werner Caskel, "Die Wālī's von Ḥuwēzeh," *Islamica*, 1934, 415–34. The basics of the movement have also been summarized in English-language scholarship by Scarcia-Amoretti and Bashir: Biancamaria Scarcia-Amoretti, "Religion in the Timurid and Safavid Periods," 610–55; Shahzad Bashir, "The Imam's Return: Messianic Leadership in Late Medieval Shi'ism," in *The Most Learned of the Shi'a: The Institution of the Marja'i Taqlid*, ed. Linda Walbridge (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 21–33. The fact that ibn Falāḥ saw himself as the *nā'ib* of the *mahdī* and not the *mahdī* himself has been observed by 'Abd al-Nabī Qayyim: 'Abd al-Nabī Qayyim, *Pānṣad Sāl Tārīkh-i Khūzistān, va Naqd-i Kitāb-i "Tārīkh-i Pānṣad sāla-yi Khūzistān"-i Kasravī* (Tehran: Nashr-i Akhtarān, 1388 [2009]), 94-99.

setting the roots for what would eventually be the imperial aspirations and claims of unquestionable political authority – indeed, even claims of divinity – in the time of Shāh Ismā‘īl.³⁰ Without attempting to generalize about the nature of Ṣūfī militancy, one might also note that these particular movements saw a combination of messianic fervor and an openness to what might otherwise be considered beliefs beyond the realm of Islamic discussion, which is to say, “exaggeration” (*ghuluww*).³¹ These are, naturally, only a set of salient examples of the complexity of Ṣūfī discourse and practice in the post-Mongol period, and should not be taken as a definitive list related to a much broader discourse. However, the discussion above should likewise emphasize that it was not only not a rare sight for a Ṣūfī to be providing advice and counsel to a prince passing through his territory, but even that in certain times and places, may have been much closer to the norm.

3.4 Intellectual and Spiritual Affiliations of Āzarī

There are a number of useful elements to the life and works of Āzarī which can be put to the test in considering the state of Ṣūfī discourse in the 9th/15th century Islamic world, each of which will be discussed in turn in this chapter. Both the *AMA* and *AJA* include a third section of the work devoted to the secrets behind the statements of the shaykhs, *mashā’ikh*, which are filled with discussions of both specific Ṣūfī figures and longer Ṣūfī *silsilas*, which speak directly to the stakes of Ṣūfī *ṭarīqa* formation in his lifetime. While this introduction has largely discussed

³⁰ On the gradual development of the Ṣafavid network into an organized fighting force, see: Mazzaoui, *The Origins of the Ṣafawids*, 46-82. On the extreme claims contained in the poetry of Shāh Ismā‘īl, up to and including claims of divinity, see: Vladimir Minorsky, “The Poetry of Shāh Ismā‘īl I,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, no. 4 (1942): 1006a–53a.

³¹ For studies specifically dedicated to this dynamic, and “exaggerator” (*ghulāt*) movements of the post-Mongol period, see the work of William Tucker: William F. Tucker, *Mahdis and Millenarians*; Tucker, “The Kūfan Ghulāt and Millenarian (Mahdist) Movements in Mongol-Turkmen Iran,” in *Unity in Diversity: Mysticism, Messianism and the Construction of Religious Authority in Islam*, ed. Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, Islamic History and Civilization: Studies and Texts 105 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 177–95.

Sufism as a discrete concept, it will be seen that there is additional value to the works of Āzarī in the points at which discussion of the positions of the *mashā'ikh* overlap with those of the occult network of the *ahl-i kashf va taḥqīq*. Though there is too much material in even just these third sections of the *AMA* and *AJA* to fully discuss over the course of a chapter, there are three major themes that will be explored throughout, all under the overarching framework of attempting to track the multivariate spiritual affiliations of Āzarī. The chapter, then, will first discuss Āzarī as a Kubrawī Ṣūfī and the specific mechanics of his being aligned with this network. This will bring with it a series of overlapping discussions of other networks of note including both the occult network of the *ahl-i kashf va taḥqīq*, as well as an invocation of what might be considered the positions of the *ghulāt*, specifically as related to the issue of the transmigration of souls (*tanāsukh*). Each of these issues will be considered in turn in hopes of not only providing a more comprehensive understanding of the thought of Āzarī itself, which has not always been discussed in these terms, but in considering the manner in which his occult compendia spoke to much broader dynamics of the political, social, and intellectual environment in which he would have been composing his works.

3.5 Ṣūfī Networks of the 9th/15th Century

While there are certain clues as to the exact intellectual commitments of Āzarī in the portions discussed in the previous chapters, the reader is nonetheless often forced to draw conclusions based on circumstantial evidence rather than precise declarations. While one might be able to review the *AMA* and *AJA* and reckon that Āzarī might have leaned in one direction or another based on the personal conclusions of the author and the authorities who are most frequently cited, an encyclopedic list of professional affiliations is something by which it is harder to come. Questions of the affiliation of Āzarī, particularly when it comes to his being a

Ṣūfī follower, are made more complex by the realities of Ṣūfī sources of the 9th/15th century. As mentioned above, the idea of a set of discrete orders which arose independently, distinguished themselves from each other from their earliest days, and which maintained tidy records of spiritual descent, can be discarded quickly. Per the work of Devin DeWeese on the “corporate identity” of Ṣūfīs in the Khalvatī, ‘Ishqī, and Shaṭṭārī “orders,” Ṣūfī *salāsīl* remained vague at best for many Ṣūfī networks throughout the 8th-9th/14th-15th centuries.³² It was not unusual for chains of transmission from what are thought of as different Ṣūfī networks to share a number of links,³³ nor would it have been out of place for a chain of transmission to include *uvaysī* transmission, in which a Ṣūfī figure would receive training “not by a living shaykh, but by the spirit of a deceased shaykh or prophet.”³⁴ A noteworthy example of this *uvaysī* style is the dynamic of a chain in which the early visionary Bāyazīd Bisṭāmī would be considered the direct instructor of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Kharaqānī (d. 425/1033), despite their being separated by a century and a half. There is also the inconvenient reality that while Ṣūfī orders *per se* may have eventually been institutionalized through such measures as the building of physical infrastructure (for example, a shrine around the grave of a founder) or the codification of a *silsila*, the founder themselves did not always self-consciously set out to found an order: Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, to whose “order” this chapter will return, did not seem to consider himself a “founder” of the Kubrawiyya, nor did “Kubrawī” as an adjective appear in the sources until the late 8th/14th or early 9th/15th centuries, long after the death of the shaykh himself.³⁵ More generally, the

³² Devin DeWeese, “Spiritual Practice and Corporate Identity in Medieval Sufi Communities of Iran, Central Asia, and India: The Khalvatī/‘Ishqī/Shattārī Continuum,” in *Religion and Identity in South Asia and Beyond: Essays in Honor of Patrick Olivelle* (London; New York: Anthem Press, 2011), 285.

³³ DeWeese, “Spiritual Practice and Corporate Identity,” 292–94.

³⁴ DeWeese, “Spiritual Practice and Corporate Identity,” 270.

³⁵ DeWeese, “Spiritual Practice and Corporate Identity,” 251–52.

aforementioned fluid concept of the Ṣūfī “network” set forth by Bashir, allowing for more ambiguity than the assumed rigidity of the defined “order,” is most likely a more productive approach to the question.³⁶

With this in mind, however, the work of putting Āzarī into a particular intellectual context is made far less concrete. Consider the entry on Āzarī in the *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā’*, in which one of the few markers for spiritual affiliation that may be found is Āzarī briefly becoming attached to Ni‘mat Allāh as a guide.³⁷ Can this be taken to mean that Āzarī was first a foremost a “Ni‘mat-allāhī” figure – that his work should be read through a “Ni‘mat-allāhī” lens, placed in comparison with other figures in the order, and evaluated based on the ways it did or did not conform to the order? It should be clear that such an analytical approach would be misguided, as it would assume correspondences between Āzarī and a Ṣūfī network in the earliest years of its development and overlook other intellectual trends to which Āzarī endeavored to speak. After all, Ni‘mat Allāh was not even the first guide whom Āzarī sought on his newfound Ṣūfī path, as that honor belonged to Muḥyī al-Dīn Ṭūsī Ghazālī.³⁸ While, as will be seen, the *AMA* and *AJA* do provide certain more certainty about the Ṣūfī network to which Āzarī would have traced himself, there should be little doubt that such an association does not preclude his participation in other Ṣūfī networks, or intellectual networks beyond the realm of “Sufism” altogether.

³⁶ Bashir, *Sufi Bodies*, 11–13.

³⁷ Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā’*, 719.

³⁸ Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā’*, 719.

3.6 Occult Intellectualism: the *ahl-i kashf va taḥqīq*

On the note of additional intellectual networks, a similar complication might arise for the relationship between Āzarī and the linkages of occult scientists which were active across the Islamic world during his lifetime. While I have freely described Āzarī as an “occult scientist” due to the contents of the *AMA* and *AJA*, his exact positions on a number of issues must be understood by inference and approximation. For just as the Ṣūfī networks of the 9th/15th century were not always tidy and internally coherent organizations, so too it is more reasonable to group the esotericists of the period as a loosely-defined networks of occult scientists rather than a single, clearly defined unit. After all, the broader network of patronized intellectuals fostered by the Timurids would have included not only figures well known for their esotericism, such as Sharaf al-Dīn ‘Alī Yazdī and Ṣā’ in al-Dīn Turka, but also figures such as al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1413), an intellectual more usually associated with the fields of theology, logic, and linguistics than the occult sciences.³⁹ Following the conclusion of Binbaṣ that the new Brethren of Purity, the neo-Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, were more of a broad intellectual network than a “close knit” community,⁴⁰ one must think of such groupings as having muddled intellectual edges, rather than hard-and-fast boundaries. For example, Cornell Fleischer has highlighted the position in such a network of the esotericist ‘Abd al-Raḥman Biṣṭāmī (d. ca. 858/1454), a master of the science of the letters and divine names (*‘ilm al-ḥurūf wa-al-asmā’*) and messianic historian and

³⁹ On connections between Jurjānī and the court of Mīrzā Iskandar b. ‘Umar Shaykh, see: İlker Evrim Binbaṣ, “Timurid Experimentation with Eschatological Absolutism: Mīrzā Iskandar, Shāh Ni‘matullāh Walī, and Sayyid Sharīf Jurjānī in 815/1412,” in *Unity in Diversity: Mysticism, Messianism and the Construction of Religious Authority in Islam*, ed. Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, Islamic History and Civilization: Studies and Texts 105 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 281-90.

⁴⁰ Binbaṣ, *Intellectual Networks*, 111–12.

prognosticator whose works were of great interest at the Ottoman court in the 9th/15th century.⁴¹ It is no coincidence that Bisṭāmī would have passed through similar circles as Turka and Yazdī during his time in Cairo. An additional overlapping category is that of the *ahl-i kashf va taḥqīq*, the “people of revealing and investigating,” into which many of these selfsame intellectuals could be grouped. For example, the Bahmanid courtier Maḥmūd Gāwān referenced such a group in his correspondence with Yazdī, while the philosopher Davānī – also a correspondent with Gāwān – saw such a designation as being closely linked to those who studied the science of the letters.⁴² If, as Binbaş has suggested, the *ahl-i kashf va taḥqīq* were those who sought to uncover the secrets of the cosmos by means of “the unity of opposites, the influence of the celestial bodies (astrology), and the importance of the *Maqaṭṭa ‘āt*,”⁴³ such a project would be nearly identical to the re-born Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ of the 8th-9th/ 14th-15th centuries. One will note that these exact three topics are major avenues of analysis for Āzarī, and the *ahl-i kashf* and technique of *taḥqīq* are cited liberally in even his earliest occult works.⁴⁴ That being said, it is difficult to place Āzarī in such esteemed company except by inference: if correspondence existed between Āzarī and other lettrists of the time, as is extant in the case of Gāwān and his letters to Davānī and Yazdī, it has not yet been discovered and analyzed. Likewise, though one can map the associations between Yazdī, Turka, Bisṭāmī, and the occult master Sayyid Ḥusayn Akhlātī (d.

⁴¹ By “messianic historian” I mean the fact that as Bisṭāmī saw in the occult the pathway to a reconciliation of all sciences and the fabric of the cosmos, the application of the esoteric sciences to the science of history – as he himself does in the work, *Naẓm al-Sulūk fī Musāmarat al-Mulūk* – would reveal not simply lessons from the past, but insight into events yet to occur. This would include analysis of apocalyptic texts in wide circulation, as in the prophecy contained in the Book of Daniel. Cornell Fleischer, “Ancient Wisdom,” 232–33.

⁴² Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks*, 96–104, Flatt, *Deccan Sultanates*, 180-83.

⁴³ Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks*, 100–101.

⁴⁴ Note also that just as Ibn ‘Arabī saw *kashf* and *taḥqīq* as indispensable to the pursuit of truth, so too did Āzarī consider Ibn ‘Arabī to be the master investigator, the *shaykh al-muḥaqqiqīn*. Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks*, 99; Āzarī, *AMA*, 137a.

799/1397) through acquaintanceship, their being contemporaries at Timurid courts, or their having passed through Cairo at roughly the same time, the same cannot be said for Āzarī. Having neither traveled to Cairo during its time as a hotbed of esoteric training in his lifetime, nor leaving a body of correspondence with other occult scientists, one must largely link Āzarī to such intellectual networks through noting the significant overlap in scholarly focus.

Beyond an interest in the science of the letters and names which could have linked Āzarī to the favored topics of the neo-Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', the earlier chapter on the question of the caliphate in the post-Mongol world also brought Āzarī into conversation with perhaps the most controversial figure of the 8th/14th century intellectual scene: Faḏl Allāh Astarābādī and his Ḥurūfiyya movement. Scholars of the Islamic occult have, rightly, been quick to reject the mistaken assumption in certain pieces of literature that to pursue the science of letters (*'ilm-i ḥurūf*) was to be a member of “the more flamboyant Ḥurūfiyya.”⁴⁵ Indeed, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Bisṭāmī of the aforementioned neo-Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' showed no restraint in his evaluation of Faḏl Allāh, condemning him as a “friend of Satan” and one who had deviated from the true understanding of occult wisdom sought by the lettrists (in the terminology of Bisṭāmī, *ahl al-ḥarf* or *ḥarfiyya*).⁴⁶ In the case of Āzarī, however, the matter is more complicated. For one, as noted in a previous section, Āzarī frequently and approvingly cites Faḏl Allāh Astarābādī as an authority in solving certain esoteric puzzles.⁴⁷ This will prove to not be the only transgressive intellectual path earnestly considered by Āzarī in his occult compendia. As will be shown shortly, one cannot review the portion of the *AMA*, re-reported in the *AJA*, on the proponents of

⁴⁵ Matthew Melvin-Koushki, “World as (Arabic) Text: Mīr Dāmād and the Neopythagoreanization of Philosophy in Safavid Iran,” *Studia Islamica* 114 (2019): 418.

⁴⁶ Fleischer, “Ancient Wisdom,” 234–35.

⁴⁷ Āzarī, *AMA*, 41a–44b.

metempsychosis, the *ahl-i tanāsukh*, without noticing that it is largely presented from a position of neutrality. Given the vehemence with which the heresiographers of Islam spoke out against the possibility of *tanāsukh*,⁴⁸ the fact that such a doctrine would be presented largely without comment by Āzarī suggests either an outright sympathy with the teaching, or a moderation that was subversive in its own manner. In other words, even in the context of the already muddled boundaries of the Timurid esotericists, the investigations of Āzarī straddled the line between what one might find among the works of the neo-Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', and the more radical positions associated with the Ḥurūfiyya or the Shī'ī *ghulāt* movements.

In sum, to deal with intellectual and spiritual networks in the 8th-9th/14th-15th centuries requires as much flexibility as these networks themselves displayed. One of the primary difficulties of such an approach is the methodological question of how to approach affiliation in the period for a figure such as Āzarī. Even while being philologically faithful to what is contained in works such as the *AMA* and *AJA*, to rely solely on what is in the work would be overly limiting. Āzarī does not seem to have named himself as a member of the reborn Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', discussed his work as explicitly one of hermetic or neo-Pythagorean prominence, nor said with clarity that he was a follower of Faḏl Allāh Astarābādī (or, if not a follower proper, at least one who was intrigued by Ḥurūfī concepts). And yet, in analyzing the works of Āzarī in historical context, there is little doubt that his interest in the occult sciences ran largely along the same lines as what one might find in the works of the neo-Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', and surely an author who cited Faḏl Allāh as a reliable authority can be said to have Ḥurūfī leanings. As such, I will

⁴⁸The specifics of *tanāsukh* in Islam, including its association with the philosophers and the theological problems for Islam which metempsychosis would present, see: Paul E. Walker, "The Doctrine of Metempsychosis in Islam," in *Islamic Studies Presented to Charles J. Adams*, ed. Wael Hallaq and Donald P. Little (Brill: Leiden; New York; Copenhagen; Köln, 1991), 219–38.

consider the implications of the arguments of Āzarī as much as his own explicit declarations of allegiance with particular intellectual networks. This chapter, then, will have to combine close readings of a particular sections of text with survey of the the writings of Āzarī as a whole: the very encyclopedic nature of the *AMA* and *AJA*, a built-in feature of their being wide-ranging esoteric compendia, means that topics are rarely, if ever, dealt with decisively in discrete portions of the text. Nonetheless, when viewed as an artifact of the intellectual production of Āzarī in the early phase of his life, there are certain major trends to which he returned time and again throughout the *AMA*. The most pressing issues, which will be dealt with in turn, will be the connection between Āzarī and the Kubrawī Ṣūfī network, the self-identification of Āzarī with the amorphous but politically influential *ahl-i kashf va taḥqīq*, his approach to the problem of transmigration, and the sectarian identity of Āzarī as one being a full expression of the common post-Mongol phenomenon of “confessional ambiguity.” What will emerge from such an eclectic background is not incoherence on the part of Āzarī, but the precise opposite: that Āzarī, working in the 9th/15th when intellectual and political experimentation was endemic to the Persianate world, served in many ways as an appropriate model for understanding an intellectual context which might otherwise appear completely unwieldy.

3.7 Āzarī and his Ṣūfī Lineage

Taking into account the aforementioned ambiguities regarding questions of membership in Ṣūfī networks in the 8th-9th/14th-15th centuries, it will be illuminating to consider how Āzarī himself viewed this thorny matter. To reiterate, based only on the biographical dictionary entries on Āzarī, there are two major signposts to the Ṣūfī affiliation of Āzarī that may guide this discussion: his relationship with own first guide, Muḥyī al-Dīn Ṭūsī Ghazālī, and his having met with Shāh Ni‘mat Allāh Valī. Fortunately, there are far more explicit hints to be found within the

third section of the *AMA*, devoted to issues present in the sayings of the “shaykhs,” *mashā’ikh*.⁴⁹ The chapter as a whole is a useful picture in time of how “Sufism” itself would have been conceived by a figure writing in the first half of the 9th/15th century: Āzarī has specified that the subject of his discussion in the section are the Ṣūfīs and those who pursue the Ṣūfī path, the *Ṣūfiyya* and *Mutaṣawwifa*.⁵⁰ In line with known Ṣūfī discourse, it is held by Āzarī that the *silsila* of each major Ṣūfī organization (*tarīqa*) ultimately teminates in ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, whose master was the prophet Muḥammad, as one might well find in works attempting to systematize Sufism along the lines of the *Kashf al-Maḥjūb* of Hujvīrī.⁵¹ So too are invoked many notable pietistic figures from the first 3 centuries of Islam, such as Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), Junayd, and Abū al-Ḥasan Nūrī (d. 295/907).⁵² Even if it is a bit anachronistic to consider these figures as solidly members of lineages of which they themselves could never have been aware,⁵³ the fact that Āzarī is considering such major figures in early Islamic pietism in the context of Ṣūfī networks in which *silsila* production was extant but flexible is not surprising. What is of greatest importance at this moment is that in discussing the spiritual affiliation of his own shaykh, who is not specifically named (but may potentially be Muḥyī al-Dīn Ṭūsī Ghazālī, as will be discussed shortly), Āzarī has given a hint as to his own self-identification. Āzarī stated that his shaykh had

⁴⁹ Āzarī, *AMA*, 62a.

⁵⁰ Āzarī, *AMA*, 65a.

⁵¹ Āzarī, *AMA*, 64a. Note the position of ‘Alī as the model for future saints, *muqtadā-yi awliyā’*, in: Hujvīrī, *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 44-5.

⁵² Āzarī, *AMA*, 64a–66a.

⁵³ That is, a figure such as Hasan al-Baṣrī, who died prior to the widespread usage of “Ṣūfī” in the sense of a practitioner of the *‘ilm al-taṣawwuf* – including but not limited to the exercises of self-denial and ecstatic visionary experiences for which Ṣūfī figures would gain great acclaim – and many centuries prior to the formation of the orders themselves, could hardly have seen himself as being a key figure within Ṣūfī spiritual lineages. Note his being included in *salāsīl* of the 4th/10th century in: Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period*, 116.

taken on the *khirqā*, the initiatory robe, of Shaykh Raḏī al-Dīn ‘Alī Lālā (d. 642/1244), which was “firmly rooted” going back to Abū Sa‘īd-i Abī al-Khayr (d. 440/1049).⁵⁴ There is an ambiguity here, as one must wonder how the master of Āzarī could also have studied alongside a figure who died early in the first half of the 7th/13th, except through the *uvaysī* style. Raḏī al-Dīn ‘Alī Lālā was best known as perhaps the most prominent disciple of Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, the so-called founder of the Kubrawiyya Order,⁵⁵ and he is mentioned as a key part of what might be considered a Kubrawī chain. In discussing his own shaykh’s *ṭarīqa*, Āzarī added alongside Raḏī al-Dīn ‘Alī Lālā another disciple of Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, Majd al-Dīn al-Baghdādī (d. 607/1204); Najm al-Dīn Kubrā himself; a teacher of Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, Ismā‘īl Qaṣrī (fl. ca. 7th/12th century); and continued the sequence back to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, who took the *khirqā* from Muḥammad.⁵⁶ Such a spiritual genealogy should do away with the notion that Āzarī may be thought of, for example, as *singularly* as a follower of Ni‘mat Allāh, though he was indeed associated with this figure. In the *AMA*, however, the primary self-presentation of Āzarī is that of a student whose shaykh was a figure in the line of the Kubrawiyya network. This may well explain why Āzarī would so frequently cite as authorities major figures within the Kubrawī *silsila*, such as ‘Alā’ al-Dawla Simnānī and Sa‘d al-Dīn Ḥamuwayī, as will be seen in full relief in the coming pages.

There is a natural question which flows from this determination of lineage, however: to what extent can Āzarī aligning himself with the Kubrawī *silsila* be taken as determinative of his

⁵⁴ Āzarī, *AMA*, 65a; *AJA*, 52b.

⁵⁵ Hamid Algar, “Kobrawiyya ii. The Order,” *Elr*.

⁵⁶ Āzarī, *AMA*, 65b. The full *silsila*, in sequence, is: Raḏī al-Dīn ‘Alī Lālā – Majd al-Dīn Baghdādī – Najm al-Dīn Kubrā – Ismā‘īl Qaṣrī – Muḥammad Mānkīl – Dāvūd b. Muḥammad, known as Khādim al-Fuqarā’ – Abū al-‘Abbās b. Idrīs – Abū al-Qāsim b. Ramaḏān – Abū Ya‘qūb al-Ṭabarī – Abū ‘Abd Allāh ‘Uthmān – Abū Ya‘qūb Nahrjūrī – Abū Ya‘qūb al-Shūshā – ‘Abd al-Wājib b. Zayd – Ḥasan al-Baṣrī – Kumayl b. Ziyād – ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib – Muḥammad.

intellectual output? Surely a figure can be aligned with a particular Ṣūfī order and nonetheless write on subjects not related to *taṣawwuf*, or draw from more than one network of intellectuals and spiritual devotees as a source base for his writings. Likewise, to assume that the writings of Āzarī would closely align with, for example, what is known of the thought of Najm al-Dīn Kubrā would assume a consistency in the Kubrawiyya network itself which cannot be guaranteed. There may also be a temptation to consider Āzarī with the framework of Marijan Molé in mind as set forth in “Les Kubrawiyya entre sunnisme et shī‘isme aux huitième et neuvième siècles de l’Hégire,” in which the writings of certain key Kubrawī figures are held to have gradually inclined towards Shī‘ī thought before the full conversion of the Kubrawiyya to Shī‘ī Islam.⁵⁷ As occasionally a Shī‘ī himself, Āzarī might appear as a step on the path towards the full alignment of the Kubrawiyya with Shī‘ism, which itself would have come to pass in the 10th/16th century, long after the death of Āzarī.⁵⁸ It is also true that contemporaries of Āzarī in the Kubrawī chain claimed an outwardly Shī‘ī affiliation and explored esoteric and messianic concepts: Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh (d. 868/1464) was *Ithnā‘asharī* Shī‘ī, sought to synthesize popular Ṣūfī concepts of the 9th/15th century with normative Imāmī Shī‘ī thought, and ultimately claimed *mahdī*-ship for himself.⁵⁹ However, the primary issues with such an approach are in either back-projecting later developments of the Kubrawiyya to the time of Āzarī, or assuming that his being linked into the same general Ṣūfī network as Nūrbakhsh would mean that he pursued a similar path. The confessional background of Āzarī or his being connected with various Ṣūfī networks might

⁵⁷ Marijan Molé, “Les Kubrawiyya entre sunnisme et shiisme aux huitième et neuvième siècles de l’Hégire,” *Revue Des Études Islamiques* 29 (1961): 61–142.

⁵⁸ Algar, “Kobrawiyya ii. The Order,” *EIr*.

⁵⁹ Shahzad Bashir, *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions*, 45–63; Devin DeWeese, “The Eclipse of the Kubrawīyah in Central Asia,” 54–63.

provide certain clues as to the intellectual development of Āzarī, but they cannot be the sole conclusions from a study of his life and works.

A better starting point for Āzarī would be to start with a relatively blank slate and consider how both he discussed his own intellectual position in his works, and how roughly contemporary sources consider both Āzarī and his mentors. Given that Āzarī discussed the *silsila* back to Najm al-Dīn Kubra as being that of his “shaykh,” Muḥyī al-Dīn Ṭūsī Ghazālī is likely where the investigation should begin. Unfortunately, as discussed in the introduction previously, Muḥyī al-Dīn himself receives only scant attention in the histories and biographical dictionaries of the 9th-10th/15th-16th centuries. By the same token, based on the esoteric compendia of Āzarī, one would struggle mightily to find tangible evidence of the guidance of Muḥyī al-Dīn, who is absent from the *AMA* and *AJA* beyond vague references to “[my] shaykh,” *shaykh-i mā*, which may or may not refer to Muḥyī al-Dīn. The primary legacy of the instruction of this first teaching of Āzarī seems to be less in any specific doctrine than in his association with the Kubrawiyya network, the luminaries of which would indeed be guiding lights for Āzarī’s occult works. The fact that Āzarī was engaging with what would become known as key works within the Kubrawī corpus is of added importance given that the “Kubrawiyya” as a specific Ṣūfī network largely formed in the course of Āzarī’s lifetime. As DeWeese has observed, at the end of the 8th/14th century, though there were devotional works related to figures in the Kubrawiyya *silsila* – for example, the *Khulāṣat al-Manāqib* of Ja‘far Badakhshī, a biography of ‘Alī Hamadānī begun in 787/1385 – there was not necessarily a conception of the Kubrawī *ṭarīqa* being a discrete movement. This would be in contrast to the later work on Hamadānī, the *ṭarīqa*-minded *Manqabat al-Jawāhir* of Ḥaydar Badakhshī, written before 872/1467-8, in which there is a noticeable effort to argue on behalf of the Kubrawiyya as a preferred method of Ṣūfī

practice, with Najm al-Dīn Kubrā becoming not merely a spiritual mentor to his early disciples, but a self-aware *ṭarīqa* organizer.⁶⁰ It is not only of note that these dates almost perfectly bracket the life of Āzarī, but rather, the work of Āzarī itself is also relevant to this discussion of the work of the two Kubrawī Badakhshīs. Teufel reported in his study on ‘Alī Hamadānī that the genealogy of Hamadānī contained in the *AJA* is in concordance with the same genealogy given in the later *Manqabat al-Jawāhir*.⁶¹ It is theoretically possible that a copy of the *Manqabat* found its way into the hands of Āzarī, as little is known about the specific dates of composition. However, it is equally possible that the *AJA* was composed prior to the *Manqabat* and drew from the same unknown source material, which nonetheless was available in Kubrawī circles. It will have to remain in the realm of speculation as to how, exactly, the genealogy of the *Manqabat* made its way into the *AJA*, but at the very least, one can reasonably assume that either this work of Ḥaydar Badakhshī was composed prior to 840/1436-7 by virtue of its being included in the *AJA*, or both Ḥaydar Badakhshī and Āzarī drew from a common source base. Most importantly for the issue at hand, though, is the fact that the *Manqabat*, a decidedly more self-aware Kubrawī text, shows clear overlap in content with the works of Āzarī – a figure who explicitly self-identified as being in a spiritual lineage extending back to Najm al-Dīn Kubrā.

3.8 Āzarī as “Student” of Sa‘d al-Dīn Ḥamuwayī

To be sure, the mere act of determining that Āzarī was a member of the “Kubrawī Sūfī network” in the 9th/15th century is not terribly informative. It is both self-evident in the section

⁶⁰ Devin DeWeese, “Sayyid ‘Alī Hamadānī and Kubrawī Hagiographical Traditions.”

⁶¹ J.K. Teufel, *Eine Lebensbeschreibung Des Scheichs ‘Alī-i Hamadānī (Gestorben 1385): Die Xulāṣat ul-Manāqib Des Maulānā Nūr ud-Dīn Ca‘far-i Badakhshī* (Leiden: Brill, 1962), 62fn2. As cited in: DeWeese, “Sayyid ‘Alī Hamadānī and Kubrawī Hagiographical Traditions,” 131–32; Āzarī, *Jawāhir al-Asrār*, 121a. Despite periodic references to ‘Alī Hamadānī in the *AMA*, I have not yet found a comparable genealogy in this earlier text.

of the *AMA* related to sayings of the shaykhs, and leaves unsaid what exactly it would have meant to be in the Kubrawī line in the time of Āzarī.⁶² After all, even if Āzarī was most active in the time when the “Kubrawiyya” as something approaching an order was only just forming, there had undoubtedly been a (fluid and malleable) spiritual lineage of some sort reaching back through the decades to Najm al-Dīn Kubrā himself. Such a lineage would bring with it any number of Ṣūfī thinkers whom Āzarī may have seen as intellectual guides, each with his own specific positions. As such, more useful than the rigid identification of network or order will be tracing those figures who appear most frequently in the works of Āzarī as authorities in order to form an understanding of Āzarī’s network based on the texts themselves, rather than by inference. Fortunately, there are both clear patterns to be found in the citations of Āzarī, as well as explicit references by the author himself. To begin with the second, in the course of discussing the one of the “secrets” in the writings of the of the Ṣūfī shaykhs, Āzarī paused for a brief aside on the life of Sa‘d al-Dīn Ḥamuwayī:

Shaykh Sa‘d al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Mu‘ayyad al-Ḥamuwayī: he was born between dinner and the time for sleep on the night of Tuesday, the 26th of *Dhū al-Ḥijja*, the year 586 [24 January 1191]. He lived for 63 years, and he was a Pole [*quṭb*] for all this time. He died on ‘Īd al-Aḍḥā, the 10th of Dhū al-Ḥijja, in the year 650 [11 February 1253],⁶³ as it has been brought down in verse:

The death of the Pole of the World, Sa‘d al-Dīn Ḥamuwayī
 Who was the light of the community and the sun of the People of Meaning
 On Friday – a different prayer in Baḥrābād⁶⁴

In the year 650, on ‘Īd al-Aḍḥā

Now, this pauper – in the manner of the descent [by] spiritual birth, as a father from a grandfather – this wretch was one of the inheritors of his gnosis of sainthood [*vāriṣān-i ma‘rifat-i vilāyat-i ū*].⁶⁵

⁶² Focusing too heavily on Ṣūfī affiliation can bring with it the risk of begging the question, with the offending tautology being, “this figure was a Kubrawī Ṣūfī because of his Kubrawī beliefs.”

⁶³ There is some debate over this date, as discussed in: Hermann Landolt, “Sa‘d al-Dīn al-Ḥammū‘ī,” *EP*.

⁶⁴ Baḥrābād, outside Juvayn, is the site of Ḥamuwayī’s grave.

⁶⁵ Āzarī, *AJA*, 98a-b. On the life of Ḥamuwayī, see: Jamal Elias, “The Sufi Lords of Bahrabad: Sa‘d al-Din and Sadr al-Din Hamuwayī,” *Iranian Studies* 27, no. 1/4 (1994): 53–75.

There could hardly be a more explicit claim to being in the spiritual tradition of Ḥamuwayī than this statement. In fact, to discuss Āzarī as being in the “spiritual tradition” of Ḥamuwayī is already a vast understatement, as he viewed himself as an inheritor of the esoteric knowledge of Ḥamuwayī and a continuation, in a certain manner of speaking, of his lineage. The “birth” of Āzarī from Ḥamuwayī would necessarily have to be “spiritual” in some sense, given that the two could not possibly have met, chronologically. Indeed, what is being expressed in this passage would seem to be the *uvaysī* manner of spiritual inheritance, which developed in Ṣūfī communities and drew from the tradition of the supposed telepathic communication between the prophet Muḥammad and Uways al-Qaranī.⁶⁶ In other words, a Ṣūfī who subscribed to the possibility of an *uvaysī*-style lineage would see no problem with spiritual authority being passed between individuals who had never met – even those separated by decades or centuries – provided that there was a meeting of sorts in a non-material realm. Āzarī saw himself as continuing the spiritual lineage of Ḥamuwayī in more or less this manner, though the *AJA* is not forthcoming on how exactly this “spiritual birth” for Āzarī came about. This likewise may answer the question of the identity of the vague “[my] shaykh,” *shaykh-i mā*, whose *khirqā* authority extended back to Najm al-Dīn Kubrā: Sa‘d al-Dīn, to whom Āzarī saw himself as most intensely spiritually attached. This is not to say that the phrase could not also refer to Muḥyī al-Dīn Ṭūsī Ghazālī. That said, given the close affinity to Ḥamuwayī in the text, and the silence of Āzarī regarding Muḥyī al-Dīn throughout, the more likely figure for whom Āzarī would have

⁶⁶The legendary account of Uways al-Qaranī is reported in a number of key Ṣūfī biographical dictionaries, such as in the *Tazkirat al-Awliyā* of ‘Aṭṭār: Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār, *Kitāb-i Tazkirat al-Awliyā*, ed. Mīrzā Muḥammad Khān Qazvīnī (Tehran: Markazī, 1321 [1942]), 26-34. For a more detailed discussion of “Uvaysī” and its use in Ṣūfī communities, see: Devin DeWeese, *An ‘Uvaysī’ Sufi in Timurid Mawarannahr*.

considered his primary shaykh is Sa‘d al-Dīn. What is most important for the moment is that regardless of the specific telepathic mechanics, Āzarī would have viewed himself quite openly as working in the Ḥamuwayī spiritual tradition.

The natural follow-up to such an declaration is, naturally, what exactly it would have meant to continue in the “Ḥamuwayī tradition.” What emerges in the occult writings of Āzarī is that Ḥamuwayī was both a key intellectual influence in terms of informing certain critical points in the *AMA* and *AJA*, as well as an entry point for Āzarī into an esoteric tradition in Kubrawī writings which extended beyond the life of Ḥamuwayī himself. On the first issue, the works of Āzarī draw heavily from the (as-yet unpublished) work of Ḥamuwayī, *al-Maḥbūb (The Beloved)* on a number of key occult concepts, most notably the science of the letters and the messianic implications of knowledge of this science. In the discourse of Āzarī on the *Muqatta‘āt*, the position of Ḥamuwayī is discussed in detail: that the secret of the Disconnected Letters is a secret to be known by the *maḥbūb*, who himself is the *ṣāḥib-zamān*, which is to say, the *mahdī*, whose miraculous gift will be to explain this otherwise obscure secret.⁶⁷ With such a revelation will come not only key parts of the *mahdī* tradition in Islam – that his arrival will result in the unification of humanity under a single religious banner, and that ‘Īsā will descend at the time of the *mahdī*’s return – but also that he will bring perfect gnosis (*‘ilm va ma‘rifat*), known from the previous citation to be the science of the letters.⁶⁸ Also important to the high station of the *maḥbūb* is his supremacy in the field of direct, experiential knowledge, *kashf*:

Sa‘d al-Dīn Ḥamuwayī (may God sanctify his beloved soul) has said that [the *Maḥbūb*] is in the world of the Truth of Certainty (*‘ālam-i ḥaqq al-yaqīn*) while most of the people of *kashf* are in the world of the Source of Certainty (*‘ālam-i ‘ayn al-yaqīn*). That one [of most people] is divinity (*ulūhiyyat*), while this one

⁶⁷ Āzarī, *AMA*, 20a; *AJA*, 9b.

⁶⁸ Āzarī, *AJA*, 26a-b; 195b.

[of the *Maḥbūb*] is godly (*ilahī*), which is the World of Existences (*‘ālam-i akvān*), of which it is said that one does not die, such as Khizr or Elijah, who drank from the Truth of Life (*ḥaqq-i ḥayvat*).⁶⁹

The *Maḥbūb* would function not only as the *mahdī*, then, but as the head of a hierarchy of *kāshifān*, who are able to understand knowledge which would otherwise be hidden. One will note that this figure has also joined the ranks of those who imbibed the water of life, thus allowing for life without death.⁷⁰ A vague concordance with broader Imāmī Shī‘ī doctrine, namely, the extended lifespan of the *mahdī*, is not the only area in which Ḥamuwayī, much like his *uvaysī* acolyte Āzarī, showed a certain interest in broader Shī‘ī concepts. It is well known, for example, that Ḥamuwayī – though never having a formal attachment to Shī‘ī Islam – saw the Twelfth Shī‘ī Imam as the seal of sainthood, the *khatm al-awliyā’*.⁷¹ Though Āzarī has routinely been considered Shī‘ī in previous literature due to his verses in praise of the 12 Shī‘ī Imams in his *dīvān*, it is as useful to see his ‘Alid loyalism as being in the same mold as the affection for the descendants of Muḥammad seen in the works of Ḥamuwayī. It is true that on matters of sainthood and eschatology, Ḥamuwayī was not the only key influence for Āzarī: the same section from which the above citation is drawn also involved significant analysis of the position of Faḏl Allāh Astarābādī on the matter of ‘Īsā and the *mahdī*.⁷² That being said, to cite Ḥamuwayī and Faḏl Allāh on the same matter is not so surprising. Certain areas of overlap between Kubrawī thought, including the writings of Ḥamuwayī and the *Jāvidān-nāma* of Faḏl

⁶⁹ Āzarī, *AMA*, 36a; *AJA*, 24b.

⁷⁰ The supernaturally long life of the *mahdī* is a repeated issue in the works of Āzarī, for in addition to this argument of Ḥamuwayī about the *maḥbūb*, a later section of the *AMA* involves an astrological explanation for how the *mahdī* as understood in *Ithnā ‘asharī* Shī‘ism could survive a centuries long occultation: Āzarī, *AMA*, 35a-b.

⁷¹ Algar “Kobrawiya ii.: The Order,” *Eir*; Sa‘d al-Dīn Ḥamuwayī, *al-Misbāḥ fī al-Taṣawwuf*, ed. Najīb Mā’il Harawī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Mawlā, 1362 [1983]), 100-2.

⁷² Āzarī, *AMA*, 40b-42a

Allāh have already been noted by Mir-Kasimov, and Ḥamuwayī himself is cited in the Ḥurūfī work of the *Maḥram-nāma*, written by Sayyid Ishāq Astarābādī, as the “great shaykh” (*shaykh-i buzurgvār*).⁷³ In other words, for Āzarī to be a self-proclaimed follower of Ḥamuwayī and member of the Kubrawī network while also showing an interest in Ḥurūfī writings is exactly what one might expect based on what is known about these two schools of thought.

On the question of sainthood and spiritual lineage, another core passage which has been reported in both of the esoteric compendia of Āzarī is purported list from Ḥamuwayī of seven poles, *aqṭāb*, those figures who would have sat atop the hierarchy of saints in their respective eras. What is meant here by *quṭb* is that which may be found pithily summarized in such works as the *Kitāb al-Insān al-Kāmil* of ‘Azīz Nasafī (a student of Ḥamuwayī, himself), in which the *quṭb* is the most prominent member of a collective of 366 saints who reside in this world at any given time, by whose blessings the world is upheld, and without whom the world would cease to exist.⁷⁴ Though various saintly individuals might have at various times been referred to as a *quṭb*, to explicitly list various *aqṭāb* of the age is somewhat risqué, given that certain traditions would hold that the saintly hierarchy is likewise an *unseen* hierarchy.⁷⁵ Recalling, though, that Āzarī presented his works explicitly as revealing what might have once been hidden, the *AMA* and *AJA* explicitly list the saintly *aqṭāb* according to Ḥamuwayī as consisting of: 1) ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661); 2) Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765), or Bāyazīd Bisṭāmī (d. 261/874 or 264/877-8); 3) Junayd al-Baghdādī (d. 298/910); 4) ‘Abd Allāh Anṣārī (d. 481/1089); 5) Abū al-Qāsim Gurgānī

⁷³ Mir-Kasimov, *Words of Power*, 401-404; Huart, *Textes*, 44.

⁷⁴ ‘Azīz al-Dīn b. Muḥammad Nasafī, *Majmū‘a-yi Rasā‘il Mashhūr bi-Kitāb al-Insān al-Kāmil*, ed. Henry Corbin, Marijan Molé, and Žiyā al-Dīn Dihshūrī, Bibliothèque Iranienne 11 (Tehran: Kitābkhāna-yi Ṭahūrī: Anjuman-i Īrān-shināsī-yi Farānsa dar Tihārān, 1380 [2001]), 317.

⁷⁵ Note the treatment of the *quṭb* in the section devoted to Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. Masrūq (d. 298/910) in the *Kashf al-Maḥjūb* of Hujvīrī: ‘Hujvīrī, *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 92.

(d. 450/1058);⁷⁶ 6) Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191); and Ḥamuwayī himself.⁷⁷ The early entries on this list are hardly surprising, as recognizing ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib as key to the origins of Sufism would have been widely practiced long before the writings of Āzarī, while the *Ithnā‘asharī* Shī‘ī imams up through Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq are included in works important to the institutionalization of the *‘ilm al-taṣawwuf* such as the *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*.⁷⁸ By the same token, Hujvīrī gives prominent places to Bāyizīd Bisṭāmī, Junayd, and Abū al-Qāsim Gurgānī in this same text, while ‘Abd Allāh Anṣārī would have been recognized as a significant writer in both pietistic practice and Ṣūfī *ṭabaqāt* literature.⁷⁹ The final two entries raise more interesting questions. The occult works of Āzarī each refer to “Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī” without providing a complete name for either Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā Suhrawardī, the Illuminationist philosopher, or Shihāb al-Dīn Abū Ḥafs ‘Umar Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234), author of the Ṣūfī manual, the *‘Awārif al-Ma‘ārif*, and eponymous founder of the Suhrawardiyya Order.⁸⁰ There are contextual elements to the life and works of Āzarī that could support one or the other being the more likely *quṭb*, whether it be the importance of the Light Verse in the analysis given by Āzarī for the *Muqaṭṭa‘āt*, or the fact that Najm al-Dīn Kubrā would have received guidance from

⁷⁶ There is a chronological inconsistency in listing Anṣārī prior to Gurgānī, though it appears as such in both the *AMA* and *AJA*.

⁷⁷ Āzarī, *AMA*, 108b; *AJA*, 97b.

⁷⁸ Hujvīrī, *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 45-51.

⁷⁹ Hujvīrī, *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 67-8, 81-2, 105-6. On Anṣārī, note such works as his *Ṣad Maydān* on the Ṣūfī path, and the well-known *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfīyya*. ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad Anṣārī al-Harawī, *Stations of the Sufi Path: The One Hundred Fields (Sad Maydan) of ‘Abdu’llah Ansari of Herat*, trans. Nahid Angha (Cambridge: Archetype, 2010); ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad Anṣārī al-Harawī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfīyya*, ed. M. Sarvar Mawlā’ī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Tūs, 1362 [1983]).

⁸⁰ The issue of ambiguity regarding references to a “Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī” is not limited to Āzarī: John Walbridge, “The Devotional and Occult Works of Suhrawardī the Illuminationist,” *Ishrāq: Islamic Philosophy Yearbook* 2 (2011): 80. Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī is mentioned three times in each work: Āzarī, *AMA*, 87b, 91a, 108b; *AJA*, 75a, 79a, 97b.

students of the uncle of Shihāb al-Dīn Abū Ḥafs ‘Umar, Abū al-Najīb Suhrawardī, providing a clear linkage between the Suhrawardiyya and the preferred Kubrawī network of Āzarī.⁸¹ There is also the fact that the major work of Shihāb al-Dīn Abū Ḥafs ‘Umar Suhrawardī, *Awārif al-Ma‘ārif*, was listed in the bibliography of the *AMA* as one of the books consulted for the compendium.⁸² Exactly which figure is meant will have to remain obscure at the moment. Less ambiguous is the brash declaration of Ḥamuwayī to have been a *quṭb* himself, a statement which could be taken as a breach of etiquette – consider the controversy over an alleged report of the Shāfi‘ī jurist stating openly that Ibn ‘Arabī was the *quṭb*, or the reluctance of certain supposed higher-level saintly persons to have their prominent position revealed⁸³ – but which Āzarī shares uncritically as a faithful acolyte. Most importantly for the present discussion is that to offer up such a list of *aqṭāb* is to solidify the position of Āzarī as following the Kubrawī tradition with a particular reverence for Sa‘d al-Dīn Ḥamuwayī.

Indeed, while it is true that such certain elements of his approach to the material – for example, through lettrism and a certain ‘Alid loyalism – would have put Āzarī in fine company with approach of the contemporary intellectuals in the occult sciences, his position would likewise have been more or less in line with both his own most preferred spiritual guide, Sa‘d al-Dīn Ḥamuwayī, and this figure’s immediate students and followers. Though Āzarī would have likely parted ways in confessional affiliation, as Ḥamuwayī was not, strictly speaking, Shī‘ī, so too was Ḥamuwayī working in which a certain amount of affinity for ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and his family was common within the Kubrawī tradition (and, indeed, across much of the Islamic

⁸¹ Āzarī, *AMA*, 24a-b; F. Sobieroj, “Suhrawardiyya,” *EP*.

⁸² See the complete list in Appendix A.

⁸³ Claude Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulfur*, 151; 252-3.

world).⁸⁴ Recalling the previous chapter, one will notice that whatever ‘Alid loyalism Āzarī would have displayed his eschatological vision saw ‘Īsā as the holder of the *khatm al-awliyā’*, the “seal of the saints,” and his position towards the *mahdī* involved an infusion of Ḥurūfī ideals into *Ithnā‘asharī* Shī‘ī discourse on the topic..⁸⁵ That said, the close follower of Ḥamuwayī, ‘Azīz Nasafī, would have taken the work of his teacher in a distinctly Shī‘ī direction, associating the saints (*awliyā’*) of Ḥamuwayī with the Shī‘ī doctrine of the imamate.⁸⁶ There is also the matter that Sa‘d al-Dīn’s son, Ṣadr al-Dīn, was a *ḥadīth* compiler with a particular interest in collecting traditions related to the family of Muḥammad, which material would likewise have certainly been of interest to those Shī‘ī thinkers with a keen interest in the *ahl al-bayt* of the prophet.⁸⁷

There are parallels between Āzarī and the first of these two students of Sa‘d al-Dīn Ḥamuwayī, ‘Azīz Nafasī, which go beyond seeing a mentor in Sa‘d al-Dīn. In terms of content, ‘Azīz Nafasī would have continued and expanded upon the ‘Alid loyalism of Ḥamuwayī, arguing in a treatise on the concept of sainthood that, based on the authority of Ḥamuwayī, there would be twelve saints after the lifetime of the prophet Muḥammad, with the final saint taking the title of the *mahdī*.⁸⁸ While not an outright profession of the authority of the 12 Shī‘ī imams, there would still seem to be a tangential construction being developed here between sainthood and the

⁸⁴ Jamal Elias, “The Sufi Lords of Bahrabad,” 71.

⁸⁵ The position of Āzarī, significant for this point, was discussed in the previous chapter. Elias, “Sufi Lords,” 72.

⁸⁶ Elias, “The Sufi Lords of Bahrabad,” 72; ‘Azīz Nasafī, *Kitāb al-Insān al-Kāmil*, 320-1.

⁸⁷ Elias, “The Sufi Lords of Bahrabad,” 70-1.

⁸⁸ Hermann Landolt, “‘Azīz Nasafī,” *EIr*. Landolt also noted that while Nasafī himself would have been not terribly committed to one Muslim confession over another, he nonetheless was “quite responsive to Ismā‘īlism,” and certain elements of his work have made their way into the Ismā‘īlī corpus.

imamate. There is, however, an overlap between the work of Āzarī and ‘Azīz Nasafī in terms of approach which would reveal an even closer intellectual kinship. In the introduction to one of his works, the *Kashf al-Ḥaqā’iq* (*Unveiling of Realities*), Nasafī relates a dream which came to him in which he was summoned to the presence of the prophet Muḥammad, Sa‘īd al-Dīn Ḥamuwayī, and the notable early Sūfī saint of Shiraz, Abū ‘Abd Allāh b. Khafīf (d. 371/982). The prophet proceeded to tell Nasafī that Ḥamuwayī had complained that Nasafī was condensing material spread over hundreds of treatises in the work of Ḥamuwayī to only 10 in the case of Nasafī, and that he was saying openly what Ḥamuwayī had discussed in a more guarded manner. In the end, Nasafī agreed to postpone circulating his work until the year 700/1300-1.⁸⁹ This motif of stating openly what had previously been hidden recurred in the work of Āzarī, with the introduction to the *AMA* clearly explaining that one mission of the text was to state in clear language secret meanings which would previously have been veiled in the works of the elite practitioners of the esoteric sciences.⁹⁰ This extended in the case of Āzarī even to sharing those ecstatic saintly utterances (*shaṭḥiyyāt*) which might at first glance seem to push the boundaries of proper discourse, though with assurances from Āzarī that proper interpretation of these verses would remove any doubt that their speakers had not left the fold of Islam.⁹¹ Though perhaps most spiritually influenced by Ḥamuwayī himself, Āzarī likewise was something of a model student of Ḥamuwayī in that he came to a series of conclusions in full congruence with those of a fellow student of Ḥamuwayī, Nasafī.

⁸⁹ ‘Azīz Nasafī, *Kashf al-Ḥaqā’iq*, 7.

⁹⁰ Āzarī, *Miftāḥ al-Asrār*, 13a-13b.

⁹¹ Āzarī, *AMA*, 14a.

3.9 Āzarī and ‘Alā’ al-Dawla Simnānī

A final curiosity when it comes to Āzarī as a Kubrawī follower is certainly that while Sa‘d al-Dīn was Azari’s most exalted spiritual authority, he is not the most popular figure in terms of citations in the *AMA* and *AJA*, an honor which is instead extended to Rukn al-Dīn ‘Alā’ al-Dawla Simnānī.⁹² Drawing heavily from the *Qawāṭi’ al-Sawāṭi’ (The Screens of Radiance)*,⁹³ it is easy to find instances of the writings of Āzarī of, for example, the fourfold cosmological structure of Simnānī, consisting of (in descending order) the worlds of the *lāhūt*, *jabarūt*, *malakūt*, and *nāsūt*.⁹⁴ Connected to these four worlds, defined as “divinity,” “omnipotence,” “sovereignty,” and the “human realm,” respectively, one may also find in the writings of both Simnānī and Āzarī an association of the divine property of the *zāt* (essence) with the *lāhūt*, *ṣifāt* (attributes) with the *jabarūt*, *af‘āl* (acts) with the *malakūt*, and *athār* (effects) with the *nāsūt*.⁹⁵ While these four terms are not unique to Simnānī, there are additional catchphrases invoked by Āzarī which suggest a deeper knowledge of the Simnānī corpus. There is the invocation of the *laṭīfa anā’iyya*, the “subtle essence of I-ness,” which indicated for Simnānī a human having moved up through the ranks of seven of the subtle essences which had emanated from the

⁹² Simnānī is cited almost exactly twice as many times as Ḥamuwayī, appearing on 13 folios of the *AMA* and 31 folios of the *AJA*, compared to Ḥamuwayī’s name appearing in these respective documents on 7 and 16 folios.

⁹³ Sometimes known as the *Sawāṭi’ al-Qawāṭi’* and composed in 704/1303-4: Jamal Elias, *The Throne Carrier of God: The Life and Thought of ‘Alā’ al-Dawla as-Simnānī* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 174-5. The work has been edited by Thackston: Rukn al-Dīn ‘Alā’ al-Dawla Simnānī, “Qawāṭi’ al-Sawāṭi’,” in *‘Alā’uddawla Simnānī: Opera Minor*, ed. Wheeler M. Thackston, Sources of Oriental Languages and Literatures = Doğu Dilleri ve Edebiyatlarının kaynakları 10, 1988, 83–109.

⁹⁴ Āzarī, *AMA*, 81a; *AJA*, 98b, 131b-132a.

⁹⁵ On the ranks in Simnānī, see Elias, *The Throne Carrier of God*, 61-5. An identical schema is present in: Āzarī, *AMA*, 81a; *AJA*, 69a.

divine.⁹⁶ A discussion of the creation of the *alif* as resulting from the “spreading of the sea of the hidden of the hidden...known as the *jabarūt*” (*ja‘ala mādat al-alif min madd baḥr ghayb al-ghuyūb al-musammā bi-‘ālam al-jabarūt*) is copied almost identically from the *Qawāṭi‘ al-Sawāṭi‘* into the *AJA*.⁹⁷ The work of Āzarī may even shed light onto existing uncertainties surrounding the death and burial place of Simnānī. There is an ongoing point of debate over the fact that a number of chronicles note that Simnānī was buried inside the structure of a figure named ‘Imād al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, whose identity remains in dispute. As Martini has noted, there is textual evidence for an ‘Imād al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bārsīnī having been “elevated to the status of *qutb*” by June 1316, as well as that ‘Imād al-Dīn might likewise be associated with an Īlkhānid minister of the same name who was involved with construction at Ṣūfiābād, the burial place of Simnānī.⁹⁸ Without aspiring to fully settle the matter, the *AJA*, in the course of discussing the phenomenon of a Ṣūfī student learning from a master without being in his direct presence per the example of Uways and Muḥammad, cited also “Shaykh Rukn al-Dīn ‘Alā’ al-Dawla and Khwāja ‘Imādī.”⁹⁹ This would present an avenue to resolve the difficulty in finding a textual record between Simnānī and ‘Imād al-Dīn altogether: if the Kubrawī tradition a century after Simnānī’s death had associated him with a close relationship with ‘Imād al-Dīn that *by definition* would not require a physical meeting and concordant, contemporary textual evidence,

⁹⁶ Elias, *The Throne Carrier of God*, 61; Āzarī, *AMA*, 102a, raised in the context of the microcosmic-macrocosmic connection between the human being and the broader cosmos.

⁹⁷ Āzarī, *AJA*, 108b; Simnānī, *Qawāṭi‘ al-Sawāṭi‘*, 88.

⁹⁸ Giovanni Maria Martini, *‘Alā’ al-Dawla al-Simnānī between Spiritual Authority and Political Power: A Persian Lord and Intellectual in the Heart of the Ilkhanate, with a Critical Edition and Translation of al-Wārid al-Šārid al-Ṭārid Šubhat al-Mārid and a Critical Edition of its Persian Version Zayn al-Mu’taqad li-Zayn al-Mu’taqid* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2018), 95-7.

⁹⁹ Āzarī, *AJA*, 146a.

it is more understandable why the resting place of Simnānī might be associated with his *uvaysī* shaykh. Given previous evidence that Āzarī had access to particular Kubrawī texts related to the genealogy of ‘Alī Hamadānī, it would not seem unreasonable that he might be a reliable source for the Kubrawī attitude towards Simnānī and ‘Imād al-Dīn *circa* 840/1436-7.

This record of the Kubrawī affiliations of Āzarī throughout his esoteric compendia is not only notable for what it explains about Āzarī himself, but what it might suggest about the circulation of knowledge in Kubrawī Ṣūfī networks in the first half of the 9th/15th century. There is a certain value in solidifying that Āzarī would have considered himself most aligned with the Kubrawī Ṣūfī world, and specifically with the intellectual legacy of Sa‘d al-Dīn Ḥamuwayī. This is of particular importance given that, as noted in the introduction, Āzarī was also known to have met directly with Ni‘mat Allāh. Ni‘mat Allāh is not wholly absent from the work of Āzarī, having been cited, often with the honorific *ḥazrat-i makhdūm* (“lord”), on 5 folios in the *AMA* and 9 of the *AJA* on issues such as the attributes of God, or citing a commentary of Ni‘mat Allāh on the (Ṣūfī) expressions (*iṣtilāḥāt*) of ‘Abd al-Razzāq Qāshānī (d. 730/1329).¹⁰⁰ Though Āzarī certainly discusses Ni‘mat Allāh with respect, he does not delve into their relationship at any length, nor does he describe this shaykh in terms approaching his respect for Sa‘d al-Dīn Ḥamuwayī. It would seem safe to say that even if Āzarī was “Ni‘mat-allāhī,” his foremost allegiance was with the Kubrawiyya network, making him an important node for this organization in Khurasan (and, briefly, South India). On this note, there is a certain benefit in being able to observe the texts to which a figure somewhat obscure in the Kubrawī Ṣūfī network would have had access in the early decades of the 9th /15th century. One might expect Āzarī (and his teacher Muḥyī al-Dīn Ṭūsī Ghazālī), who has not typically figured prominently in Kubrawī

¹⁰⁰ Āzarī, *AMA*, 89a, 132b, 144a, 164b, 166b; *AJA*, 4b, 31a, 76b, 113b, 124b, 141b, 142a, 165a, 167b.

chains of transmission, to nonetheless have been discussing and circulating such works as *al-Maḥbūb* or *Qawāṭi‘ al-Sawāṭi‘*, or to have opinions on the burial place of Simnānī or the genealogy of ‘Alī Hamadānī which suggest a certain access to the specifically Kubrawī discourse on these key figures in the chain of Ṣūfī notables. In other words, Āzarī provides a limited but useful look into what sorts of texts and discussions may have occupied a Kubrawī devotee and his shaykh in the first half of the 9th/15th century.

On the matter of multivariate Ṣūfī identities, though the previous chapter focused on the role of Faḏl Allāh Astarābādī in the work of Āzarī set aside from the extensive discussion of his Kubrawī links above, it is already something of an error to draw a hard distinction between the “Kubrawī” side of the thought of Āzarī in opposition to a “Ḥurūfī” trend, given the overlap between certain Kubrawī speculations with regard to prophethood and sainthood which are reprised in the writings of Faḏl Allāh. As noted by Mir-Kasimov in his extensive study of the *Jāvidān-nāma* of Faḏl Allāh, it is relatively easy to draw correlations between the writings of certain key Kubrawī intellectuals and Ḥurūfī concepts. This may extend to the discussion of Ḥamuwayī in the *Misbāḥ fi al-Taṣawwuf* of prophethood involving the descent of the “divine Word” from higher realms, while sainthood would be the (ascending) return to a divine source.¹⁰¹ One might also note the speculations on sainthood and previous concepts of Ibn ‘Arabī by the student of Ḥamuwayī, ‘Azīz-i Nasafī, which brought with them a “quasi prophetic or messianic claim,”¹⁰² as well as Nasafī’s reporting of the teaching of Ḥamuwayī that the 12th saint (*valī*) would be the seal of the saints (*khatm al-awliyā‘*) and the *mahdī*.¹⁰³ It is of note that writers

¹⁰¹ Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, *Words of Power*, 402; Sa‘d al-Dīn Ḥamuwayī, *al-Misbāḥ fi al-Taṣawwuf*, 137-8.

¹⁰² Mir-Kasimov, *Words of Power*, 403.

¹⁰³ ‘Azīz Nasafī, *Kitāb al-Insān al-Kāmil*, 320-321.

of the Kubrawī tradition themselves engaged with certain ambiguities in understandings of the identity of the *mahdī*, with Mir-Kasimov relating via Molé that Ḥamuwayī himself assigned *mahdī*-hood sometimes to ‘Īsā b. Maryam, and sometimes to the 12th saint, the *khatm al-awliyā*’.¹⁰⁴ Though ultimately these figures and concepts have been analyzed by Mir-Kasimov through the lens of their congruence with the *Jāvidān-nāma* of Faḏl Allāh, it is of greater importance for the question at hand that they also map almost perfectly with the writings of Āzarī. Drawing from these concordances between Kubrawī and Ḥurūfī thought, it would seem to present little issue for Āzarī to rely so confidently on both the works of Sa‘d al-Dīn Ḥamuwayī and Faḏl Allāh Astarābādī to resolve his various secrets, *asrār*. As will be discussed in a future section of this chapter, in his discussion of the *ahl-i tanāsukh* and the cyclical nature of the *qiyāma*, Āzarī drew so heavily from the *Kitab al-Insān al-Kāmil* of ‘Azīz Nasafī that it is nearly a direct transmission of Nasafī’s ideas in the context of the *AMA*– Nasafī who is also mentioned by Mir-Kasimov in the context of Kubrawī lettrist speculation and its potential impact on the thought of the Ḥurūfiyya.¹⁰⁵ On the one hand, then, Āzarī was serving to further the intellectual positions of major Kubrawī figures who, like Āzarī himself, were active in the post-Mongol Persianate world. On the other, Āzarī was a manifestation of the idea presupposed by Mir-Kasimov: that there was a certain alignment earlier Kubrawī speculations on the nature of sainthood and the messiah and what would eventually become the more radical Ḥurūfī thought of Faḏl Allāh.

One might reasonably object at this point that there is little novel in this “manifestation” of Āzarī, and that his role as a collator of previous material in his esoteric compendia would

¹⁰⁴ Mir-Kasimov, *Words of Power*, 403-4; M. Molé, “Les Kubrawiyya entre sunnisme et shiisme,” 74-5.

¹⁰⁵ Āzarī, *AJA*, 98b, 170a-172a; Mir-Kasimov, *Words of Power*, 414.

make it inevitable that the discussions of sainthood by his predecessors would make it into his texts. Bracketing for a moment the original contributions of Āzarī to such topics as, for example, the caliphate and the *mahdī* as discussed in the previous chapter, there is the additional fact that one can receive as much of a window into Ṣūfī networks of Khurasan and beyond by understanding Āzarī the *editor* as there is in analyzing Āzarī the *author*. Beyond the specific instances in which the voice of Āzarī breaks through (the opinions of *in faqīr*, “this pauper”), there is the broader superstructure of selected source material which itself is a distinct intellectual position. It cannot be overlooked that it was an active choice by Āzarī to present the positions of, for example, Sa‘d al-Dīn Ḥamuwayī, Ni‘mat Allāh, or Faḏl Allāh Astarābādī in rapid succession and, essentially, as equally reliable authorities. Such a structure to the texts would certainly resist a particularly narrow reading of spiritual affiliation, in which there were impermeable barriers between the “Kubrawī,” “Ni‘mat-allāhī,” or “Ḥurūfī” schools. This does not mean, of course, that the work is value-neutral, so much as that Āzarī was willing to take an expansive approach to Islamic occultism in gathering together any works that fit his ultimate vision, regardless of the specific affiliation of the original author. It is the originality of this fact that might otherwise go overlooked, given that the *AMA* and *AJA* are, at first glance, largely collations of other material as opposed to wholly new contributions to the field. That said, to fully realize the potential for synthesizing Ṣūfī speculations from the Kubrawī tradition, and the intensely disruptive lettrism of Faḏl Allāh, is not merely derivative but is a notable development in and of itself.

3.10 Āzarī and the People of Unveiling and Investigation (*ahl-i kashf va taḥqīq*)

While Āzarī was hardly unique in taking such a wide-ranging approach to the organization of knowledge in the 9th/15th century – consider, for example, the vast array of

personalities at the court of Iskandar b. ‘Umar Shaykh¹⁰⁶ – this should not be taken to mean that the position of Āzarī was in some sense fully universalist. There was, in fact, one network which Āzarī would have viewed as underpinning much of his own intellectual approach, namely, the loosely-defined *ahl-i kashf va taḥqīq*, the “People of Unveiling and Investigation.” The *ahl-i kashf va taḥqīq* were, in some sense, an informal intellectual network *par excellence*, formed through relationships and correspondence between like-minded intellectuals more than through any true institutionalization of an “order.”¹⁰⁷ While the rough outlines of the “beliefs” of this group were mentioned above, it is worth determining how Āzarī would have thought of himself as being part of this network. While “*kashf*” and “*taḥqīq*” do certainly appear throughout the *AMA* and *AJA*, there is more solid evidence beyond this more circumstantial relationship. Namely, there is the fact that Āzarī may well have considered the *ahl-i kashf va taḥqīq* to have been, in some sense, the *most favorable*, or even the *only correct* Islamic school. This point will require additional analysis, as it would seem to directly contradict the general approach of Āzarī that may be found in the remainder of his esoteric compendia, namely, a flexible and variegated approach towards knowledge not bound by narrow considerations of school or confession. What is more, the elevated role of the *ahl-i kashf va taḥqīq* is discussed in a section which appears in the *AMA* and *AJA* which would seem nearly impossible to harmonize with the wide-ranging approach of Āzarī, namely, a heresiography of mistaken Islamic sects. This unexpected path in the work of Āzarī is approached by means of one of the more well-known *ḥadīth*: that after the death of the prophet Muḥammad, his community would break into 73 sects, 72 of whom would

¹⁰⁶ Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks*, 89-96.

¹⁰⁷ Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks*, 96-104.

be in error and one which would achieve salvation.¹⁰⁸ It is unsurprising that such a report would generate a great deal of speculation within the Islamic community to discern the one righteous path, as well as defining the 72 alternatives that would need to be strenuously avoided.¹⁰⁹ By the same token, mention of the 73 groups is an opportunity for scholarly investigation of both the various schools within Islam as they existed, as well as the specific ideological commitments of the author, who was making his own strong value judgment as to who would be saved and who would be damned. The focus at this moment, though, will be less on the nature of Muslim intellectual schools in the 9th/15th century, and more on the far more relevant question of how *Āzarī himself* would have evaluated correct religious beliefs at the time of his writing the *AMA* and *AJA*.

3.11 *Āzarī* and the Tradition of the 73 Sects

This heresiographical discussion of *Āzarī* foreshadows from its inception that it will return to the pressing issue of the science of the letters, the *‘ilm-i ḥurūf*, which animates so much of his occult work. In this case, the secret in need of interpretation is a poetic verse which less than obliquely nodded to the question of the 72 errant sects:

72 communities on the head of a letter
 All together, not one could open the letter.
 I wrote in the point of the letter at the head of the letter
 It opened the letter; I became the leader of the letter.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ *sa-taftariq ummatī ‘alā thalāth wa-saba ‘īn firqa al-nājiyya minhum wāḥida wa-al-bāqūn halakā*, as reported in the well-known early historiography of al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153), *Kitāb al-Milal wa-al-Niḥal*: Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Karīm Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-Milal wa-al-Niḥal*, ed. Aḥmad Fahmī Muḥammad, 2nd ed., vol. 1, 3 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1413 [1992]), 5.

¹⁰⁹ The genre of *al-milal wa-al-niḥal* (“religions and sects”) which sought to explain a wide variety of religious beliefs and practices would have long predated *Āzarī*, with prominent examples including *Kitāb al-Milal wa-al-Niḥal* of Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064) and another *Kitāb al-Milal wa-al-Niḥal* of al-Shahrastānī per the note above. See D. Gimaret, “al-Milal wa ‘l-Niḥal,” *EI*².

¹¹⁰ *ḥaftād u du millat-and dar sar-i ḥarf/ffī-al-jumla kasī na ki gushāyad dar ḥarf/man nuqta-yi ḥarf bar sar-i ḥarf zadam/bigushād dar ḥarf shudam rahbar-i ḥarf*. *Āzarī*, *AJA*, 99b.

Such a verse would quite explicitly raise the possibility of Āzarī carrying out a *milal wa-niḥal* analysis of his own, and his texts naturally take up the issue of determining the groupings of the so-imagined 73 sects. As Āzarī went on to explain, the point of this poetic verse was to craft an analogy between the alphabet and the various schools of Islam, namely, that the head of the letter, the *sar-i ḥarf*, represented the “three points” – perhaps a reference to the head of an unfinished *alif*, which contains three corners prior to its being completed with a final mark – and the element of “leading” referencing the (correct) *ṭarīqa*, or religious path. The aim of this analogy, in other words, would be that just as the rest of the letters of the alphabet flow away from the first letter of the *alif*, so too do the 72 sects twist and deviate away from the one true *ṭarīqa*.¹¹¹ The natural question, then, would be which groups constitute the 72, and which remaining one would be the leading *ṭarīqa*, and the works of Āzarī accordingly list every possible group which could constitute one of those who have wandered from the proper path. Without listing every sub-group here, it is worth mentioning the overarching categories into which each subgroup is placed by Āzarī: the Mu‘tazila; the Shī‘a; the Kharijites (*khawārij*); the Murji‘ites; the *Najjāriyya*, a theological school whose fundamental positions included the created nature of the Qur’ān, the impossibility of seeing God, and “the rejection of divine attributes;”¹¹² the *Jabriyya*, a polemical title given to those who presumably would emphasize the strength of divine compulsion, *jabr*, and reject the freedom of human action; the *Mushabbihā*, those who would draw an equivalence in comparing God to the characteristics of created beings; and

¹¹¹ Āzarī, *AJA*, 99b-100a. This is reported on the authority of a teacher of Āzarī, *ḥazrat shaykh*, who remains unspecified.

¹¹² Khalīl ‘Athāmina, “al-Nadjjāriyya,” *El*²

finally, the remaining group which would receive salvation, *al-firqa al-nājiyya*.¹¹³ A rejection of certain schools which emerged in the theological controversies of the first few centuries of Islam over issues free will and the nature of God, such as the Mu‘tazila or Murji‘a, is expected in a heresiographical section. It is a bit of a curiosity that Āzarī, sometimes considered to have been a Shī‘ī Muslim himself, would include the Shī‘a among his list of deviant sects. It must also be noted that this is not merely an indirect manner of criticizing certain groups of Shī‘ī Muslims known as *ghulāt*, “exaggerators,” though certain well-known extremist schools such as the followers of Mughīra b. Sa‘īd¹¹⁴ are indeed singled out for criticism. On the contrary, Āzarī stated that the 22 Shī‘ī schools, “all of them having disbelieved,” could be subdivided into the *ghulāt* (which, for Āzarī, included the Ismā‘īliyya), the Zaydiyya, and the Imāmiyya.¹¹⁵ This latter group, which would overlap significantly with the *Ithnā‘asharī* Shī‘a, would have included for Āzarī those who believed in the concept of the appointment of an imam by his predecessor (*naṣṣ*) having originated with the imamate of ‘Alī b. Abī Tālib, and those who considered (certain) early prophetic companions (*ṣaḥāba*) to have apostasized. Likewise, Āzarī later defined the “12 ranks of the refusers [*rāfiḍa*]” – itself a polemical term when used in describing the Shī‘a – to include groups who would have held that the world was never lacking an imam, or the necessity of recognizing ‘Alī and his imamate, neither of which seem to be particularly transgressive expressions of *ghuluww*.¹¹⁶ In other words, it does not seem that Āzarī was using this section to define the correct avenues of Shī‘ī belief against competing Shī‘ī movements, so

¹¹³ Āzarī, *AJA*, 100a.

¹¹⁴On Mughīra b. Sa‘īd, see: Steve Wasserstrom, “The Moving Finger Writes: Mughīra B. Sa‘īd’s Islamic Gnosis and the Myths of Its Rejection,” *History of Religions* 25, no. 1 (1985): 1–29.

¹¹⁵ Āzarī, *AJA*, 102a.

¹¹⁶ Āzarī, *AJA*, 104b.

much as to criticize the Shī‘a (among others), writ large. Perhaps the simple designation of Āzarī as a “Šūfī Shī‘ī” needs reconsideration.

With the invocation of this prophetic tradition regarding the 72 deviant sects comes the imperative to define the single group worthy of salvation, and so one must ask: who would have Āzarī considered the one proper Islamic school? The answer is convoluted in part because the organization of this section of a text is ambiguous, as it seems to have been compiled from two different unnamed sources. In the first listing of the 72 “mistaken” sects, Āzarī seemed to take the opinion that the right path came with “the Ash‘arites, the predecessors from the traditionists, and the *ahl al-sunna wa-al-jamā‘a*,”¹¹⁷ which is to say, a more or less mainstream Sunnī position in the 9th/15th century. After stating this, though, Āzarī shortly thereafter reintroduces from scratch the concept of the 73 sects, this time specifying that from each of 6 main parties, there are 12 errant subgroups. The list is also distinct from the first accounting, as the 6 major parties are now the Kharijites, the *Rāfiḍa* (that is, the Shī‘a), the Jahmiyya (used to designate followers of the supposed doctrines of Jahn b. Safwān, d. 128/746¹¹⁸), the Jabriyya, the Qadriyya, and the “Surhūbiyya” [Jārūdiyya].¹¹⁹ In other words, while there is a certain amount of overlap, this is nonetheless a distinctive piece of heresiography. Likewise, the conclusion of this section is a far more importance, as after having listed the 72 errant sects, Āzarī did not at this point simply nod towards the Sunnī tradition. On the contrary, he returned in full force to the original quatrain under consideration, namely, not just the 72, but the “leader of the letter,” the interpretation of

¹¹⁷ Āzarī, *AJA*, 103b.

¹¹⁸ W. Montgomery Watt, “Djahmiyya,” *EP*.

¹¹⁹ Āzarī, *AJA*, 104a. “Surhūbiyya” being derived from a pejorative nickname, *surhūb* (“blind sea-devil”) given to the Zaydī teacher, Abū al-Jārūd b. Ziyād al-Mundhir. This branch of the Zaydī Shī‘a would have rejected the caliphates of Abū Bakr and ‘Umar, and welcomed the imamate of any descendant of Fāṭima “if he were worthy and claimed the imāmate with the sword.” Marshall Hodgson, “al-Djārūdiyya,” *EP*. On the additional communities, see: W. Montgomery Watt, “Djabriyya,” *EP*; Josef van Ess, “Qadariyya,” *EP*.

which would lead to knowledge of the correct *ṭarīqa*. Certain sections of this portion of text are worth quoting at length to view the complete argument of Āzarī:

All together, not one could open the letter: the perfect teacher is the one of the path of God who opens all things and resolves the differences from among them. *I wrote in the point of the letter at the head of the letter*: an indication of the distinguishing characteristic, meaning: “to me, by this characteristic, one may distinguish the 72 sects from each other, like the letters,” as in the first analysis of the 72. *It opened the letter; I became the leader of the letter*: meaning, the leader of the path of God. And this is an indication of the gathering and unveiling of the realities of the human.

If it were said, “from this *the head of a letter* is meant knowledge [*‘ilm*], that all difference were within it, and expression of that is their perfection from knowledge,” then it would be appropriate that *all together, not one could open the letter*, meaning, “in knowledge, *I wrote in the point of the letter at the head of the letter*,” meaning, “I put intellect upon knowledge/it opened, I became the leader in knowledge.”

The intention is the investigative science [*‘ilm-i taḥqīqī*], which is the result of unveiling [*kashf*].¹²⁰

The discussion of the point and the emergence of the letters of the alphabet is not merely meant as an analogy to explain how a wide variety of Islamic sects may have emerged from the primordial core of Muḥammad and his close family and followers, though it certainly is that. Rather, this was certainly chosen with the fact that members of the *ahl-i kashf va taḥqīq* would have considered speculation on the science of the letters to be one of their core interests. The leader of the perfect *ṭarīqa*, who is able to “write in the point of the letter” and “open the letter,” likewise has the ability to distinguish the “realities of the human” – and, by extension, recognize those groups which would have an imperfect understanding of ultimate reality. The correct path, then, is set apart by virtue of its having the *investigative science which is the result of unveiling*, which is to say, the mastery of *kashf va taḥqīq*. For all of the ambiguity and fluidity in the belief

¹²⁰ Āzarī, *AJA*, 106a.

system of Āzarī, which has tended to draw from sources without a great deal of concern about their original authorship, here at last is an explicit declaration of a hierarchy of knowledge. Reaching back to a foundational definition of the priorities of the *ahl-i kashf va taḥqīq* – the *coincidentia oppositorum*, study of the celestial spheres, and the Qur’ānic *Muqatta’āt*¹²¹ – there can be little doubt that each of these plays a significant role in the *AMA* and *AJA*. Little wonder, then, that Āzarī would state so explicitly that the use of *kashf* and *taḥqīq* would be the signposts of a practitioner of the most favored Islamic school, in fact, the *fırqa nājiyya*.

While this may have resolved the occult secret (*sirr*) at hand in this section of the occult compendia of Āzarī, there is the broader issue of what significance might be of such an outright declaration of preference for the *ahl-i kashf va taḥqīq*. To my knowledge, Āzarī has not been discussed in previously literature as having considered himself as part of this loosely-connected intellectual network, so there is a certain value in adding another confirmed member to the previously-known group of scholars. Of greater significance, though, is less the manner in which Āzarī added himself to the ranks of the *ahl-i kashf va taḥqīq*, and more the ways in which he brought this outside movement into his own project. At first glance, the efforts of Āzarī may simply be placed within a broader intellectual stream of especially earlier heresiographical discussions of the various *fıraḡ va niḡal*.¹²² However, the core aim of Āzarī in this section was not merely to comment on debates of the heresiographers on the 73 sects of Islam, but rather, to incorporate the *ahl-i kashf va taḥqīq*, wrapped in the discourse of the science of the letters, into this heresiographical vision. On the one hand, this appears as yet another piece of evidence for

¹²¹ Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks*, 100-101.

¹²² For an overview of Islamic heresiographies, see: Josef van Ess, *Der Eine und das Andere: Beobachtungen an islamischen Häresiographischen Texten*, Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur ees Islamischen Orients, n. F., Bd. 23 (Berlin; New York: De Gruyter, 2011).

the broader methodological approach of Āzarī, namely, a great deal of fluidity in his works: though perhaps influenced by the Ḥurūfiyya or the Kubrawī Ṣūfī network, his texts rarely take firm normative positions towards one group or another. On the other, this very principle is then *subverted* its application to the question of heresiography, in which one particular *firqa*, that of the *ahl-i kashf va taḥqīq*, is held to the preferred pathway for pursuing knowledge in Islam. These elements of the *AMA* and *AJA* texts are what clarify that while it may, at points, seem as though the works of Āzarī are largely collecting information from elsewhere, Āzarī was not an unthinking compiler, and on the contrary, there is a defined editorial position behind the decision to incorporate one or another pieces of evidence – an editorial position that nonetheless was willing to draw from sources across multiple traditions and schools without narrow intellectual or sectarian limitations.

3.12 The Transmigration of Souls in Islamic Thought

Though conversant with the Islamic heresiographical tradition, it must also be noted with a certain irony that elsewhere in the *AMA* and *AJA*, Āzarī was willing to take up in clear language one of the more transgressive concepts in Islam, that of the transmigration of souls (*tanāsukh*) – a concept which Āzarī understood in language drawn practically from the works of ‘Azīz Nasafī, directly. What will be most notable is not merely that Āzarī discussed the concept of *tanāsukh*, but that he addressed it in a largely neutral manner, itself a provocative approach to a sensitive topic. Before delving into the specific source material, a few words are needed on what exactly will be meant by “*tanāsukh*” in this particular concept. By the time of Āzarī, the simple definition of the “transmigration of souls” from one form to another after death would have been already well established. Beyond this basic understanding, the matter becomes more complicated, given that despite the framing of both ‘Azīz Nasafī and Āzarī, there are notable

differences even among those who could have been considered the people of *tanāsukh* (*ahl-i tanāsukh*). While the broader concept of metempsychosis would surely have predated the emergence of Islam, whether in the context of the Greek or Indian traditions,¹²³ so too were there movements within the first century of Islam which took up the matter of the transmigration of souls.¹²⁴ As noted by Walker, there would not have been a single conceptualization of *tanāsukh*, and would have instead been two main trends: that pursued by Shī‘ī groups which would come to be known in the heresiographical literature as *ghulāt*, “exaggerators,” and that taken up by the theologians and philosophers.¹²⁵ This first group, the path of the Shī‘ī *Ghulāt* movements, would have allowed for either the soul of one Shī‘ī imam to transmigrate to the body of the next after the death of the former, or for the spirit of God to enter the physical body of the imam, with the latter case also being known as *ḥulūl*, “incarnation.”¹²⁶ This is the understanding of *tanāsukh* as it might have been conceived within early groups such as the Mukhammisa movement, who would allegedly have held that the souls of disbelievers could transmigrate to lower natural forms, and that the pentad of Muḥammad, ‘Alī, Fāṭima, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn would have shared a “single divine spirit,”¹²⁷ with an acceptance of metempsychosis continuing on into modernity among the Druze and Nuṣayrī-‘Alawī movements.¹²⁸ For the early Shī‘ī heresiographers who

¹²³ Paul E. Walker, “The Doctrine of Metempsychosis in Islam,” 220-1; Wilferd Madelung, “Abū Ya‘qūb Al-Sijistānī and Metempsychosis,” in *Iranica Varia: Papers in Honor of Professor Ehsan Yarshater* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 131.

¹²⁴ Gimaret, “Tanāsukh,” *EF*.

¹²⁵ Walker, “The Doctrine of Metempsychosis in Islam,” 220.

¹²⁶ Wadad Qadi, “The Development of the Term Ghulāt in Muslim Literature with Special Reference to the Kaysāniyya,” in *Shi‘ism*, ed. Etan Kohlberg, *The Formation of the Classical Islamic World 33* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 178.

¹²⁷ Madelung, “Mukhammisa,” *EF*.

¹²⁸ Walker, “The Doctrine of Metempsychosis in Islam,” 227.

first developed and popularized the concept of *ghuluww*, *tanāsukh* would have been one signifier among others for those who were overzealous in their description of the position of the imam.¹²⁹

Though constituting a core example of *tanāsukh* in the Islamic tradition, the positions of the Shī‘ī *ghulāt* can also largely be bracketed from the ways this term was discussed and debated among the theologians and philosophers. Perhaps the most clearly-stated embrace of *tanāsukh* in Islamic thought is that which has been assigned to the followers of the Mu‘tazilī theologian, al-Nazzām (d. between 220 and 230/835 and 845), and in particular to the argument of Aḥmad b. Ḥābiṭ that the soul could cycle not only through human but animal forms.¹³⁰ This was, however, not a matter restricted to the debates among the Mu‘tazila. Given the incorporation of the Greek philosophical tradition into the Islamic intellectual milieu, it was nearly inevitable that Islamic philosophers would be forced to confront the presence of the transmigration of souls in the earlier Greek texts. Though, as will be seen, the issue was not limited to the Platonic tradition, those philosophers working in a Platonic or Neoplatonic mold would have quickly been confronted by the fact that, per the *Phaedo*, the great sage Plato himself would have allowed for the migration of the soul to a new physical body.¹³¹ It was not only Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (d. 313 or 323/925 or 935), himself having composed a commentary on the *Timaeus* of Plato, who had to fend off charges of believing in *tanāsukh*, though Rāzī, properly speaking, never addressed the

¹²⁹ Qadi, “Kaysāniyya,” 182. Shahrīstānī would have held the four “innovations” of the *ghulāt* to have been anthropomorphism, *tashbīh*; God changing His mind, *badā*; a “return” prior to the Day of Judgment, *raj‘a*; and metempsychosis, *tanāsukh*. That said, as noted by Qadi throughout this article, *ghuluww* was not a stable term, and concepts which would become “mainstream” in Shī‘ism – such as occultation, *ghayba*, or return, *raj‘a* – would at certain times have been considered *ghuluww*, themselves. The core point is that assigning *ghuluww* to certain groups was as much an exercise in setting the fluctuating boundaries of the “orthodox” Shī‘ī community as it was a descriptive exercise. See also Qadi, “Kaysāniyya,” 189-90.

¹³⁰ Charles Pellat, “Aḥmad b. Ḥābiṭ,” *EL*²; Walker, “The Doctrine of Metempsychosis in Islam,” 226-7.

¹³¹ These passages would have been cited by al-Bīrūnī: Walker, “The Doctrine of Metempsychosis in Islam,” 221.

matter directly.¹³² The question of the transmigration of souls was a constant intellectual challenge also for those Ismā‘īlī philosophers who were working in the Platonic-Neoplatonic tradition, for example, Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sijistānī (d. after 361/971) and Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. after 411/1020). Even while wholly rejecting *tanāsukh* in the understanding of the soul within a human flowing to the form of a plant or animal, Sijistānī would have hinted in certain works at a certain cyclical nature to the experience of the soul. The fundamental question is that of resurrection: how could it be that there would only be a single resurrection from the grave, given the chronological difference between the first generations of humanity and the current age? Likewise, one must wonder how in a purely spiritual resurrection, the soul, denuded from its body, would remain individuated and endure a paradise or hell which are described in visceral sensual terms in the core texts.¹³³ The solution proposed by Sijistānī is one of an immediate restoration to a spiritual body, *ba‘th*, in expectation for a final *qiyāma* (here, “resurrection”) and “[one’s] judgment by the Qā‘im and [one’s] rise to the spiritual world.”¹³⁴ A complete denial of *tanāsukh* would also have been embraced by al-Kirmānī by virtue of the individuation of the soul being “due precisely to its association with the body,” and hence this occurring in the cycles of metempsychosis would be absurd.¹³⁵ And yet, similarly to Sijistānī, Kirmānī still held that after death, the *ba‘th* would function as a “spiritual rebirth which prepares the virtuous soul to

¹³² Walker, “The Doctrine of Metempsychosis in Islam,” 225-6.

¹³³ The thesis of the “*ahl al-zāhir*” that the same physical body would be wholly reconstituted is outright rejected by these thinkers. Daniel De Smet, “La transmigration des âmes. Une notion problématique dans l’ismaélisme d’époque fatimide,” in *Unity in Diversity: Mysticism, Messianism and the Construction of Religious Authority in Islam*, by Orkhan. Mir-Kasimov, vol. 105, Islamic History and Civilization: Studies and Texts (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 98-99; Walker, “The Doctrine of Metempsychosis in Islam,” 235.

¹³⁴ De Smet, “La transmigration des âmes,” 107-8; Madelung, “Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sijistānī and Metempsychosis,” 140.

¹³⁵ Walker, “The Doctrine of Metempsychosis in Islam,” 236-7.

reach its final perfection.”¹³⁶ This final perfection would only come, then, with the time of the (purely spiritual) *qiyāma*, and the issue of *tanāsukh* is considered resolved.¹³⁷

There is a reason to discuss these theories at length beyond the fact that Āzarī took an interest in *tanāsukh*, namely, whether the issue was truly resolved. It is true that the position of the Platonist and Neoplatonist philosophers in the Fāṭimid period was quite distinct from the apparent position of Aḥmad b. Ḥābit, in which a soul may move from human to animal over the course of numerous lifetimes. But even the discussion of *ba‘th*, while perhaps avoiding certain issues of this outright *tanāsukh* or the reasoning behind bodily resurrection, does seem to allow for an intermediate and individuated “re-creation” in a higher realm. This is not so dissimilar, then, from the Aristotelian solution offered by Ibn Sīnā of the emergence of a “subtle body,” *jarm samāwī*, after an individual’s death on the material, sublunary plane.¹³⁸ Consider also the position of the later philosopher Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1641) of an afterlife in which an “undeveloped” soul may enter into the “World of Images,” *‘ālam al-mithāl*, as opposed to the “World of Pure Intellect,” taking on the form of an animal (though not, as in the argument of the *ahl-i tanāsukh*, literally be reborn into the material world as an animal).¹³⁹ This shadowy existence in an intermediary World of Images is indeed distinct from the classical transmigratationist position in which the soul may be reborn in a completely new form after the death of the body, but it unquestionably involves a soul taking on a new form in a new realm,

¹³⁶ De Smet, “La transmigratation des âmes,” 104.

¹³⁷ De Smet, “La transmigratation des âmes,” 105.

¹³⁸ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Mabdā’ wa-al-Ma‘ād*, *Silsila-yi Dānish-i Īrānī* 36 (Tehran: Dānishgāh-i Tihārān, 1363 [1984]), 113-14.

¹³⁹ Walker, “The Doctrine of Metempsychosis in Islam,” 238, citing: Fazlur Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā (Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī)* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1975), 247-50.

even after the death of the body to which it was so inextricably linked in this life. Whether one finds the arguments of the Islamic philosophers against *tanāsukh* while remaining true to the textual sources describing the afterlife, or in which individuals are transformed into animals (per Q5:60), to be compelling is of lesser importance than the mere fact that the issue of how to resolve the matter of metempsychosis was an enduring one in Islamic thought. The fact that even rejections of *tanāsukh* proper would still be forced to consider the possibility of a “second” body, however understood, will prove to be of major importance for Āzarī.

3.13 Āzarī and the Possibility of Metempsychosis

The stakes of the dispute over the possibility of the transmigration which appeared in the works of those authors writing before the lifetime of Āzarī will prove to still have a certain resonance into the 9th/15th century context in which he was composing his esoteric compendia. Following the usual pattern of these esoteric works, the theme of the transmigration of souls came up in the context of a difficult couplet on the “sect of transmigration,” *mazhab-i tanāsukh*:

In the journey of existence, I fell to *raskh*
 From the world of *raskh*, I then fell to *faskh*
 I passed from *faskh* to *maskh*
 So as I had become *raskh*, I fell to *naskh*¹⁴⁰

As explained by Āzarī, what is being discussed here is the core belief of those who would embrace the idea of the transmigration of souls: that an eternal soul (*qadīm*) may transmute (*tabdīl*) through various physical forms in an attempt to achieve a perfected state (*kasb-i kamāl-i tamām*).¹⁴¹ In the worldview of the people of *tanāsukh*, this is held to have a Qur’ānic basis, as it would be the true meaning behind Q89:27-8 in which the becalmed soul (*al-naḥs al-muṭama`ina*)

¹⁴⁰ Āzarī, *AMA*, 171a. The passage is replicated in the *AJA* as well: Āzarī, *AJA*, 170a-172a

¹⁴¹ Āzarī, *AMA*, 171b.

is exhorted to return to God. The rhyming terms in the couplet, then, are held to be the positions of the soul falling to the mineral (*raskh*), plant (*faskh*) or non-human animal (*maskh*) realms.¹⁴² In fact, Āzarī here has invoked a framework of the ascent or descent of the soul which had a long legacy in Islamic esoteric thought, including but not limited to the position of that of the Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs.¹⁴³ This simple schema, though, is only the starting point for the *ahl-i tanāsukh*, as not just the human soul, but the entirety of the cosmos, is subject to a complex hierarchy of degrees (*darajāt*) among which it is possible to ascend and descend. Not only are there held to be similar positions among the celestial spheres, with “heaven” being among the highest spheres and “hell” being the sublunary sphere, but there are ranges within human beings themselves: humans might rise from the ranks of the ignorant to the learned, from the learned to the saintly, and the saintly to the prophetic.¹⁴⁴

It is not simply a literary device that logically speaking, hell, the “sublunary sphere” would be human existence on Earth, beyond which the pious would be trying to ascend. In the framework laid out by Āzarī, there is a close link between the cycling of the soul through ranks of creation and the revolution of the celestial spheres. Though not a word for word copy of the original, this section is nearly identical in meaning to the introductory material of the epistle in explanation of the people of *tanāsukh* in the collected treatises of ʿAzīz Nasafī known as the *Kitāb al-Insān al-Kāmil*, in which this same concept of the ascent and descent of souls through

¹⁴² Āzarī, *AMA*, 171b.

¹⁴³ Note a very similar construction, though with five levels (*naskh*, *maskh*, *waskh*, *faskh*, and *raskh*), in the epistle of al-Khaṣībī, *al-Risāla al-Rastbāshiyya*: Meir M. Bar-Asher and Aryeh Kofsky, trans., *The ʿAlawi Religion: An Anthology*, Bibliothèque de l’Ecole des hautes études, Sciences religieuses 190 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), 97-108.

¹⁴⁴ Āzarī, *AMA*, 171b-172a.

ranks of material existence is explicated at length.¹⁴⁵ The background source of Nasafī will be of immense importance in understanding the analysis presented by Āzarī on another term which brought with it a certain amount of ideological baggage, namely, the concept of the *qiyāmat* (or, multiple *qiyāmāt*).¹⁴⁶

To invoke the concept of cyclical *qiyāmāt* would seem to be to invoke the belief system of the Ismā‘īlīs, and it is worth considering whether this is the way *qiyāma* is meant to figure into the cosmology of the *ahl-i tanāsukh* in the way it is understood by Āzarī. Is this, for example, a *qiyāma* precisely in the manner of Ḥasan II (i.e., Ḥasan ‘alā Dhikrihi al-Salām, d. 589/1193), the Ismā‘īlī imam at Alamut, which would have brought with it a loosening of adherence to the *sharī‘a* and a declaration of the resurrection of the dead (the latter idea, of course, being drawn from the Qur’anic concept of the *yawm al-qiyāma*)?¹⁴⁷ It will be best at this point to expand upon what, precisely, the believers in the transmigration of souls would have apparently understood *qiyāma* to have meant. For Āzarī, the key method of analysis is that every rank of *qiyāma* is inherently tied to the revolution of the spheres:

Ascending from the position of *raskh* to the perfection of *naskh* takes 50,000 years, which is the length of the greater rising of the sun, meaning *qiyāmat*.¹⁴⁸

From this, it would seem that *qiyāmat* is a figurative expression for when a soul rises from the basest depths of the inorganic material world to the loftier heights of the celestial spheres, though the matter is not quite as simple as this. Just as there are a series of hierarchical levels to the

¹⁴⁵ ‘Azīz Nasafī, *Kitāb al-Insān al-Kāmil*, 408-13.

¹⁴⁶ Arabic *qiyāma*, Persian, *qiyāmat*. The latter is naturally used by Āzarī in this section, and the transcription of portions of his writing will remain faithful to this.

¹⁴⁷ Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Order of Assassins: The Struggle of the Early Nizārī Ismā‘īlīs against the Islamic World* (‘s-Gravenhage: Mouton, 1955), 148-151.

¹⁴⁸ Āzarī, *AMA*, 172a.

process of transmigration, and within in each level of transmigration (*naskh, maskh, faskh, raskh*) and within each form through which a soul might migrate (for example, in humans, the ignorant, learned, saintly, and prophetic), so too is there a determined hierarchy of *qiyāmāt*:

The greater *qiyāmat* (*qiyāmat-i ‘uzmā*) is an expression for the complete revolution of all of the 7 planets.¹⁴⁹ Meaning: the revolution of each planet is 1,000 years as the sovereign¹⁵⁰ and 6,000 years of the other[s], which is 7,000 years. Thus, 7 planets, for each of which there is a 7,000 year revolution, so for the collective a *qiyāmat* would be 49,000 years, and this is the greater *qiyāmat*. In every 7,000 years, there is a *qiyāmat*, and they call this one the major *qiyāmat* (*qiyāmat-i kubrā*). In every 1,000 years, there is a *qiyāmat*, and this is called the minor *qiyāmat* (*qiyāmat-i suhrā*). When the particular revolution of each planet comes to a close, a *qiyāmat* occurs.¹⁵¹

At this point in the analysis, *qiyāmat* is still largely being used in an astronomical/astrological sense as a means of tracking the revolutions of the spheres and noting the transition from when one sphere is preeminent in a particular millennium to the dominance of the next.

Where *qiyāmat* gains a greater resonance for Āzarī is the fact that, according to the *ahl-i tanāsukh* via Āzarī, with each *qiyāmat*, the people discard one set of customs and rites in favor of new customs (*‘ādāt-i nu*). There is, in other words, a millennial import to the cycling of the spheres, with major social disruption to be expected with each passing of 1,000 years leading up to a more cataclysmic destruction of the world every 7,000 years, when every sphere has heralded its respective minor *qiyāmat*.¹⁵² Though this *qiyāmat-i kubrā* would largely ravage the world as we know it, Āzarī noted that it would not fully destroy the earth, and that certain “tall

¹⁴⁹ By these 7 *kawākib* are meant the 7 classical celestial spheres of the Sun, Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn.

¹⁵⁰ *istiqlāl*. Likely not a reference to “independence” so much as that in each 7,000 year cycle, there is one 1,000 year sub-cycle in which each particular planet is dominant, followed by it passing the other 6,000 years in a subordinate role.

¹⁵¹ Āzarī, *AMA*, 172a.

¹⁵² Āzarī, *AMA*, 172a.

buildings” might remain. It would only be with the completion of 7 of these major *qiyāmāt* – 49,000 years plus an addition millennium, for a total of 50,000 – that the greater *qiyāmat*, *qiyāmat-i ‘uzmā*, which would constitute the end of the world and inversion of the natural order, would come to completion.¹⁵³ There are certain elements of this discussion of *qiyāmat*, namely, the idea of cyclical progressions and the loosening or binding of new customs and rites, which might invoke Ismā‘īlī thought, but the stronger concordance is the fact that the discussion at this point in the *AMA* almost perfectly mirrors the collected epistles known as *Kitāb al-Insān al-Kāmil* of ‘Azīz Nasafī, in which there is an excursus in discussing the progression of *tanāsukh* to explain the concept of the *qiyāmat* (*dar bayān-i qiyāmat*).¹⁵⁴ It is true that there have been periodic speculations that there is a certain “responsiveness” to Ismā‘īlī doctrine in the works of Nasafī, though without evidence of any official affiliation.¹⁵⁵ Given what is easily available about Āzarī and his strong inclination towards the Kubrawiyya generally and the intellectual line of Sa‘d al-Dīn Ḥamuwayī specifically, it is highly likely Āzarī was citing from the *Kitāb al-Insān al-Kāmil* more so than any particular work of Ismā‘īlī thought, even if there are certain elements that are broadly harmonious with the Ismā‘īlī Shī‘a.¹⁵⁶

While the vast majority of the discourse in the *AMA* can be seen as a summary of the slightly more prolix account found in the *Kitāb al-Insān al-Kāmil*, there is one divergence at the

¹⁵³ Āzarī, *AMA*, 172a.

¹⁵⁴ ‘Azīz Nasafī, *Kitāb al-Insān al-Kāmil*, 413-14.

¹⁵⁵ Landolt, “Nasafī, ‘Azīz,” *Eir*.

¹⁵⁶ A Šūfī having an intellectual position which was broadly harmonious with certain aspects of the Ismā‘īlī Shī‘a would hardly have been unique at the time. Even certain points in Sarbadārid history have been argued to have been representative of Ismā‘īlī influence. For a notable example of Ismā‘īlī trends becoming synthesized with post-Mongol Sufism, see: Jamal, *Surviving the Mongols*. On the question of the Sarbadārid movement and the Ismā‘īlī Shī‘a, see: Mahendrarajah, “The Sarbadars of Sabzavar.”

end of this section of Āzarī that is worth highlighting. After this brief discussion of the various *qiyāmāt*, Āzarī turned again to the model of ‘Azīz Nasafī to consider the specific degrees of ascent and descent (‘*urūj* and *nuzūl*) to which a soul might be subject in the system of *tanāsukh*. There are indicative details such as the lowest form of plant (the *tuhlab*, water moss) to the highest (the *wāq* tree) which also appear in the work of Nasafī,¹⁵⁷ as well as the matter of humanity emerging in *sarāndīb* [Sri Lanka],¹⁵⁸ which suggest heavy reliance on the *Kitāb al-Insān al-Kāmil*. As this discussion of the ranks of material existence in which a soul might be clothed, as well as the broader association of ascent (‘*urūj* or *taraqqī*) through the upper degrees (*darajāt*) with *naskh* and descent (*nuzūl*) through the lower degrees (*darakāt*) with *maskh*, is already explained in clear language in the epistles of ‘Azīz Nasafī, there is little need to recount them in full detail here. Where the writings of Āzarī deviate from the information included in the *Kitāb al-Insān al-Kāmil* is that Āzarī saw the influence of the *ahl-i tanāsukh* beyond their being merely one branch of the philosophers.¹⁵⁹ For Āzarī, *tanāsukh* had made its way into a much broader range of Islamic discourse, and even the Sunnī tradition has a certain cloaked *tanāsukh*:

The end of all of this is: this is an ancient *mazhab*, and there is no party which does not speak about *tanāsukh*...it is as the Sunnis say in describing the people of paradise: [*the people of*] *paradise are bare and beardless*. About the form of the people of hell, they say: for every member of hell, his tooth will be like Uḥud, and he has 40 skins, and behind each skin is a scorpion, like a single hill.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Nasafī, *Kitāb al-Insān al-Kāmil*, 411-12.

¹⁵⁸ Or, “*sarandīb*.” For the connection of this signifier with Sri Lanka in the Islamic tradition, see: C.E. Bosworth, “Sarandīb,” *EP*².

¹⁵⁹ The statement of Āzarī that the concept of *tanāsukh* is an “ancient” one is quite right, as it is a simply matter to find discussion of the transmigration of souls in much earlier works of Greek philosophy, such as in the Platonic tradition of the Myth of Er: Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 297-303.

¹⁶⁰ Āzarī, *AMA*, 173a.

Āzarī was taking up a known philosophical question, namely, the fact that the pleasures of paradise and torments of hell are typically discussed in quite visceral physical terms. If the physical body in this sublunar realm has withered and died, then from where do the “bodies” of the saved or damned derive? For Āzarī, this constituted an oblique acknowledgment by the Sunnī tradition that the soul would again be clothed in a new form (*ṣūrat*) in its ascent to higher realms of ease or descent to the lower realms of suffering. It is worth noting that, as Āzarī himself cited, there is a certain precedence for such a discussion in the Islamic philosophical tradition:

Abū ‘Alī Sīnā [Ibn Sīnā] – despite rejecting the *tanāsukh* of the sect of *ḥikmat* – has confirmed the subtle body [*jism-i samāwī*]. It is that which he has said in his explanations, that whenever it would find freedom from imperfections, perhaps the [soul] may not be [fully] independent from the aid of the body.¹⁶¹

Though Ibn Sīnā was an outright critic of *tanāsukh* as a concept, one can follow the logic of Āzarī in citing him at this point on account of his discussion of the soul becoming attached to a subsequent “body” after the end of this life, a *jism-i samāwī* (*jarm samāwī* in the original work of Ibn Sīnā).¹⁶² The most alluring group mentioned by Āzarī, though, is also the one about which he is willing to say the least, namely, the Ṣūfīs:

Among the school of Sufism, they themselves have claimed, formed, acquired, and collected much about the body. Then it is a matter of their withholding [it]; but the belief regarding all of their positions is not proper to be made simple with respect to the masses.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Āzarī, *AMA*, 173a. These concepts can be directly traced back to the *Kitāb al-Najāt* of Ibn Sīnā, in which there is a discussion of both the manner in which the “animal faculties” aid the soul, and the fact that the soul will not be damaged by the corruption of the material body. In this same text is the rejection of transmutation by Ibn Sīnā by the reasoning that *tanāsukh* would result in more than one soul entering a single physical body simultaneously. Ibn Sīnā, *Avicenna’s Psychology: An English Translation of Kitāb al-Najāt, Book II, Chapter VI, with Historico-Philosophical Notes and Textual Improvements on the Cairo Edition*, trans. Fazlur Rahman (Westport, CT: Hyperion Press, 1981), 54-64.

¹⁶² Ibn Sīnā, *al-Mabdā’ wa-al-Ma’ād*, 113-14.

¹⁶³ Āzarī, *AMA*, 173a.

Put differently, this is the point when the otherwise freely-speaking work of the *AMA* compels itself to fall silent, out of concern that the masses would not be able to handle the open disclosure of *tanāsukh* among the Ṣūfīs. This differs sharply from the way in which the Sunnīs and philosophers were described as having merely incorporated elements of the transmigration of souls, even if ostensibly rejecting *tanāsukh* as a concept. It would not seem unreasonable to draw from this that the *mazhab-i taṣawwuf* to whom Āzarī is referring would have been supporters of the concept of *tanāsukh*, themselves.

Ending on such a cryptic note, this portion of the work of Āzarī raises as many questions as it answers. Chief among them would be the matter of what additional information Āzarī may have had regarding *tanāsukh*, but which he preferred to keep concealed. There is also the issue of who, precisely, were these “Ṣūfīs” to whom the text obliquely referred. It is true that nearly the entirety of this exact section is a gloss on the work of the Kubrawī Ṣūfī ‘Azīz Nasafī, though it is also the case that this final discussion of the widespread belief of *tanāsukh* in Islamic schools was not taken directly from the epistles of the *Kitāb al-Insān al-Kāmil*. The Ṣūfī networks of the Kubrawiyya and Ni‘matallāhiyya to whom Āzarī had connections had many practitioners of the esoteric sciences, but it would be unusual to suggest that they were open purveyors of information on *tanāsukh*. Beyond the specific material which can be traced back to the *Kitāb al-Insān al-Kāmil*, a work to which Āzarī must surely have had access, we are left in the realm of speculation, as there is no direct textual evidence that could suggest that Āzarī studied the concept of the transmigration of souls from his teachers Muḥyī al-Dīn Ṭūsī Ghazālī or Ni‘mat Allāh, for example. One wonders what other “Ṣūfīs” Āzarī may have had in mind.

That said, this should not be seen as limiting what *can* be drawn from the text, namely, a poorly-hidden suggestion by Āzarī that *tanāsukh* was hardly a transgressive topic. On the

contrary, even if *tanāsukh* were outwardly rejected by many Islamic schools, the implication here is that it was nonetheless a key element in what would have by all accounts been mainstream Islamic religious discourse. This may be paired with the fact that to speak about a topic as sensitive as *tanāsukh* in a neutral manner would seem, itself, to be an action making a specific ideological statement. It is one thing to follow the lead of Nasafī in being (among other things) an expansive collator of material from a variety of sources without being rigidly limited by questions of sect or confession. In my reading, though, Āzarī went beyond simply relating the beliefs of the *ahl-i tanāsukh* in a wholly detached manner, arguing instead for the near omnipresence of *tanāsukh* in Islamic thought – whether acknowledged or implied. This is not to assign the title of *ghālī* to Āzarī, and on the contrary, his argument functions in a certain manner as re-opening a question related to the soul and the body that many of the Islamic philosophers would have preferred remain closed: if those who reject *tanāsukh* appeal to the soul only coming into existence with the creation of the physical body and the connection between the two meaning that metempsychosis is illogical, then how can the soul exist *beyond* the death of the physical body in an individuated manner?¹⁶⁴ One solution, noted by Walker, is the existence of exactly the “subtle body” of Ibn Sīnā mentioned above, which would persist in Islamic thought well into the post-Classical period. For Āzarī, this was less convincing as a refutation of *tanāsukh*, and rather functioned as a backhanded endorsement of metempsychosis as understood by the *ahl-i tanāsukh*, allowing once again for the “spectre of metempsychosis” to be seriously considered through the lens of Islamic doctrine.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ Walker, “The Doctrine of Transmigration in Islam,” 237-8.

¹⁶⁵ Walker, “The Doctrine of Transmigration in Islam,” 238.

3.14 Excursus: Āzarī and Confessional Ambiguity in the 9th/15th century

Before moving to the next chapter, it is worth briefly stitching together certain otherwise disparate threads which can be found throughout the work of Āzarī related to his confessional affiliation. In fact, a better way of approaching the matter of the intellectual affiliations of Āzarī might be to ask whether this process of synthesizing his being a Kubrawī Ṣūfī in the mold of Sa‘d al-Dīn Ḥamuwayī and ‘Azīz Nasafī, follower of Ni‘mat Allāh, admirer of the *ahl-i kashf va taḥqīq*, and sympathizer with those who believe in the doctrine of *tanāsukh*, and allegedly a Shī‘ī Muslim, is as difficult as it may first appear. Of course, these are already not necessarily confessions or intellectual networks which would have lent themselves to hard-and-fast rules regarding membership, so one could certainly expect any particular individual to “belong” to more than one. This would be the case not only for Ṣūfī networks, in which it was hardly unique for an individual to pursue more than one Ṣūfī path, but would be particularly true for a movement such as the *ahl-i kashf va-taḥqīq*, which cannot be said to have had much rigid institutional structure in the 9th/15th century. The difficulty is in Āzarī being *all of these things at once*, with little concern for potential inconsistencies or contradictions which might potentially arise, much less with concerns for whether his beliefs fell under the category of broader “orthodoxy.” The central point of such an unwieldy venn diagram would be Āzarī himself, unifying these various schools and networks into the coherent whole of his occult works and serving as an important node through which the circuits of a number of otherwise disparate intellectual networks would have flowed in the Persianate world of the 9th/15th century.

Before coming to any further conclusions on the intellectual affiliations of Āzarī, it will be worth briefly reiterating aforementioned points where the confessional identity Āzarī, or lack thereof, was mentioned. Having been raised in the Sarbadārid polity when it was fully

Ithnā ‘asharī Shī‘ī, as well as his being aligned with the Shī‘ī-adjacent Ḥurūfiyya movement,¹⁶⁶ have led to a reasonable assumption of his being an *Ithnā ‘asharī* Shī‘ī himself. He was defined by Rajā‘ī as a “Shī‘ite Sufī poet,” while a review of not simply imamophilic elements in the *dīwān* of Āzarī, but an apparent endorsement of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib as *imam*, led Özyurt to conclude that the views of Āzarī on ‘Alī were “aligned with those of Shiism.”¹⁶⁷ Vuşūqī has come to a similar determination based on a *qaşīda* in the work of Āzarī in praise of the 12 Imams of the *Ithnā ‘asharī* tradition, an intense ‘Alid loyalism in his writings, and the prophetic tradition of Ghadīr Khumm – an account interpreted by the Shī‘ī tradition as the moment when the prophet Muḥammad designated (*naşş*) ‘Alī as his successor¹⁶⁸ – being discussed favorably in the *AJA*.¹⁶⁹ It should be noted that the period in which Āzarī would have been writing, the post-Mongol period of Islamic history, was one of intense confessional ambiguity. The fluidity between confessions which are assumed in the modern day to be wholly distinct is exemplified by such examples as the coins of the Timurid Abū al-Qāsim Bābur (d. 861/1457), with Shī‘ī formulas on one side and Sunnī on the other.¹⁷⁰ Even the historian Fażl Allāh b. Rūzbihān Khunjī, well-known in his distaste for the Şafavid empire of Shāh Ismā‘īl and author of a Sunnī polemical work, *Ibṭāl Nahj al-Bāṭil wa-Iḥmāl Kashf al-‘Āṭil*, written in response to the Shī‘ī text *Nahj al-Haqq* of al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī, stopped to visit the grave of ‘Alī al-Rizā, the 8th imam of

¹⁶⁶ Note the elements which seem borrowed from Shī‘ī Islam, though then molded into the specific Ḥurūfī worldview, in: Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, “Ummīs versus Imāms in Ḥurūfī Prophetology: An Attempt at a Sunnī/Shī‘ī Synthesis?,” in *Unity in Diversity: Mysticism, Messianism and the Construction of Religious Authority in Islam*, ed. Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, *Islamic History and Civilization: Studies and Texts* 105 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 221–46.

¹⁶⁷ Özyurt, “‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib in Shaykh Āzarī’s Qasidas.”

¹⁶⁸ Laura Veccia-Vaglieri, “Ghadīr Khumm,” *EP*.

¹⁶⁹ Vuşūqī, “Āzarī, Mazhab va Dushmanī-hā.” The Ghadīr Khumm incident appears in both occult compendia: Āzarī, *AMA*, 194a; *AMA*, 200a-200b.

¹⁷⁰ See: John E. Woods, *The Aqquyunlu*, 3–4.

Ithnā ‘asharī Shī‘ism, in Mashhad.¹⁷¹ It was far from unusual in the 9th/15th century for political figures, intellectuals, and religious scholars to occupy positions in the gray area between Sunnī and Shī‘ī Islam, and an affection for ‘Alī or reverent attitude towards the 12 Imams are not in and of themselves proof of Āzarī’s confessional identity. With this in mind, it is not enough to infer from the background of Āzarī that he would have been an unambiguous *Ithnā ‘asharī* Shī‘ī by virtue of his having been born in Khurasan in the later years of the Sarbadārīds. More accurately, the *Dīvān* of Āzarī being filled with *qaṣīdas* in praise of the 12 Imams does not mean that Āzarī was *exclusively* Shī‘ī.¹⁷²

What is most curious about the confession of Āzarī is not its ambiguity in and of itself, so much as the way it seems to change depending on the genre of his work. For all of the imamophilia which is on clear display in the *Dīvān* of Āzarī, it appears in contrast to the approach towards confession in the occult compendia of the *AMA* and *AJA*. On the specific topic of confessional identity, the *AMA* and *AJA* are surprising in their avoidance of such outward ‘Alid loyalism as listed in the literature cited above. In fact, there is very little in the text that would identify it as normatively Shī‘ī. There are no references to what might be considered “canonical” collections of Shī‘ī literature, such as those of the so-called “first three Muḥammads,” al-Kulaynī (d. 329/941), Ibn Bābawayh (d. 381/991-2), or al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067). More relevant to the precise field in which Āzarī was working in the *AMA* and *AJA* is that there is likewise little mention of core writers in the esoteric sciences in the Shī‘ī post-Mongol world. For example, Ḥaydar Āmulī, whose discussions of *wilāya* and analysis of the

¹⁷¹ Faḏl Allāh b. Rūzbihān Khunjī, *Mihmān-nāma-yi Bukhārā*, ed. Manūchihr Sutūda (Tehran: Shirkat-i Intishārāt-i ‘Ilmī va Farhangī, 1384 [2006]), 351.

¹⁷² At least the *qaṣīdas* of Āzarī are largely in the *Ithnā ‘asharī*, rather than Zaydī or Ismā‘īlī, Shī‘ī tradition, as seen in a work extolling the virtues of both the prophets and the 12 imams: Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 12-21.

works of Ibn ʿArabī through a Shīʿī lens would have presumably been of interest to Āzarī, is completely absent from the text.¹⁷³ The same can be said for the writings of Rajab Bursī (d. ca. 814/1411), who, like Āzarī, would have considered themes of the science of the letters and concepts from the thought of Ibn ʿArabī, as well as the life and status of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, in his work, *Mashāriq Anwār al-Yaqīn fī Asrār Amīr al-Muʿminīn* (*The Dawning-sites of the Lights of Certainty in the Secrets of the Commander of the Faithful*).¹⁷⁴ It is, of course, possible that Āzarī had no exposure to the writings of these Shīʿī esotericists of the previous generation. There is little that can be definitively stated about an omission of one author or another from the text of the *AMA* or *AJA*. That said, it must be viewed with some interest that Rajab Bursī was not cited as an influence, given that Bursī himself would have fled Iraq for Khurasan in the 8th/14th century and ended up in Ṭūs around 769/1367-8 at the age of 26.¹⁷⁵ In other words, he was active in Sarbidārid territory in the days of Āzarī’s youth. It is certainly possible that Āzarī simply never crossed paths with Rajab Bursī, or that such outwardly Shīʿī esoteric works were not part of his own spiritual training. However, if confessional alignment was a major priority for Āzarī, and he was undoubtedly an *Ithnāʿasharī* Shīʿī, so too might one potentially expect him to acknowledge contemporary figures such as Ḥaydar Āmulī, Rajab Bursī, or others writing in a similar fashion. In their place are such Kubrawī figures who, though themselves feeling a certain devotional affection for the Twelve Imams, cannot be considered to have been normatively Shīʿī

¹⁷³ See Josef van Ess, “Ḥaydar-i Āmulī,” *EP*².

¹⁷⁴ Rajab b. Muḥammad Bursī, *Mashāriq Anwār al-Yaqīn fī Asrār Amīr al-Muʿminīn*, ed. ʿAlī ʿĀshūr (Beirut: Dār al-Andalus, 1422 [2001]); B. Todd Lawson, “*The Dawning Places of the Lights of Certainty in the Divine Secrets Connected with the Commander of the Faithful* by Rajab Bursi (d. 1411),” in *The Heritage of Sufism Volume 2: The Legacy of Medieval Persian Sufism*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn, (London: Oneworld Publications, 1999), 261–76.

¹⁷⁵ Lawson, “*Dawning Places*,” 264.

themselves, such as Sa‘d al-Dīn Ḥamuwayī and ‘Azīz Nasafī. Finally, relevant to the discussion of confessional alignment and literary genre, there is the fact that the work of Āzarī on the wonders and oddities of the world, *Gharā’ib al-Dunyā wa ‘Ajā’ib al-‘Alā*, contains what might be considered a straightforwardly Sunnī confessional position. In the course of a discussion of rivers and streams, Āzarī in the *Gharā’ib* made reference to four streams of the caliphate flowing out from the person of the prophet Muḥammad – an unsubtle reference to the first four (so-called) “rightly-guided” caliphs, and thus an acknowledgement of the caliphal claims of Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, and ‘Uthmān.¹⁷⁶ This completes the circle of confessional ambiguity in the writings of Āzarī, with a full spectrum of both apparently Sunnī and Shī‘ī statements across his various works.

In fact, the confessional association of Āzarī – or more accurately, the lack of definitive proof of its existence, one way or the other – should call into question the utility of overreliance on a Sunnī or Shī‘ī affiliation as determining of an author’s intellectual positions. The esoteric manuals of Āzarī, the *AMA* and *AJA*, exemplify the sort of disregard of strict confessional boundaries which would have typified the earlier Kubrawī generations from whom Āzarī drew inspiration. An indicative example may be found in the final section of the *AJA*, in which Āzarī took up the question of occult secrets tucked away in the writings of the poets. Āzarī, whose career had been built upon a foundation of his skill as a poet, was addressing directly the fact that within the Qur’ānic text is the line, “as for the poets, the erring follow them,” which would could be taken to be a condemnation of one of the most widespread and popular art forms in Islamic literature.¹⁷⁷ The overall exegetical conclusion of Āzarī will come to be that Muḥammad was

¹⁷⁶ Āzarī, *Gharā’ib al-Dunyā*, 26b-27a.

¹⁷⁷ Q26:224, *wa-al-shu‘arā’ yattabi‘uhum al-ghāwūn*.

criticizing not poetry writ large, but specifically, non-Muslim poets who would have put their art to use in mocking the early Muslim community. Notably, one of his core pieces of evidence is a poem of the early Muslim poet Farazdaq (d. 110 or 112/728 or 730) which was said to have been composed after a visit to the Ka‘ba in Mecca. According to the poet, the ‘Abbāsid caliph Hishām b. ‘Abd al-Malik (d. 125/743) sought to kiss the Black Stone of Mecca but was foiled by the great rush of circling pilgrims and was unable to reach the Ka‘aba itself. Shortly afterward, though, the son of Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī and great-grandson of Muhammad, Zayd al-‘Ābidīn, entered the mosque of Mecca, at which point the pilgrims immediately parted to allow him to reach the Ka‘aba.¹⁷⁸ This is, of course, an account heavily infused with an ‘Alid loyalism and devotion to the family of the Prophet, and it has accordingly been featured in such Shī‘ī works as the *Biḥār al-Anwār*.¹⁷⁹ Surely, there is a deeper significance to such an example being presented at this moment than simply the fact that the early Muslim community would have composed devotional poetry, redeeming poetry as an art from potential condemnation. Rather, Zayn al-‘Ābidīn is throughout invoked as “Ḥāẓrat Imam Zayn al-‘Ābidīn,” which is to say, an acknowledgment of his status as a Shī‘ī imam. That being said, it is difficult to draw from this that Āzarī was thinking in narrow confessional terms when merely a few lines later, he described Sa‘dī Shīrāzī, himself a Sunnī Muslim, as a figure by whose work the “doors of heaven were opened.”¹⁸⁰ This compact example is an apt representation of the approach of Āzarī as a whole, in which confessional matters are discussed in ambiguous terms, and sources are analyzed without strict boundaries of religious affiliation coming into play.

¹⁷⁸ Āzarī, *AJA*, 180b-181a.

¹⁷⁹ This particular account may be found in: Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār: al-Jāmi‘a li-Durar Akhbār al-‘Imma al-Aṭḥār* vol. 46 (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1403 [1983]), 124-5.

¹⁸⁰ *dar-hā-yi āsmān gushāda shud*. Āzarī, *AJA*, 181a.

3.15 Conclusion

A key conclusion to be drawn from the observations above is the manner in which the general intellectual approach found in the works of Āzarī is perfectly reflected in his flexible approach towards affiliation with a variety of spiritual networks. The path taken by Āzarī to largely work between the confessional categories of Sunnī and Shī'ī, and to draw from Ṣūfī thinkers both within and without the Kubrawī network with which he had the closest links, was a practical manifestation of an intellectual and spiritual approach which sought to resolve such competing elements within the unity of God. Consider again the section of the *AJA* in which Āzarī discusses the matter of the secrets of the poets. Having successfully resolved the risk of poetry being Qur'ānically forbidden, Āzarī continued on to craft an analogy between the prophets of Islam and the notables of the Muslim poetic tradition. For Āzarī, just as God made no distinction between each one of the prophets in his favor, so too are the various poets united in the manner in which they reflect divine attributes, themselves:

Each one [is] from among the distinct but related manifestations of Him, and each attribute-manifestation is in the rank of the essence and attributes (*zāt va ṣifāt*) of Him...for this group, each one has a particular relation and manner in their relation to Him.¹⁸¹

The invocation of the *zāt va ṣifāt* is of considerable importance at this moment, for it links the works of the poetry to the knowledge of the very nature of God. For example, Āzarī notes that from 'Aṭṭār one might grasp yearning (*shawq*), from Rūmī, taste (*zawq*), from Firdawsī, fortitude (*shajā'at*), and on down a list of major poets, each linked with a favorable characteristic. Though Rūmī and 'Aṭṭār are cited frequently throughout the *AMA* and *AJA*, it is as notable that Firdawsī would be included alongside them as it is that this list of the poets is being directly compared to

¹⁸¹ Āzarī, *AJA*, 182a.

the relationship between the prophets and the divine. To be sure, there is a particular role for God and the divine in the *Shāhnama*,¹⁸² but the goals of this epic work would seem to be quite different from, for example, the works of ‘Aṭṭār. And yet, here they are in Āzarī, each of a source of the “secrets” which have formed the core impetus of these esoteric compendia and able to be interpreted in such a way as to reveal a higher truth about the divine attributes. Such an approach of tending towards unification of separate fields of knowledge was, of course, popular among those of the *ahl-i kashf va taḥqīq*, with whom Āzarī would have grouped himself. As this same group of intellectuals populated a number of courts throughout the Islamic world throughout the 9th/15th century, it is also unsurprising that a unification of opposites in the scholarly realm would be reflected in the political scene of the time period. This is to say that the 9th/15th century saw not merely a drive towards identifying an underlying unity of the sciences, but also towards a practical unification of authority, with leaders held up as absolute sources of authority and themselves the manifestation of both external/physical and internal/spiritual power.¹⁸³ For whatever else in the work of Āzarī may be original, his underlying methodology was undoubtedly in line with the dominant ideology of his contemporaries in polities stretching from the Balkans to Bidar.

¹⁸² See: Dick Davis, “Religion in the *Shahnameh*,” *Iranian Studies* 48:3 (2015), 337-348.

¹⁸³ Clear instances of this have been cited throughout, and examples of the phenomenon may be seen in: Fleischer, “Ancient Wisdom;” Markiewicz, *The Crisis of Kingship*; Yılmaz, *Caliphate Redefined*; Melvin-Koushki, “Occult Challenge;” Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks*.

Chapter 4: Gnosticism in the Poetics of Āzarī

After the divine revelation and the book of our Royal Lord, and the words of the King, omniscient of the lords of speech, and the traditions of the prophets, peace be upon them – there is no speech more adorned and refined than that of the poets of Islam.

Āzarī, *AMA*, “In Explanation of the Speech of the Poets.”¹

4.1 Introduction

Though the previous chapters have demonstrated that Āzarī was an intellectual deeply invested in the occult sciences, a Ṣūfī who considered himself aligned with the Kubrawī network, a follower of the gnostic-lettrist system of Faḏl Allāh Astarābādī, and an admirer of the *ahl-i kashf va taḥqīq*, less focus has been granted to the vocation through which Āzarī first made his name professionally at the court of Shāhrukh, namely, his career as a poet. There is a certain value in focusing on the prose works of Āzarī, which have received only scant attention in the literature, though it is necessary to not overlook that genre to which Āzarī would have devoted himself for large portions of his life. For all of the obscurity surrounding the occult works of Āzarī, it was the poetic corpus of Āzarī that has led to his enduring presence in the sources and literature on Persian literary history to date. While Dawlatshāh Samarqandī hardly limited himself to reporting on the literary arts throughout his biographical dictionary, it is fitting that Āzarī would appear in his *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā*, collecting information on the *poets*. So too does the *Bahāristān* of ‘Abd al-Raḥman Jāmī include in its seventh section (*rawza-yi haftum*) a collection of narratives and selected verses related to the poets, dismissive as the entry on Āzarī

¹ *ba ‘d az tanzīl-i ilāhī va manshūr-nāma-yi ḥazrat-i pādishāhī va kalām-i malik ‘allām-i jillat-i kalimat va aḥādūth-i anbiyā’ ‘alayhim al-salām hīch sukhan ārāsta-tar va pīrāsta-tar az sukhan-i shu‘arā’-yi islām. Āzarī, AMA, 177a.*

would seem to be.² These are merely the closely contemporaneous accounts; mention of Āzarī in some fashion also occurs in an additional 27 works (29 in total) from the genres of history or *tazkira*, stretching from the 9th/15th century to the 14th/20th century work of Aqā Buzurg Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharī‘ah ilā Taṣānīf al-Shī‘a*.³ Even without speaking to the entries in the *tazkiras* themselves, this is a notable literary footprint for a figure who generally has received only passing attention in the academic literature. Setting aside the exact critical reception of his work,

² One will recall that Jāmī considered the work of Āzarī to be full of “nonsense,” *tāmāt*. Jāmī, *Bahāristān*, 150.

³ Note the list contained in: ‘Abd al-Rasūl Khayyāmpūr, *Farhang-i Sukhanvarān* (Tabriz: Intishārāt-i Ibn Sīnā, 1340 [1961]), 3. The full list would include: Jāmī, *Bahāristān*, 150; Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā‘*, 717-28; Gāzurgāhī, *Majālis al-Ushshāq*, 333-4; Kh‘āndamīr, *Ḥabīb al-Siyar*, 4:62; ‘Alī Shīr Navā‘ī, *Tazkira-yi Majālis al-Nafā‘is*, ed. ‘Alī Aṣghar Ḥikmat, trans. Sulṭān-Muḥammad Fakhrī Haravī and Ḥakīm Shāh Muḥammad Qazvīnī (Tehran: Kitābforūshī-i Manūchihri, 1363 [1984]), 10-11, 185-6; Amīn Aḥmad Rāzī, *Haft Iqlīm*, ed. Javād Fāzil, vol. 2 (Tehran: Kitābforūshī-yi ‘Alī Akbar ‘Ilmī va Kitābforūshī-yi Adabiyya [sic], 1339 [1960]), 296-300; Nizām al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Muqīm al-Harawī, *Ṭabaqāt-i Akbarī* (Lucknow: Nawal Kishore, 1254 [1875]), 417; Ṭabātabā, *Burhān*, 71, 73; Ibrāhīm Shīrāzī, *Tazkirat al-Mulūk*, 13b; Shūshtarī, *Majālis al-Mu‘minīn*, 2:125-134; Firishta, *Tārīkh-i Firishta*, 2:250-2, 290, 374-377, 406; Shīr ‘Alī Khān Lūdī, *Tazkira-yi Mir‘āt al-Khayāl*, ed. Muḥammad Malik al-Kitāb Shīrāzī (Bombay: Maṭba‘-i Muḥaffarī, 1285 [1906]), 68; Mīr Sayyid Sharīf Rāqim Samarqandī, *Tārīkh-i Rāqim*, ed. Manūchihri Sutūda, Majmū‘a-yi Intishārāt-i Adabī va Tārīkhī-i Mawqūfāt-i Duktur Maḥmūd Afshār Yazdī 81 (Tehran: Bunyād-i Mawqūfāt-i Duktur Maḥmūd Afshār Yazdī, 1380 [2001]), 61; ‘Alī Qulī Khān Vālih, *Tazkira-yi Riyāz al-Shu‘arā‘*, ed. Muḥsin Nājī Naṣrābādī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Asāfir, 1384 [2005]), 230-2; Luṭf ‘Alī Beg Āzar, *Ātashkada*, ed. Ḥasan Sādāt Nāshirī (Tehran: Mu‘assasa-yi Maṭbū‘āt-i Amīr Kabīr, 1337 [1958]), 443-457; Muḥammad Quḍrat Allāh Gūpāmavī, *Tazkira-yi Natā‘ij al-Afkār* (Bombay: Chāpkhāna-yi Sulṭānī, 1336 [1957]), 31-2; Zayn al-‘Ābidīn Shīrvānī Tamkīn, *Riyāz al-Siyāḥa*, ed. Ḥāmid Rabbānī, Tehran (Tehran: Kitābforūshī-yi Sa‘dī, 1339 [1960]), 148-50; Bahman Mīrzā Qājār, *Tazkira-yi Maḥmūd-Shāhī* (Tehran, 1249/1833-34), #902, Kitābkhāna-yi Majlis-i Shūrā-yi Millī, 18b-19a; Rizā Qulī Khān Hidāyat, *Tazkira-yi Riyāz al-‘Ārifīn*, ed. Mihr-‘Alī Gorkānī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Kitābforūshī-yi Maḥmūdī, 1344 [1965]), 49-50; Hidāyat, *Majma‘ al-Fuṣṣahā‘*, ed. Mazāhir Muṣaffā (Tehran: Mu‘assasa-yi Maṭbū‘āt-i Amīr Kabīr, 1336-40 [1957-61]), 8-9; Muḥammad Šiddīq Ḥasan, *Tazkira-yi Sham‘i Anjuman* (Bhopal: Ra‘īs-i Maṭābī‘-i Shāhjahānī, 1255 [1876]), 29-30; Shams al-Dīn Sāmī, *Qāmūs al-‘Ālām*, ed. Mihrān Maṭba‘asī (Istanbul: Mihrān Maṭba‘asī, 1268 [1889]), 68-9; Hermann Ethé, *Tārīkh-i Adabiyyāt-i Fārsī*, ed. Rizāzāda Shafaq (Tehran: Bungāh-i Tarjuma va Nashr-i Kitāb, 1337 [1958]), 188, 208; Ismā‘īl Pāshā Baghdādī, *Hidāyat al-‘Ārifīn: Asmā‘ al-Mu‘allifīn wa Āthār al-Muṣannifīn* (Istanbul: Ṭubī‘a bi-‘Ināyat Wakālat al-Ma‘ārif al-Jalīla fī Maṭba‘atihā, 1330-34 [1951-55]), 337; Ma‘šūm-‘Alī Shāh, *Ṭarā‘iq al-Ḥaqā‘iq*, ed. Muḥammad Ma‘šūm Shīrāzī and Muḥammad Ja‘far Maḥjūb (Tehran: Kitābkhāna-yi Bārānī, 1339 [1960]), 142, 627; Kitābkhāna-yi Majlis-i Shūrā-yi Millī, *Fihrist-i Kitābkhānah-i Majlis-i Shūrā-yi Millī: Kutub-i Khaṭṭī*, ed. Zīyā al-Dīn Ibn Yūsuf Shīrāzī, vol. 3 (Tehran: Majlis-i Shūrā-yi Millī, 1353 [1974]), 372-5; Mīrzā Muḥammad ‘Alī Mudarris, *Rayḥānat al-Adab fī Turājīm al-Ma‘rūfīn bi-al-Kunya aw al-Laqaḥ yā Kunī wa-Alqāb* (Tehran: Kitābforūshī-yi Khayyām, 1346-49 [1967-70]), 46-7; Nafīsī, *Tārīkh-i Nazm va Naṣr* 1:293-4; Aqā Buzurg Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharī‘ah ilā Taṣānīf al-Shī‘a*, ed. Aḥmad Munzavī vol. 9 (Tehran: Chāpkhāna-yi Majlis, 1332-34 [1953-55]), 3-4.

Āzarī clearly left enough of a footprint in the Persian literary consciousness to have been dutifully recorded in a number of biographical dictionaries over the space of many centuries.

The focus on Āzarī as a poet, specifically, as evidenced in the *tazkira* tradition has largely been maintained in the existing academic literature, though a limited number of studies of other aspects of his life and work may still be found. This is not particularly surprising, given that there is an extensive record of Āzarī in the *tazkira* anthologies, the *dīvān* of Āzarī is one of his few works easily available in a modern edition, and that scholarly work on Āzarī is still in its early stages. That said, what few modern, scholarly works on Āzarī have been written largely frame Āzarī as first and foremost a poet, and largely concern themselves with his verse writing. This is on display in the Persian biographies of Āzarī, as in the work of Muḥammad-‘Alī Vuṣūqī, *Shaykh Āzarī-yi Isfarāyīnī: Aḥvāl va Ash‘ār*, in which large portions of the text are devoted to reproduction of the poems of Āzarī with analysis of certain major themes.⁴ In particular, there is a great interest in the confessional affiliation of Āzarī, sharing his panegyrics dedicated to the 12 *Ithnā‘asharī* imams and emphasizing the Shī‘ī devotional nature of many of his works.⁵ Likewise, the volume of collected conference papers devoted to research into Āzarī, *Mawj-i Daryā-yi Ma‘rifat*, does include works not exclusively devoted to Āzarī’s poetic output, though a significant number of the selected papers included (18 of 42) are focused on technical and thematic elements of Āzarī’s verse writings.⁶ Given that the majority of extant known works of Āzarī are in verse, this is both reasonable and to be expected. The poetic output of Āzarī was such that even well-known collections such as his *dīvān* would be worthy of additional analysis,

⁴ Vuṣūqī, *Shaykh Āzarī-yi Isfarāyīnī*, 47-148.

⁵ Āzarī is discussed as unambiguously Shī‘ī in: Vuṣūqī, *Shaykh Āzarī-yi Isfarāyīnī*, 111.

⁶ ‘Abbās Shujā‘ī and Yūsuf ‘Alī Yūsuf-nizhād, eds., *Mawj-i Daryā-yi Ma‘rifat*, 255-733.

while lesser-studied verse works of his, such as *al-Mir'āt*, have received only scant scholarly attention. In other words, the state of research into the verse works of Āzarī is hardly oversaturated, already.

I would propose that what is as pressing as analysis of the verse works of Āzarī themselves is to consider how the disparate works of Āzarī might fit together into a coherent whole. While there has been a non-negligible amount of scholarly attention towards especially his *dīvān*, what is less forthcoming in existing literature is a more holistic approach to the works of Āzarī: can portions of the *dīvān* be read in conversation with the *AMA* and *AJA*? Or, was the difference in style between the prose and verse works of Āzarī reinforced by noticeable digressions in terms of substance? It is this lesser-taken approach – reading the verse works of Āzarī while explicitly considering their potential to reinforce themes already present in his prose compendia – that will be used throughout this chapter.

4.2 Methodological Approach to the Poetics of Āzarī

Having established that a considerable portion of the corpus of Āzarī is written in verse, there is the question of how, exactly, to evaluate these works. One will recall that Āzarī not only studied the arts of prosody, rhetoric, and the composition of poetry in his youth, but that his talents were sufficient to win himself the post of poet laureate at the court of Shāhrukh, even if he would shortly thereafter have abandoned this post in favor of the Ṣūfī path.⁷ This is to say that Āzarī would have received critical acclaim for his poetry in his lifetime from one of the premier courts of the Persianate world. Given that Āzarī himself discussed a mastery of the *ghazal* and *qaṣīda*,⁸ and that the pinnacle of his success came in a poetic competition in response to verses of

⁷ Āzarī, *AMA*, 9a-9b.

⁸ Āzarī, *AMA*, 6b.

his near-contemporary, Salmān Sāvajī,⁹ Āzarī surely would have been self-consciously working in an existing Persian literary context. This admittedly raises the possibility of evaluating the verse sources of Āzarī from a literary-critical perspective, considering the *dīvān* or other poetical works of Āzarī both in terms of how they respond to an existing literary tradition, as well as the mechanics of the texts themselves. There is surely additional analysis to be done on the *dīvān* of Āzarī with regard to how this extensive collection of compositions did or did not engage with previous, well-known Persian poets, or in what ways the verse works of Āzarī were (or were not) indicative of stylistic trends in Persian poetry throughout the 9th/15th century. Compelling as such a discussion could be, this literary-critical approach to the works of Āzarī is outside the scope of the project at hand, and must be bracketed for the time being for future investigations.

Even without evaluating the specific rhetorical devices of the *ghazals* or *qaṣīdas* of Āzarī, his collected verse compositions are nonetheless an important treasury of material both in terms of developing a more complete biographical account of his life and works, as well as fully considering the intellectual tradition in which he worked throughout his life. There are at least two ways in which a close reading of the poetry of Āzarī will serve as a confirmation and continuation of the analysis already displayed in the previous chapters. The first is that through the poetic works themselves, one may find additional information related to the biography of Āzarī not otherwise contained in, for example, the biographical dictionaries which discuss the life of Āzarī. As one example, while the *Gharā'ib al-Dunyā* will not be discussed at length here, the work mentions in an early folio that the author had previously discussed the topic of prophetic and saintly miracles (*mu'jizāt* and *karāmāt*, respectively) in his *Jawāhir al-Asrār*.¹⁰

⁹ Āzarī, *AMA*, 8b; Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tazkira-yi Shu'arā'*, 718

¹⁰ Azari, *Gharā'ib al-Dunyā*, 6a.

Even this statement made in passing confirms that the *Gharā`ib* would have been composed after the *AJA* and, hence, after 840/1436-7, in the period of the final 30 years of Āzarī's life which was spent in Isfarāyin. Another, perhaps more compelling, avenue of investigation in the varied poetic works of Āzarī is not the way in which they are *distinct* from the prose works of the *AMA* and *AJA* already discussed at length, but the manner in which they are *concordant*. Beyond praise poetry for the prophet Muḥammad or the 12 Shī`ī imams, do the verse works of Āzarī indicate an interest in the occult sciences, as in the manner so clearly expressed in the *AMA* and *AJA*? In other words, did Āzarī alter the function of his works alongside their form in moving from prose to poetry, or might the works be considered as part of the same coherent whole? Consider again the following verses from the *Gharā`ib al-Dunyā*:

سحراندر کلام حضرت تست
 کیما سرمد شریعت توست
 کیما سیمیا و نیرنجات
 ره سازد در طریق نجات

Magic is in the speech of your Master
 Alchemy is the collyrium of your law
 Alchemy, letter magic, and illusionism
 Follow the path of salvation.¹¹

One would struggle to find a pithier defense of the occult sciences forming a licit avenue of practice than these two lines. Even from these few lines of the introduction of this work, Āzarī has set forth that the *‘ulūm-i gharība* are not merely allowable, but are intertwined with the very core of Islam, which adorn the field of Islamic law and with which the core teachings of Islam itself are infused. What is needed is a reconsideration of the poetic works of Āzarī, arguably the

¹¹ Āzarī, *Gharā`ib al-Dunyā*, 3a.

works for which he became most famous, which takes into account the interest in the occult sciences which underpinned so much of his other writing.

The path to analyzing the manner in which the verse works of Āzarī reinforce or expand upon that which is found in his prose writings will be threefold: first, it will be useful to consider the way that the poetry of Āzarī has been received previously, specifically through the aforementioned *tazkira* tradition. If the poetic corpus of Āzarī is in need of *re-reading*, as I would suggest, it will be necessary to consider the ways in which it was read in the first place by previous composers of biographical dictionaries of the poets. Second, from this body of historical sources, the chapter will move to a brief literature review of the manner in which Āzarī's poetry has been discussed in the few works of secondary literature on Āzarī which have been written. Finally, the chapter will move from this necessary context-building to the verse compositions in the *Dīvān* of Āzarī themselves.

While the poetic works of Āzarī are too numerous to be discussed comprehensively, there is more than sufficient source material to provide greater insight into the way in which Āzarī's broader worldview was expressed in his verse writings. The chapter will specifically focus on certain longer pieces of verse which may be found in the printed *Dīvān* of Āzarī, but which – to my knowledge – have not previously be analyzed in this manner. Certain works from the *Dīvān* of Āzarī have already been identified as containing certain esoteric/gnostic (“*‘irfānī*”) themes, as in the case of the *qaṣīda* dedicated to “wisdom, gnostic knowledge, and ethics” (*dar ḥikmat va ‘irfān va akhlāq*). One might likewise expect to find a discussion of the approach of Āzarī to cosmology and the ascent of the soul in a *qaṣīda* which has been labelled, *‘urūjiyya dar ḥikmat va ‘irfān*, “ascent poem on wisdom and gnostic knowledge.”¹² Worthy of greater analysis would

¹² Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 42-50.

also be the *tarjī‘-band* – a form in which a specific line is repeated at regular intervals throughout – which has been included in the printed *dīvān* of Āzarī as *dar siyar va sulūk-‘irfānī*, “on the gnostic journey and path.”¹³ The question which will be at the heart of much of this chapter is whether elements of the poetry of Āzarī have been composed in the same model as what might be found in the major prose works of the *AMA* and *AJA*, including an embrace of the occult sciences and philosophical speculations related to the role of the human in a broader cosmos. Or, did the fact that Āzarī was composing these poetic works in a different form than his prose *AMA* and *AJA* mean that the contents of the *Dīvān* would be a significant departure from these earlier occult compendia? What will emerge in the forthcoming discussion is a set of source texts which, while present in a collected *dīvān* alongside love poetry in the form of *ghazals* and praise poetry dedicated to the prophet and imams, are themselves suffused with speculations on more esoteric matters in a manner which reflects – or sometimes exceeds – the interest in the *‘ulūm-i gharība* present in the *AMA* and *AJA*.

As this chapter is devoted to the matter of the works of Āzarī in verse, a note is required on what is both his most famous and least accessible poetic work, namely, the *Bahman-nāma*, his alleged history of the Bahmanid Sultanate said to have been started during his time in Bidar in the early 830s/1430s and carried on after his death by Naẓīrī and Sāmi‘ī.¹⁴ Unfortunately, the text must be discussed only in tentative terms, given that no manuscript of the *Bahman-nāma* has yet been discovered, and the work to date must be considered lost. What information exists on this supposed work has largely been derived from the later *Gulshan-i Ibrāhīmī/Tārīkh-i Nawras-nāma*, in which Firishta mentioned the *Bahman-nāma* as one of his sources for the history of the

¹³ Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 89-97.

¹⁴ Nafīsī, *Tārīkh-i Nazm va Naṣr dar Iran*, 1:786.

Bahmanids alongside two other lost works, the *Tuḥfat al-Salāṭīn* of ‘Ayn al-Dīn Bījāpūrī and the *Sirāj al-Tawārīkh* of Shaykh Muḥammad Sirāj.¹⁵ Even then, Firishta himself spoke about the *Bahman-nāma* in only tentative terms: though the *Bahman-nāma* is mentioned shortly before a discussion of the claimed lineage of ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Ḥasan Bahman Shāh reaching back to Bahman b. Isfandīyār, so too did Firishta qualify that the copy of the text he was able to review in Aḥmadnagar did not contain the pen-name [*takhalluṣ*] of Āzarī.¹⁶ Likewise, according to Firishta – a major source for information about the *Bahman-nāma* in the first place – what versions of the text did exist were plagued by accretions and editing performed by later authors. One might already wonder whether the anonymous version of the text to which Firishta had access in approximately the early 10th/17th century was wholly the work of Āzarī, given his own discussion of the work having been carried on past the death of Āzarī in 866/1461-2 by the poets Naẓīrī and Mullā Sāmi ‘ī.¹⁷ Beyond this, there are the complaints of Firishta that certain “unjust persons” (*bī-inṣāfān*) had altered portions of the text despite it maintaining the same name of the *Bahman-nāma*, and that discrepancies within the work made it clear that the *Bahman-nāma* to which he had access was not the work of a single author, and that in all likelihood, it contained verses which had not originally been written by Āzarī in the first place.¹⁸ In other words, research into the *Bahman-nāma* was already plagued by issues of the existence of sources and difficulty in verifying their authorship from the time of Firishta. There is the additional difficulty

¹⁵ Firishta, *Tārīkh-i Firishta*, 2:250. One will note that the *Bahman-nāma* is not listed as one of the works of Āzarī in the much earlier *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā’*, the author of which, Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, was a contemporary of Āzarī. See: Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā’*, 727.

¹⁶ Firishta, *Tārīkh-i Firishta*, 2:251.

¹⁷ Firishta, *Tārīkh-i Firishta*, 2:376.

¹⁸ Firishta, *Tārīkh-i Firishta*, 2:376.

that the earliest biographical dictionary entries on Āzarī do not mention the *Bahman-nāma*, nor do other early modern histories of the Deccan, such as the *Burhān-i Ma'āṣir* of Ṭabāṭabā, mention the *Bahman-nāma* in the course of their discussions of Āzarī at the court of the Bahmanid sultans.¹⁹ Given the fact that no copy of the *Bahman-nāma* has been found to date,²⁰ discussions around it must necessarily be speculative, but what evidence does exist in the narrative sources is already, by the admission of its own compilers, not derived from a reliable source. Until a copy of this work emerges and can be examined, there is little that can be said regarding the *Bahman-nāma* and whether its contents reflect the intellectual positions of Āzarī in any way.

4.3 *Tazkira* and Literature Review

While the discussion of the prose works in the previous two chapters was largely novel in the literature surrounding Āzarī – with the exception of select works of modern Persian-language scholarship which acknowledged certain key portions of the *AJA* related to the Ḥurūfiyya and the *Muqatta'āt* – the same cannot be said of his poetry. Where biographical dictionaries might include as little information as the titles of the prose works of Āzarī, and at most a sentence or two on the structure and content of the *AJA*, the *tazkira* entries for Āzarī often include dozens of lines of his poetry across multiple forms (*qaṣīda*, *ghazal*, etc.). This has been a tangible feature of the biographical notices of Āzarī from their earliest appearance, as Dawlatshāh, himself a

¹⁹ Ṭabāṭabā, *Burhān*, 71-73; Ibrāhīm Shīrāzī, *Tazkirat al-Mulūk*, 13b.

²⁰ My own research has confirmed the difficulty in acquiring not only the *Bahman-nāma* itself, but any contemporary historiographical sources related to Bahmanid history. There are a number of sources stored at the Telangana Government Oriental Manuscripts Library and Research Institute titled, respectively, *Tārīkh-i Bahmanī* (*Tārīkh* #640), *Tārīkh-i Bahmaniyya* (*Tārīkh* #2516), and *Dustūr va Ḥālāt-i Salāṭīn-i Bahmanī* (*Tārīkh* #2126), all of which contain only the section on the Bahmanid Sultans from the history of Firishta. Similarly, there are two works titled the *Bahman-nāma* in the holdings of the University of Tehran (#1213/3 and #2879), both of which are versions of the verse epic *Bahman-nāma* of Īrānshāh b. Abī al-Khayr, composed *circa* 485 to 501/1092-93 to 1107-08 and discussing the exploits of Bahman, son of Isfandīār. See William L. Hanaway Jr., “Bahman-nāma,” *EIr*.

contemporary of Āzarī, included in his *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā* a number of examples of the poetry of Āzarī, including both *ghazals* and *qīṭa‘as*.²¹ Given that the genre of the *tazkira* itself often (though not always) involved a literary focus, it is not so surprising to find greater attention being dedicated to the poetry of Āzarī compared to his prose. That said, the works of Āzarī drawing the attention of the composers of *tazkiras* brings with it an opportunity to revisit the appearance of this figure in a mode of writing which would have involved a number of authors over multiple centuries revisiting the known corpus of Āzarī. While the first chapter saw the construction of the biography of Āzarī using sources from a wide variety of genres, including historical chronicles, autobiographical sections of Āzarī’s own work, and biographical dictionaries, there may be value in now focusing more on this last category of writing. One wonders whether the Āzarī of the *tazkira* tradition differs notably from the Āzarī able to be constructed through a conglomeration of texts. By the same token, in those works which function as anthology as much as biography, sharing extended selections from Āzarī’s poetic corpus, it would be significant to see if any trace of Āzarī as a figure interested in the occult sciences made its way in a specific manner into the *tazkira* tradition. This will set the scene for the specific examination of the poetry of Āzarī to come in the next part of the chapter.

Considering the role of the Persian *tazkira* often involving a combination of both biography and anthology,²² there is a fundamental question to be asked about each of these two elements of the tradition as they relate to Āzarī. The first, on the biographical and historical side, has to do with the coherence of a specific “Āzarī tradition” throughout the *tazkira* genre. The historicity of the *tazkira* as a method of writing and its reliability as a stand-alone source for

²¹ Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā*, 722-26.

²² J.T.P. de Bruijn, “Tadhkira 2. In Persian Literature,” *EF*.

reliable historical evidence is a valid question, but not the most pressing at the moment. The challenge of applying a prosopographical method to the scattered references to Āzarī in works across genre and time of composition has already been displayed in the introductory chapter to this dissertation. What is of interest now is the manner in which the historical circumstances of Āzarī appeared in a self-consciously anthologizing genre. Was there what might be considered a “standard account” of the life of Āzarī which appeared across the *tazkira* tradition with little discernible alteration, suggesting the transmission of an original account, and/or a set of authors drawing from a single source base of texts? Or, are there significant discrepancies in the historical biography of Āzarī which might suggest, for example, that there was relative innovation in the Āzarī *tazkira* biography over time, perhaps due to a multivariate source base? There is also the matter of what portions of the poetic corpus of Āzarī a *tazkira* composer might choose to include in the portion of the entry dedicated to representative samples of Āzarī’s verse. Were there particular poems which were seen as particularly worthy of recognition? Are there noticeable patterns in these selected poems with regard to form or subject matter?

In taking a diachronic approach to Āzarī in the *tazkira* tradition, it is necessary to start with the very earliest mentions of him in the biographical dictionaries composed by authors active in the 9th/15th century. The earliest records of the life of Āzarī would have been crafted largely by figures within the courtly circles of Sulṭān-Ḥusayn Bāyqarā, whose court in Herat was a source of patronage for a wide range of poets and litterateurs. This would include a number of figures who would have been rough contemporaries of Āzarī, and who would have been active in Khurasan as young writers as Āzarī neared the end of his life in the latter half of the 9th/15th century. Chief among these would be the well-known personages of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī, Dawlatshāh Samarqandī (d. 900 or 913/1494 or 1507), Mīr ‘Alī Shīr Navā’ī (d. 906/1501), and

Mīr Kamāl al-Dīn Ḥusayn Gāzurgāhī (d. after 909/1503-4), each of whom addressed the life and work of Āzarī in one capacity or another. The earliest of the works which mention Āzarī is also perhaps the *tazkira* which provides the least amount of information about the life and works of Āzarī, namely, the *Bahāristān* of Jāmī, completed in 892/1487. Citing only a single line of poetry for the purposes of anthology from the 146th *ghazal* of Āzarī, Jāmī mentions Āzarī as a poet of Khurasan whose work includes *ṭāmāt*, rendered in the dictionary of Steingass as ranging from “doubtful words” to “raving nonsense” to “vain-glory.”²³ While these are charges that future composers of *tazkiras* will seek to refute, little is to be drawn from the *Bahāristān* besides the low opinion held by Jāmī towards Āzarī, and the fact that at least one *ghazal* from the *dīvān* of Āzarī would have been in circulation and easily accessible to Jāmī. A narrative of the life and works of Āzarī will have to be found elsewhere, and the foundational work related to the biography of Āzarī will prove to be in the *tazkira* of Dawlatshāh Samarqandī.

It is through the *tazkira* of Dawlatshāh that what will come to be the core narrative of the life and works of Āzarī will find its earliest expression, with much of the *tazkira* tradition to come transmitting this original narrative. There are certain exceptions, namely, the *Majālis al-Ushshāq* of Gāzurgāhī, mentioned previously in the introduction to this dissertation. While there are indeed unique narratives to the life of Āzarī in the work of Gāzurgāhī which are not found in other contemporary biographical dictionary entries – namely, his becoming enraptured with a young man, and his specific conversation with Ulugh Beg regarding the provenance of his own pen-name (*takhalluṣ*)²⁴ – there is nothing close to a systematic treatment of the life and known

²³ Jāmī, *Bahāristān*, 150; Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary*, 807. The full *ghazal* may be found in: Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 160.

²⁴ Gāzurgāhī, *Majālis al-Ushshāq*, 333-4.

works of Āzarī. It is only with the work of Dawlatshāh that what might be considered the “standard” narrative of the life and works of Āzarī emerges. Though the introduction has already relied heavily on the *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā’*, among other works, to construct a comprehensive Āzarī biography, the major points of emphasis would include: Āzarī having spent the final 40 years of his life pursuing the Ṣūfī path; the familial connections of Āzarī to the Sarbadārid movement; the poetic abilities of Āzarī leading to his attaining the role of poet laureate (*malik al-shu‘arā’*) at the court of Shāhrukh; the somewhat abrupt departure of Āzarī from the court in Herat to pursue a pietistic life under first the guidance of Muḥyī al-Dīn Ṭūsī Ghazālī, then Ni‘mat Allāh; his performing the *Ḥajj* pilgrimage and composing a work about Mecca and its environs, the *Sa‘ī al-Ṣafā*; his travel to India to serve at the Bahmanid court of Aḥmad Shāh in Bidar; his continued pursuit of the Ṣūfī path following his return from India; his spending his final 30 years in Isfarāyīn, a period which included a visit from Sulṭān-Muḥammad b. Bāysunghur to discuss customs of justice (*qānūn-i ‘adālat*); and Āzarī having been buried in Isfarāyīn.²⁵ It is also in Dawlatshāh that the first expansive list of the works of Āzarī appears, including: the *Dīvān*, *Jawāhir al-Asrār*, *Sa‘ī al-Ṣafā*, *Ṭughrā-yi Humāyūn*, and *‘Ajā‘ib al-Gharā‘ib*.²⁶ This is familiar territory when taken alongside the previous analysis of the life of Āzarī in this project. What is notable at this stage, however, is the anthology section of Dawlatshāh’s entry on Āzarī. There are six discreet examples of the poetry of Āzarī included, all of which are also present in the *Dīvān* of Āzarī: *qaṣīda* 12 on the unicity of God (*dar tawḥīd*), *ghazals* 114, 171, and 359, and *qiṭ‘as* 29 and 30.²⁷ Bracketing for a moment the specific content

²⁵ Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā’*, 717-728.

²⁶ Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā’*, 727.

²⁷ Dalatshāh Samarqandī, *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā’*, 722-726; Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 38-9; 149; 170; 242-3; 298.

of these works, the more pressing point is that in Dawlatshāh, one finds a relatively comprehensive biography of Āzarī and a broader approach to anthology than the stray line or two included by Jāmī or Gāzurgāhī.²⁸ However, in the *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā* is only the beginning of Āzarī as a figure in the biographical dictionaries. What must first be considered is whether this image of Āzarī in the *tazkira* tradition remained relatively stable, or if it included major revisions, excisions, or additions over time.

In keeping with the form of the *tazkira* itself as a combination of biography and anthology, let us consider each of these in turn. The specific contours of the life of Āzarī as can be determined in the source materials do not need to be discussed in extreme detail source-by-source, as many of the earliest materials in the life and times of Āzarī have already been critically analyzed in the introduction to the dissertation. What is under investigation here is the relative continuity of Āzarī in the *tazkira* tradition, broadly understood. Consider the chart in Appendix B, which considers the biography of Āzarī as it exists in known *tazkira* references to his life and works, as well as historiographical sources, which have been included to provide additional context to parallel biographical references to Āzarī which may have been incorporated into *tazkiras*, as well. What one will first note is the relative continuity of the biography of Āzarī in terms of the base material first presented by Dawlatshāh in the *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā*, with variation consisting largely in terms of the amount of biographical detail provided as opposed to wholly new information. That is, the basics of the life of Āzarī in terms of the summary presented above does not radically change over the course of the development of the presence of Āzarī in the *tazkira* tradition. One does not have to confront, for example, major contradictions

²⁸ Unlike the verifiable *ghazal* line in Jāmī, the lines of Āzarī included by Gāzurgāhī are in the form of *maṣnavī*, a poetic form not included in the *Dīvān* of Āzarī.

in source material with regard to his most well-known travels, or his spiritual guides.

Undoubtedly there would have been considerable borrowing from generation to generation, with certain stock phrases, such as “forty years on the carpet of obedience,” *chihil sāl dar sajjāda-yi ṭāʿat*, reappearing in a number of the accounts. There is one exception to this general pattern of continuity, which is to say, the shift in the accounts written at the turn of the 10th-11th/16th-17th century which begin to include far more detail regarding the time of Āzarī in India than those which came before. For example, what I have termed the “palace *qaṣīda*” – the lines in praise of Aḥmad Shāh I and his newly-constructed palace in Bidar, which were allegedly etched into the walls of the palace itself – appears only beginning with the *Haft Iqlīm (Seven Climes)* of Amīn Aḥmad Rāzī, completed in 1002/1594.²⁹ These lines are also cited almost exclusively by the historians of Islam in India, and receive little attention in the *tazkira* tradition more broadly.³⁰ The one exception I have found in the *tazkira* tradition would be the appearance of the palace *qaṣīda* in the much later (1293/1876) *Tazkira-yi Shamʿ-i Anjuman* of Muḥammad Ṣiddīq Ḥasan.³¹ The palace *qaṣīda*, then, though widely shared within the Indo-Persian historiographical tradition, was not what one might consider a mainstay of biographical writing on Āzarī.

4.4 Āzarī in the Indo-Persian Historiographical Tradition

As a brief aside on the matter of the sudden efflorescence of Indo-Persian historiographical writing 10th-11th/16th-17th, particularly in the Deccan, there is another curious line which first appears in the *Haft Iqlīm* of Amīn Aḥmad Rāzī regarding the parallel

²⁹ Amīn Aḥmad Rāzī, *Haft Iqlīm* 2:297.

³⁰ In addition to the citation of Rāzī in the previous footnote, see: Nizām al-Dīn Aḥmad, *Ṭabaqāt-i Akbarī*, 417; Ṭabāṭabā, *Burhān-i Maʿāṣir*, 71; Ibrāhīm Shīrāzī, *Tazkirat al-Mulūk*, 13b; Firishta, *Tārīkh-i Firishta*, 2:375.

³¹ Muḥammad Ṣiddīq Ḥasan, *Tazkira-yi Shamʿ-i Anjuman* (Bhopal: Raʿīs-i Maṭābiʿ-ī Shāhjahānī, 1876), 29.

historiographical accounts being composed in those days by his contemporaries. According to Rāzī, Āzarī was rewarded for the palace *qaṣīda* verses with 12,000 bolts of cloth (*davāzda hazār basta-yi qumāsh*), a detail shared on the authority of “a compiler of Bahmanī history” (*az mu'allif-i tāriḫ-i bahmanī naql mīkunad ki...*).³² This immediately raises the question of who, precisely, is being cited at this moment. The identical line appears in both the *Ṭabaqāt-i Akbarī* and the *Tazkirat al-Mulūk*,³³ which would leave as worthy alternatives for investigation the writings of Ṭabāṭabā and Firishta. With Ṭabāṭabā, one finds a deviation from the well-worn *topos*, present in the work of Dawlatshāh, related to the saintly figure refusing the patronage of a benefactor. In the telling of the *Burhān*, the composition of the palace *qaṣīda* led to Aḥmad Shāh offering Āzarī a reward of 100,000 *dakkanī tankas*, identified by the author as approximately 1,000 *tumans*. With Āzarī initially refusing the reward with a pithy Arabic phrase,³⁴ the sultan – charmed by his interlocutor – increased the gift by an additional 25,000 *tankas*, at which point Āzarī accepted the award while bestowing great thanks upon the sultan. This is then followed by Āzarī seeking leave on account of the stated reason of homesickness (*ḥubb al-waṭan*).³⁵ The account appears in nearly identical form in Firishta, though Āzarī's bout of homesickness is raised just after sharing the palace *qaṣīda*. In this version of events, having been impressed by the verse of Āzarī and wishing to entice the shaykh to remain in the Deccan, Aḥmad Shāh summoned Āzarī to his presence and offered 40,000 white *tankas*, with a *tanka* defined by Firishta as equivalent to one silver *tula*.³⁶ Delivering the same Arabic retort to a similarly jovial

³² Rāzī, *Haft Iqlīm*, 2:298.

³³ Nizām al-Dīn Aḥmad, *Ṭabaqāt-i Akbarī*, 418; Ibrāhīm Shīrāzī, *Tazkirat al-Mulūk*, 13b.

³⁴ “Your gifts bear nothing but your own ends,” لا تحمل عطایاکم آلا مطایاکم.

³⁵ Ṭabāṭabā, *Burhān*, 71.

³⁶ See the discussion of this particular weight in the introduction.

Aḥmad Shāh, Āzarī's award was then increased by 20,000 additional *tankas*, along with a robe of honor (*khil 'at*) and 5 *habashī* and 5 Indian servants. As in the case of Ṭabāṭabā, this gift was then deemed sufficient and accepted by Āzarī prior to his returning to Khurasan.³⁷ In other words, in neither case is Āzarī offered a reward in-kind of fine linen per Rāzī, so the specifics of whether he received 125,000 or 60,000 *tankas* is not particularly relevant. There is the fact that unlike the previous *tazkira* tradition, which saw Āzarī scrupulously avoid any material reward for his services, the Āzarī of the Indian historiographical tradition – though making an initial show of reluctance – is held to have received a considerable reward for his services to the Bahmanid court. So, while there is some confusion in the material as to what, exactly, Aḥmad Shāh would have offered Āzarī, those sources which transmitted the palace *qaṣīda* could be presumed to have been composed by authors who at the very least were aware of this apparent tradition of Āzarī receiving, with some hesitation, a generous reward at the Bidar court. In other words, gift specifics aside, one finds an explicit statement in a number of sources suggesting a circulation of Indo-Persian historiographical texts at the end of the 10th/16th century in some capacity. Could the *mu'allif* of Rāzī have been Ṭabāṭabā and his *Burhān*, completed in 1003/1594? As the *Haft Iqlīm* was completed just prior in 1002/1594, it is possible that Rāzī had access to an incomplete copy of the *Burhān* or the later *Gulshan-i Ibrāhīmī*, or that there is another, unnamed source which was the *mu'allif-i tārikh-i bahmanī* of Rāzī, Niẓām al-Dīn Aḥmad, and Ibrāhīm Shīrāzī. Similar to other murky elements of Bahmanid historiography, an exact resolution to this question will have to wait for a further research project.

³⁷ Firishta, *Tārikh-i Firishta*, 2:375-6.

4.5 Anthologizing Āzarī

What remains is the less-well-trodden ground of the circulation of the poetic material of Āzarī in the available sources. After all, key to the earliest non-autobiographical discussions of the life and works of Āzarī has been his productivity as a composer of poetry, per the *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā*. The key question at this point is not simply *whether* the poetry of Āzarī was shared in the *tazkira* tradition, as it surely was, but *which* selections of Āzarī remained popular in the tradition over time. This may well indicate which compilers may have drawn from which previous *tazkiras* as they formed their own anthological portions of their Āzarī entries. It may also give some sense of which portions of the *dīvān* were circulating widely, if certain *qaṣīdas* or *ghazals* recur continuously. As such, the chart in Appendix C includes a note of the most frequently repeated verses of Āzarī which appear in the source base for his life as a composer of poetry. For the sake of having a standard against which a broad base of sometimes-fragmentary pieces of verse could be compared, the numbering system for *qaṣīdas*, *ghazals*, *qiṭ‘as*, *ruba‘īs*, and the like, is the printed *dīvān* of Āzarī.

A number of observations may be made, alongside certain gaps in our knowledge that will be difficult to resolve without additional sources. An initial observation is that there was not a single, accepted corpus of Āzarī’s poems which appear consistently across *every* source, even as there are certain patterns which may be seen in particularly “popular” works. For example, the 24th *qaṣīda* of Āzarī, assigned in the *dīvān* as “in praise of ‘Alī” (*dar madḥ-i ḥaẓrat ‘Alī*), is mentioned in 10 places and appears from the earliest iterations of *tazkiras* mentioning Āzarī, though with only one exception (the *Tārīkh-i Riyāz al-‘Arifīn* of Rizā Qulī Khān Hidāyat), this *qaṣīda* is invoked to share perhaps the most well-known line of poetry from Āzarī, referencing his departure from India:

من ترک ہندو جینہ جیپال کتہ ام
بادروت جو زبیر یک جو نیخرم

I, the Turk of Hind, told the corpse of Jaypāl
I would not buy all the glory of Jawna for 1 grain of barley.³⁸

Further discussion of this widely shared line is necessary. The reference to Hind was not a mere affectation Āzarī inserted into a later work, for if Firishta is to be believed, this line was recited by Āzarī upon requesting leave from his post at the Bahmanid sultanate in order to return to his homeland of Khurasan. Jayapāl must be the Hindūshāh king and opponent of Maḥmūd of Ghazna, who was defeated in the Battle of Peshawar in the year 391/1001, and would eventually abdicate in favor of his son Anandapāl and self-immolate.³⁹ Harking back to the days of the invasions of Maḥmūd into India would not be so unusual for an historian working in an Indo-Muslim sultanate, but the phrasing in this particular verse is highly affected. An explanation is likely to be found not in the more distant past of the Ghaznavids, but in the example of the first Bahmanid historian, ‘Iṣāmī, who also devotes an early portion of his *Futūḥ al-Salāṭīn* to praising Maḥmūd. Among other victories, there is listed the following hemistich:

کہ جیپال را در خراسان فروخت

Who sold Jaypāl in Khurasan⁴⁰

What ‘Iṣāmī was referencing is most likely the episode Maḥmūd ransoming Jaypāl after having held him captive in Khurasan, releasing him only after having received a recompense of 50 elephants. More importantly, though, even this brief hemistich of ‘Iṣāmī can be put to good use

³⁸ Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā’*, 720.

³⁹ Clifford Edmund Bosworth, *The Ghaznavids: Their Empire in Afghanistan and Eastern Iran, 994-1040* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1992), 114; “Hindū-Shāhīs,” *EI*².

⁴⁰ ‘Iṣāmī, *Futūḥ al-Salāṭīn*, 30.

in decoding the aforementioned line of Āzarī. With the “corpse of Jaypāl” settled, what remains in the first hemistich is the “Turk of India,” who, from context, would be Maḥmūd. On the one hand, it is Āzarī casting himself in a role which would have been well-known in 9th/15th century Muslim India: that of Maḥmūd of Ghazna, using Maḥmūd as a metaphor to explain both his travel to India, and perhaps, his own desire to depart for Khurasan despite his successful career at Bidar. On the other, it is a direct evocation of what to that time had been the foundational work of Bahmanid historiography, the *Futūḥ al-Salāṭīn* of ‘Iṣāmī.⁴¹ An individual hearing the verse of Āzarī who was well-versed in the work of ‘Iṣāmī would both recognize the language of buying and selling being used around the person of Jaypāl, as well as the reference to Khurasan, the region to which Āzarī was desperate to return.

The second hemistich of the line is somewhat harder to parse, in part because there are extant variant readings. Though the dominant trend is to have Āzarī addressing “Jawna,” the version of *qaṣīda* 24 in the printed *dīvān* has Āzarī stating his aversion to the pomp and circumstance of an Indian king, *rāja*. In context, this would likely be read as still the figure of Jayapāl, with Āzarī – unlike that most famous Turk of Hind, Maḥmūd – rejecting the spoils of the kingdoms of India which were so attractive to the Ghaznavids. However, there can be no doubt that the line preserved more frequently in the *tazkira* tradition has Āzarī addressing “Jawna,” itself a somewhat contextually appropriate, but nonetheless curious choice. The most proximate figure with the title related to the Muslim sultanates of India of the period would be Muḥammad b. Tughluq, who went by the title Malik Jawna prior to the accession to the throne of his father, Ghiyāth al-Dīn Tughluq, in 720/1320.⁴² There is the question of why Muḥammad b.

⁴¹ On the historiography of ‘Iṣāmī, see: Peter Hardy, *Historians of Medieval India: Studies in Indo-Muslim Historical Writing* (London: Luzac and Company, Ltd., 1960), 94-110.

⁴² Peter Jackson, “Muḥammad b. Tughluq,” *EP*.

Tughluq would be the recipient of Āzarī’s statement, besides the technical aspect of “Jawna” being a metrical fit. Muḥammad b. Tughluq died in 752/ 1352, more than half a century before the arrival of Āzarī, and was hardly a Bahmanid himself: it was *against* the sultan of Delhi that ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Ḥasan Bahman Shāh, then titled Zafar Khān, was a premier military commander for the rebellion – the rebellion which would culminate in 748/1347 in the very creation of the independent Bahmanid sultanate.⁴³ It is likely this line which has led to certain confusions in the *tazkira* tradition regarding the historiography of the Muslim sultanates in the Deccan, with Sulṭān-Muḥammad Fakhri Haravī in his *Laṭā’if-nāma* (a Persian translation of the *Majālis al-Nafā’is* of Mīr ‘Alī Shīr Navā’ī), and Amīn Aḥmad Rāzī in his *Haft Iqlīm*, both placing Muḥammad b. Tughluq as a contemporary of Āzarī: Fakhri Haravī records him as the “governor of Gulbarga” (*vālī-yi Gulbarga*) who attempted to award Āzarī a high sum for his poetic achievements, while Rāzī identified the patron of Āzarī as “Sulṭān Muḥammad Jawna.”⁴⁴ These are, naturally, both mistaken, both due to the sovereign of the Deccan in the 830s/1420s, and Āzarī’s royal patron having been Aḥmad Shāh, and with the capital having been moved from Gulbarga to Bidar as early as 827/1424.⁴⁵ Nor would there likely have been a different governor

⁴³ The events of 748/147 are summarized in minute detail in: Sherwani *The Bahmanis of the Deccan*, 25-37; Abdul Qadir Saiyid Husaini, *Bahman Shāh, The Founder of the Bahmani Kingdom* (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1960), 5-19.

⁴⁴ ‘Alī Shīr Navā’ī, *Tazkira-yi Majālis al-Nafā’is*, 10; Amīn Aḥmad Rāzī, *Haft Iqlīm*, 2:297.

⁴⁵ This is the date given to the construction of the Sola Khambh mosque of Bidar, as noted by Yazdani: اندر زمن خلیفۀ یزدانی / سلطان محمد که ندارد ثانی // در هشتصد و بیست و هفت این مسجد را / شد بانئ خیر قیام سلطان
 “During the time of the vicegerent of God, Prince Muḥammad, who has no equal; In 827, Qublī Sulṭānī was the auspicious founder of this mosque.” Ghulam Yazdani, *Bidar, Its History and Its Monuments* (London: Oxford University Press, 1947), 54.

There is some debate as to how determinative this is as indicating the date of the transfer of the capital in full. As argued by Sherwani, “surely the mosque could not have been the solitary royal edifice at Bidar in 827 [hijrī];” Sherwani, *The Bahmanis of the Deccan*, 184. That said, Yazdani has noted that Sulṭān Muḥammad, the third son of Aḥmad Shāh, “held the viceroyalty of the province of Bidar before the transfer of the seat of government from Gulbarga to Bidar city.” Yazdani, *Bidar: Its History and Monuments*, 55. It is a possibility that the dedication of the mosque to Sulṭān Muḥammad, as opposed to the king himself, Aḥmad Shāh, might indicate the completion of

of Gulbarga (who could have existed as a subordinate to Aḥmad Shāh) by that name, as just prior to the arrival of Āzarī, the officer (*dārūgha*) in charge of Gulbarga had been a figure by the title of Qalandar Khān.⁴⁶ Inconsistencies in the *tazkira* entries aside, it would not be difficult to imagine Āzarī to have had at least some knowledge regarding the Tughluqids, *particularly* if the line listed above is, indeed, a reference to the *Futūḥ al-Salāḥīn* of ‘Iṣamī. The question as to why, specifically, Muḥammad b. Tughluq would be referenced at this point will have to remain somewhat obscure, though “Jawna,” taken in conjunction with the “Turk of India” and Jaypāl, suggest a familiarity with significant figures in the legacy of the Muslim sultanates of India.

Though the 24th *qaṣīda* of Āzarī has a certain importance due to its being shared in a number of biographical dictionary entries, and that it was composed (at least in one line) at the pivotal moment of Āzarī’s departure from the Deccan to return to Khurasan, further conclusions regarding the anthological tradition and the poetry of Āzarī become far more scattershot. There are other *ghazals* which are comparatively popular, such as *ghazal* 447 (present in 9 *tazkira* entries) and *ghazal* 167 (7 entries), though these are not signs of universal popularity when considering that at least 31 mentions of Āzarī in histories and *tazkiras* exist. Nor are these two *qaṣīdas* in particular ones associated with the collected verses of Āzarī from the earliest days, as they begin to appear only with the 12/18th century *Tazkira Riyāz al-Shu‘arā’* of ‘Alī Qulī Khān Vālih. The historiographical sources which have sections devoted to the Bahmanids do often include what I have termed the “palace *qaṣīda*” (beginning, *حبذا فسر مشيد كه ز فرط عظمت*), apparently composed on the occasion of the construction of the new palace in Bidar, though as

the mosque prior to the full transfer of the capital. That said, it would not be outlandish for a member of the royal family who was not himself the monarch to patronize a mosque in his own name, regardless of the capital’s location.

⁴⁶ Sherwani, *The Bahmanis of the Deccan*, 200.

noted above, with the exception of the later (1293/1876) *Tazkira-yi Sham 'i Anjuman* of Muḥammad Şiddīq Ḥasan, these verses had little other anthological footprint. There are two major conclusions worth highlighting from the data which can be collected related to Āzarī in the *tazkira* tradition. First, that there was not a single, standard set of verses attributed to Āzarī in the sections devoted to anthology in the *tazkiras*. It is notable that most of the fragmentary verses shared in the biographical dictionaries can be traced to what eventually would constitute the collected and printed *dīvān* of Āzarī, nonetheless. One will note that the most complete manuscript of the *dīvān* of Āzarī which was used in the editing of the printed *dīvān*, is dated to 1073/1662-3.⁴⁷ Though copied nearly two centuries after the death of Āzarī, it nonetheless included poems which would have been collected in whole or in part in the earliest *tazkira* tradition, as well as those *new* verses not contained in such early *tazkiras*, such as the works of Dawlatshāh or the translations of the *Majālis al-Nafā'is*, which would continue to be circulated and shared in later *tazkiras*. In other words, while there was not a single, standardized set of poems consistently shared across the *tazkira* tradition, the majority of poems which were shared by one *tazkira* writer or another prior to the composition of this *dīvān* were included within this printing. This may speak to the circulation of at least some shared, baseline corpus of the verse of Āzarī which could eventually be collated into the *dīvān*, even if what the *tazkira* writers chose to incorporate was not standard.

Secondly, the wide circulation of a variety of the poems of Āzarī does not mean that the anthological portions of the *tazkira* tradition on Āzarī might be considered fully representative of every variety of verse which is contained in the *dīvān*. Some of the compositions of Āzarī which are deserving of the closest reading to determine if they are in conversation with his prose

⁴⁷ Āzarī, *Dīvān*, xii.

compositions are the very works which were largely *absent* from the *tazkira* entries, namely, those *qaṣīdas* or stanzaic works which deal with so called “*irfānī*,” “gnostic/theosophic” matters. Before delving directly into these poems on such issues as the nature of the soul, the relationship of the soul to the physical body, and the structure of the universe, let us turn from the *tazkira* tradition to say a few words about the *dīvān* of Āzarī itself.

4.6 Exploring the *Dīvān* of Āzarī

Clearly, the verse work of Āzarī – likely through his having been included in the genre-determining work of the *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā’* – has survived in numerous fragments in many *tazkira* anthologies from the 9th/15th century onward, though there is still the matter of the “complete” *dīvān* (collection) of Āzarī. Beyond the anthological presentation of Āzarī’s verse in the Persian-language secondary literature, this *dīvān* is one of the rare printed works of Azari. It does seem that the *dīvān* of Āzarī was in reasonably broad circulation, whether in whole or in part. The edited *Dīvān* lists five different manuscripts which were used in the printing of this particular edition: two from the *Kitābkhāna-yi Millī-yi Malik*, two from the *Majlis-i Sinā* library, and one from the Bodleian library in Oxford.⁴⁸ The editors likewise note that versions of the text would exist in libraries in Copenhagen, Paris, and (West) Bengal.⁴⁹ The *Dīvān* was thus comparable in spread to the *AJA*, perhaps the most popular work of Āzarī, which may be found in multiple copies in the *Kitābkhāna-yi Majlis-i Shūrā-yi Millī*, as well as the the British Library, the Telangana Government Oriental Manuscripts Library and Research Institute, or the Khuda Bakhsh Library in Patna.⁵⁰ Part of the purpose of the analysis on display in this chapter will be to

⁴⁸ Āzarī, *Dīvān*, xii.

⁴⁹ Āzarī, *Dīvān*, lxxxv The last of these, located in the Asiatic Society of Bengal in Calcutta, I have reviewed myself: Ḥamza b. ‘Alī Malik Āzarī-yi Isfarāyinī, *Dīvān-i Āzarī* (11th/17th c.), #606, Asiatic Society of Bengal.

consider these two elements of the work of Āzarī – the poetic *dīvān* and the esoteric compendia of the *AMA* and *AJA* – not as wholly distinct, but evaluating them more self-consciously as emerging from the same author. In other words, the intention here is to complement the analysis of the intellectual positions as laid out quite explicitly in his (also relatively widely circulated) prose works, and to consider Āzarī’s verse through the lens of his occult works. Is the verse of Āzarī as presented in this *dīvān* recognizably Āzarī-an, or does it deviate in a significant fashion from the *AMA* and *AJA*? While certain readings of the verse of Āzarī are already present in the academic literature, what has not yet been completed is this sort of intertextual analysis of the *dīvān* by reading it against the occult compendia for which Āzarī also gained a certain, limited measure of fame.

The remaining question is where, exactly, to begin the process of untangling the thought of Āzarī as it currently exists, woven through a *dīvān* containing too vast a selection of works to reasonably analyze as a whole at this time. With over 469 *ghazals* alone in the printed *dīvān*, an investigation of the themes and allusions in only this poetic form could constitute a distinct project in itself. For the sake of scope, then, I will take a more focused approach to this collection and make greatest use of those works already identified as having a gnostic-theosophical bent (‘*irfānī*’ in the edited edition).⁵¹ In terms of form, the most relevant portions of

⁵⁰ For a source review of the manuscript copies of the *AJA* used in this dissertation in particular, consult the source review in the introduction.

⁵¹ Though a reasonable usage of ‘*irfānī*’ in a modern Persian academic/literary context, it is largely anachronistic to use “*irfān*” for the life of Āzarī to signify esoteric, gnostic, and theosophical elements. As noted in the study of ‘*irfān*’ in a Persian context by Ata Anzali, with the exception of the discourse of Ibn Sīnā on the matter, the more common terms to designate a particular spiritual station in the Šūfī quest, or knowledge of higher, unseen realms, would be *ma’rifā*, and the possessor of this station or knowledge, the ‘*arīf*. It would not have been until the 10th/16th century in a specific Šafavid context when the emphasis would be placed on the ‘*arīf* bearing ‘*irfān*. This, of course, was contingent on the context of both Šafavid crackdowns on non-Šafavid Šūfī orders, and a growing distaste for *tašawwuf* alongside the decline in Qizilbāsh – themselves historically rooted in the Šafavids as a militant Šūfī order -- political and military power at the turn of the 11th/17th century. In any case, ‘*irfānī*’ as denoting a discourse of “spirituality,” based in the Islamic tradition but notably distinct from the Šūfī legacy as it might be used in a modern Iranian context, would be foreign to Āzarī, and ‘*irfān*’ does not figure heavily in his works. On the

Āzarī's verse for the purposes of this chapter are largely found in the *qaṣīdas* and the single *tarjī'-band*. The labelled *qaṣīdas* 5, *dar ḥikmat va 'irfān va akhlāq*, and 14, *qaṣīda-yi 'urūjiyya dar ḥikmat va 'irfān*, and the *tarjī'-band*, *dar siyar va sulūk-i 'irfānī*, would seem to clearly be worth of discussion. This is, necessarily, a quite limited reading of the *dīvān* of Āzarī, and should not be taken to be a *definitive* study of all gnostic-theosophical concepts as they appear in his collection of works. A closer consideration of the *ghazals* of Āzarī, which have not been thematically labelled as in the case of the *qaṣīdas*, will certainly shed additional light on the intellectual positions of Āzarī. Consider, for example, the final line of *ghazal* 3:

تن بهج مشکات است و دل مصباح نور است آذری
از نور مصباح دلت روشن کن این مشکات را

The body is as the niche, and the heart is the lamp of light, Āzarī;
Illuminate this niche by the light of the lamp of your heart.⁵²

The line is not only significant because the vocabulary is instantly recognizable as being Qur'ānic in origin, as the *mishkāṭ* and *miṣbāḥ* are drawn from the evocative metaphor of the “Light Verse,” Q24:35.⁵³ So too would any reader or listener familiar with the Light Verse recognize that the *nūr* which fills the lamp of the heart within the niche of the body is the light of

legacy of *'irfān* in an Iranian context, see: Ata Anzali, “The Safavid Opposition to Sufism,” in *“Mysticism” in Iran: The Safavid Roots of a Modern Concept*, Studies in Comparative Religion (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2017), 24–68. The stakes of *'irfān/ma'rifa* are also summarized in: Gerhard Böwering, “‘Erfan,” *EIr*. The political situation in the time of the Ṣafavid Shāh ‘Abbās I, and in particular the response of the monarchy to the periodic instability brought about by Qizilbāsh dissension and rebellion through the creation of a counterbalancing “third force” of the centralized *ghulām* corps, is discussed in: Roger Savory, *Iran Under the Safavids* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 76–82.

⁵² Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 108.

⁵³ Specifically, Āzarī is referencing the beginning of the verse, as rendered by Abdel Haleem, “God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. His light is like this: there is a niche, and in it a lamp...:” اللَّهُ نُورُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ

مَثَلُ نُورِهِ كَمِشْكَاةٍ فِيهَا مِصْبَاحٌ

God. Taken in isolation, the previous lines of this *ghazal* do not speak to the light of God or its relationship to the person. However, his brief and highly allusive *bayt* can be further understood through the creative reading of the Light Verse – in which the lamp of the niche is the human form, meaning that the light of God is kindled within each person – which also appears in the prose occult compendia of the *AMA* and *AJA* in the context of explaining the Disconnected Letters, the *Muqaṭṭa`āt*. This can be seen clearly in an excerpt near the end of the discussion of the *Muqaṭṭa`āt* in the *AMA*, which is reprised in the *AJA*:

This [emanation, *fayz*] is that sprinkling of the light of the essence, which is **God guides whoever He will to his Light**. The body is like the niche (*mishkāṭ*), and the vegetative soul (*rūḥ-i nabāṭī*), which is in the liver, is like the glass (*zujāja*). The animal soul (*rūḥ-i ḥayavānī*), which is in the heart, is in the abode of the wick. The sensual soul (*rūḥ-i nafsānī*), which is in the mind, is like oil, and so this oil is the light. As for the human soul (*nafs-i insānī*), upon it there are rays, and by this is there **light upon light**. As for the holy soul (*rūḥ-i quds*), it is attached to the human soul, and there is **light upon light**. In reality, it is all one light, which differs in stages according to the ascent of the names. In its stages, [they are] in the exegesis of **God is the light of the heavens and the earth**.⁵⁴

Though what appears in the *AMA* and *AJA* is far more detailed than the cited line of *ghazal*, it has largely added specifics to the general framework of the human being the vessel in which is kindled the emanating “light upon light” of God of the Light verse. This final line of the *ghazal*, then, functions as a brief allusion to a more technical concept dealt with elsewhere in the prose works of Āzarī.⁵⁵ While this *bayt*, and other *bayts* throughout the *ghazal* collection of Āzarī, can certainly be read against the prose works of the *AMA* and *AJA* to trace consistent threads across various works, such single lines are by definition highly allusive on their own, speaking coyly to matters that have been discussed in greater detail in other works. This is in contrast to the

⁵⁴ The portions of the text in bold are direct citations from Q24:35. Āzarī, *AMA*, 23b; *AJA*, 12b-13a.

⁵⁵ I have discussed this portion of the *AMA* in greater length elsewhere: Winters, “Reading the Book of Creation.”

extended *qaṣīdas* on matters “*irfān*,” which are worthy of their own more detailed analysis.

What will emerge from a closer investigation into this particular set of *ghazals* is the interest of Āzarī in a set of themes that might be considered classically *gnostic*, namely, the idea of a human luminous soul not merely being contrasted with the lower material nature of the body, but being *imprisoned* in a world of ignorance and materiality from which one might be freed by the pursuit of correct religious knowledge.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ There is a reasonable criticism that could be raised towards this line of thinking, namely, that what exactly “Gnosticism” should be imagined as constituting is not a fully settled matter even among scholars of what have been termed “gnostic traditions,” themselves. One might note, for example, the considerable range of attitudes with regard to personal practice, or in understanding the nature of the body and the soul, which exists among disparate movements all classed as “gnostic,” as discussed in Michael Allen Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism:” An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996). There is also the fact that to descriptively derive a definition of Gnosticism based on the various belief systems which have been constructed by those groups considered “gnostic” is to easily descend into circular reasoning. As noted by Matthew Twigg, the status of “Gnosticism” in the scholarly literature is such that one is obligated to define what, exactly, one means by “gnostic,” as mentioned in: Matthew Twigg, “The Mountain of Jericho in the Nag Hammadi ‘Apocalypse of Paul’: A Suggestion,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 69, no. 4 (2015): 423fn1. Following the lead of Twigg, for the practical purposes of this dissertation, I will put to use the practical definition of R. van den Broek that the thought of a gnostic movement would involve: “an esoteric... spiritual knowledge of God and of the divine origin and destination of the essential core of the human being which is based on revelation and inner enlightenment, the possession of which involves a liberation from the material world which holds humans captive.” See: R. van den Broek, *Gnostic Religion in Antiquity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 3. A similar definition may be found in the *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*, in which gnostics would be, “representatives of a much broader and variegated movement or type of religiosity ‘characterized by a strong emphasis on esoteric knowledge (gnosis) as the only means of salvation, which implied the return to one’s divine origin.’” Wouter J. Hanegraaff, ed., *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2006), 9. It is true that, per the immediately preceding citation, “Gnosticism” has a tradition of being academically linked with the study of Christianity, in the since-discarded method of envisioning a “Gnosticism” *in toto* which stood in opposition to the early Christian Church, and as such, one may also raise concerns over applying this same term to an Islamic context. I would argue that such a concern can be disregarded by virtue of Islam largely arising from the same broad period of Late Antiquity in which gnostic concepts thrived in the Afro-Eurasian *Oikoumene*, and the early Islamic conquests involving the rapid political expansion of the first generations of Islamic polities into many of the very lands in which these same gnostic movements had developed – particularly in the lands of modern day Iraq, where gnostic groups would still have been active at the time of the early Muslim conquests. Undoubtedly those concepts which fall under the definitions of “gnostic” above can be found in various strains of Islamic thought from a quite early date. For an overview of this topic, see: Heinz Halm, *Die islamische Gnosis: die extreme Schia und die ‘Alawiten*, Bibliothek Des Morgenlandes (Zürich: Artemis Verlag, 1982), 7-26. On gnostic concepts in early Ismā‘īlī Shī‘ī thought, see also, Heinz Halm, “The Cosmology of the Pre-Fatimid Isma‘īliyya,” in *Mediaeval Isma‘īli History and Thought*, ed. Farhad Daftary (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 75–83.

4.7 Gnosticism in the Poetry of Āzarī

To evaluate the presence of “gnostic” concepts in the verse writings of Āzarī, based on the definition cited above, the most pressing task is to closely examine works from his *dīvān* dealing with esoteric concepts which have not received sufficient or appropriate attention in the existing literature. Establishing this necessary textual context is essential, given the difficulty in the second task which will emerge: placing the gnostic works of Āzarī in a broader intellectual context, and considering the intellectual networks from which Āzarī may have derived the concepts which will be discussed here. The preceding chapters have demonstrated the difficulty in establishing specific intellectual and spiritual lineages for Āzarī beyond his own self-professed initiation into the Kubrawiyya Ṣūfī network, complete with an *uvaysī* spiritual descent from Sa‘d al-Dīn Ḥamuwayī.⁵⁷ The enthusiastic citations of Fażl Allāh Astarābādī throughout the *AMA* and *AJA*, explored in chapter 2, provide considerable hints as to the occult networks in which Āzarī found himself active throughout his life, but even these come without the sort of tangible evidence of interpersonal connections that would place Āzarī in specific inheritances of spiritual instruction. As such, what can be said about many of the intellectual affinities of Āzarī may not be derived from explicit statements from the author himself, but are nonetheless conclusions which can reasonably be drawn by carefully examining his written works. Through the course of two *qaṣīdas* and one extended *tarjī‘-band*, one will see both allusions and outright explication of gnostic concepts related to light and darkness, knowledge and ignorance, and the body and soul. After this examination of the actual textual evidence provided in select works from the *dīvān*, I will provide a brief discussion of where such gnostic ideals may theoretically be placed on the 9th/15th century Islamic occult intellectual scene.

⁵⁷ See the discussion of Āzarī and the Kubrawiyya throughout the preceding chapter.

4.8 *Qaṣīda* 5: On Wisdom, Theosophy, and Ethics

The most briefly allusive, but nonetheless highly significant, references to these gnostic themes in the work of Āzarī may be found in the fifth *qaṣīda* of his *dīvān*, *dar ḥikmat va 'irfān va akhlāq* (“on wisdom, theosophy, and ethics”). Though the editorial titling of this work is reasonable, as these are indeed the major topics of this *qaṣīda* which takes the form of Āzarī having a discourse with anthropomorphized Understanding, *khirad*, this particular piece of verse is largely filled with straightforward and predictable exhortations to pursue a moral life. One is encouraged to avoid the vices of avarice and cupidity, which burn more fiercely than fire itself, while avoiding the utter cold of those who would offer praise and worship to humanity, reminding the reader/listener that true fear and awe is to be reserved for God alone.⁵⁸ Bemoaning one’s innumerable sins and shortcomings while taking refuge in the mercy of God⁵⁹ certainly fits the tropes of what one would expect in such devotional and practical ethical literature. It is worth noting, though, that within such predictable pieces of spiritual advice come hints of a more developed view of the nature of the human soul and its position in the cosmos. In the midst of this discourse of ethical instruction, Āzarī is asked by Understanding to explain a more abstruse topic: the significance of “the secret of Khizr and the Waters of life in the darkness[es]” (*zi-sirr-i khizr va āb-i ḥayāt dar zulamāt*). The answer of Āzarī is that this is a straightforward metaphor, with the Water of Life being that knowledge which is hidden or not easily available (*'ilm-i nāpaydā*), surrounded by ignorance (*jahl*) and accessible through the guidance of Khizr, which is to say, the spiritual teacher of the path (*murshid-i rāh*).⁶⁰ Even in these two brief lines, one

⁵⁸ Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 22-3.

⁵⁹ Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 24.

⁶⁰ Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 22.

already can see an encapsulation of certain concepts which could reasonably held as gnostic. There is not just the association of knowledge with light and life, while ignorance is associated with darkness and death, though parallel constructions of these may certainly be found in earlier gnostic discourses. There is also the fact that knowledge is necessarily *hidden*, shrouded in darkness and not easily accessible except through the instruction of the master. The darkness of ignorance is also not merely a mental or theoretical construct for Āzarī, and on the contrary, can be associated with the suffering inherent to the struggle and strife of the material world:

When the veil and darkness of the world are lifted
So shall anguish and pain [be lifted] from humanity and the saints.⁶¹

Such a framework in this *qaṣīda* of Āzarī would seem to match the established gnostic dichotomy of materiality-ignorance-darkness being set apart from spirituality-knowledge-light. That being said, it should likewise be clear that such a handful of lines in a single *qaṣīda* are not sufficient alone to establish clear gnostic trends in the work of Āzarī, nor speak definitively about the manner in which his verse works may be in conversation with his prose. These few lines are rather, a starting point from which one may ask: are these cryptic gnostic allusions expanded upon in any greater detail in the other works of Āzarī?

4.9 Ascent of the Soul in the *Qaṣīda 'Urūjiyya*

A reasonable place to begin such an inquiry into the works from the corpus of Āzarī which contain a more developed gnostic system would be in his “ascent *qaṣīda*,” *qaṣīda-yi 'urūjiyya*. Not only has this work, too, been identified by the editors of the *dīvān* of Āzarī as addressing *ḥikmat va 'irfān*, but the title itself is a reference to the “night journey,” *mi 'rāj*, of the prophet Muḥammad, in which in the course of a single night the prophet ascended through the

⁶¹ *ḥijāb u zulmat-i dunyā gahī ki barkhīzād/darīgh u dard bar-āyad zi khalq u awliyā. Āzarī, Dīvān, 22.*

heavens and visited Jerusalem before returning to Mecca.⁶² Accordingly, the *‘urūjiyya* of Āzarī involves the account of a miraculous nighttime journey, only for the author to be abruptly returned to his original place, though with the benefit of having seen wondrous sites of the higher worlds. The *‘urjiyya* of Āzarī begins with the poet marveling at the movement of the heavens at the time of the evening prayer (*namāz-i shām*),⁶³ the revolutions of the bodies leading to Āzarī being mesmerized as if watching an endless sea (*man az ta ‘ajjub-i īn baħr-i bī-karān*), as though he himself were floating in a vessel of bewilderment on the depths (*darūn kishtī-yi ħayrat nashasta dar gharqāb*).⁶⁴ Inspired to deeper inquiry by such wonder at the beauty natural world, pondering who may have been its fashioner (*šāni ‘*) and emanator (*mubdi ‘*), the author suddenly found himself floating down the “waters of contemplation” as though he was a water-lily borne by the current, powerlessly ripped away from the sensory world (*‘ālam-i maħsūs*) in estrangement from it (*ghā‘ib*), and witness to the lifting of the veil of the world of form (*‘ālam-i šūrat*) in which humanity dwells in day-to-day life.⁶⁵ The emphasis upon *fikr* would seem to leave little doubt that this was not a physical journey for Āzarī, in which his body was supernaturally transported away from the sensory world in which he had dwelled just a moment ago. Rather, in bewilderment at the world of the spheres rotating above him and desirous of direct knowledge of their Fashioner, the consciousness of the author is jolted away from the physical body towards higher realms of being.

⁶² The development of this account over time and conflicting opinions as to both the specifics of the journey and whether it was a physical or visionary journey have been summarized in: B. Schrieke and J. Horovitz, “Mi‘rādī,” *EP*.

⁶³ Which is to say, the *maghrib* prayer.

⁶⁴ Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 42.

⁶⁵ *ba āb-i fikr furū-rafta sar chū nīlūfar/zi-fikr-i ‘ālam-i maħsūs chūn shudam ghā‘ib/ħijāb-i ‘ālam-i šūrat bi-shud zi-pīsh nazar. Āzarī, Dīvān*, 43.

Though the *urūjiyya* may begin with the flight of the soul away from the material bodily form, the journey laid out in this *qaṣīda* of Āzarī does not begin very auspiciously. In fact, the first experience of the now-disembodied author is that of a quite horrible scene. Looking upon a high arch (*gunbadī*), Āzarī witnessed four women hanging from each other (*āvīkhta bi yak dīgar*), in each of whose hands were four ropes (*chār kamand*). From these four women are birthed three male children, each of whom are immediately bound hand and foot by the terrifying (*bā-nahīb*) women and, after the women pull intensely from both above and below, nothing of these newly-born boys remained.⁶⁶ Reasonably terrified by witnessing such a scene, the luck of the narrator does not improve, as he himself falls into the same tangle of ropes of these “four Ahrimans, and four demons, and four vipers.”⁶⁷ Losing hope that he will escape and avoid the fate of the three young boys before him, the narrator cried out to the lord of all creation for help, and sure enough, a *deus ex machina* arrived in the form of a graceful youth (*javānī laṭīf*).⁶⁸ Encouraged by his newfound guide not to fear and to seize upon the ropes tied above him to his own benefit, the narrator is able to mount the dome in which he was suspended and push through a door to escape it, seeing before him a scene clearly alluding to the organization of the heavenly spheres, with seven additional domes, with a “rider” (a planet) upon each of these seven levels,

⁶⁶ Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 43.

⁶⁷ *chahār Ahriman u chahār dīv u chahār afī*, Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 43. The usage of Zoroastrian terminology for the negative cosmic principle, *Ahriman*, strikes me as more a stylistic decision by the composer of the poem than a statement of sympathy for Zoroastrian concepts, despite certain Zoroastrian concepts likewise mapping loosely (and imperfectly) upon gnostic viewpoints. As noted in Corbin, Zervanite elements of Zoroastrian thought could conflict with the gnostic worldview loosely defined above, for example, certain schools holding both Ahura Mazda and the contrary Ahriman as being unified through the Zervanite “mediat[or] between the duality of Light and Darkness,” as opposed to eternally contradictory hypostases. Henry Corbin, *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis* (London; Boston: Kegan Paul International in association with Islamic Publications Ltd., 1983), 20.

⁶⁸ Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 43.

along with 12 aspects (*manzar*) representing the 12 mansions of the Zodiac.⁶⁹ The heart of Āzarī is again seized with fear as the seven riders and four women engage in a tumultuous wedding banquet – “without dowry, and an unlawful bond” (*bī-mahr va nā-mashrū*) – sometimes debating (*munāzara*) and sometimes at truce (*āshī*), but fully absorbed in their “work” regardless (*budand jumla ba kār-i khūd*).⁷⁰ It is at this point in the *qaṣīda* that this more allusive style is discarded in favor of didactic exposition, as Āzarī escapes the troubling scene before him by climbing a tree shown to him by his youthful companion, passing level by level past the heavenly spheres, and passing into the abode of the Pure Light (*nūr-i pāk*), which is to say, the paradisaical domain of the Pure Soul (*rūh-i munazza*), where he is able to ask this being to explain exactly what it was that he witnessed.⁷¹ In what will prove an important piece of evidence for the thought of Āzarī, this scene which horrified him so terribly was in close correspondence to the material world: the four women would be the four elements, their ropes the four natures (*ṭab*),⁷² the seven riders the seven planets, the 12 celestial aspects the mansions of the Zodiac, and the youthful guide the human intellect (*‘aql*).⁷³ There can be little mystery as to the author’s intention regarding the exact correspondences between the allusion presented and

⁶⁹ Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 44. One is reminded of the “missionary of the Middle Ages” in the well-known engraving included in *L’atmosphère* of Camille Flammarion, in which a figure has pushed his head beyond the barrier separating earthly realms from the heavenly. Camille Flammarion, *L’atmosphère: météorologie populaire* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1888).

⁷⁰ Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 44.

⁷¹ Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 44-5.

⁷² Or, *ṭabī‘a/ṭibā‘*. Reading these four *ṭab* in parallel with the four elements, these would be the four natures of hot, cold, moist, and dry. See the discussion of these in the Islamic alchemical tradition: S. Nomanul Haq and D. Pingree, “Ṭabī‘a,” *EP*.

⁷³ Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 45. The three children generated and destroyed by the elemental mothers are not precisely defined, though as all facets of creation were borne through them (*ki mī-shavand mavālīd rā hama mādar*), one might suppose they are the three kingdoms of the mineral, vegetative, and animal.

the material world: in this understanding, the physical world is one of strife and dispute, with the very elements which bear out created beings simultaneously destroying them in terrifying fashion. Noticing the transitory nature of life in the realm of growth and decay in contrast to the permanence of the afterlife would not be exceptional in itself, though one must note the intense revulsion and fear towards material reality which permeates this discussion found in the *qaṣīda* ‘*urūjiyya*, itself a hallmark of certain strains of gnostic thought.

Though the resentment of the material world on display in this *qaṣīda* is notable in illuminating the thought of Āzarī, his pursuant conversation with the Pure Soul will provide far more distinguishing intellectual signifiers than simply a hostility towards this transient, mundane world. After all, a suspicion of the sensual world can be found in any other number of far earlier works of different genres, whether these be books of *zuhd* or general ethical exhortations in the Ṣūfī tradition to keep one’s gaze fixed on the ultimate reality of the afterlife.⁷⁴ What is more important than finding the process of generation and decay inherently off-putting is what knowledge Āzarī professed to have gained from higher realms. The Pure Soul to whom he has been delivered through the guidance of his own intellect explained that this soul, itself, may be designated the *khalīfat Allāh*, the “source of all creation,”⁷⁵ and the macrocosmic caliph in whose person Ādam served as a microcosmic reflection.⁷⁶ Even these designators, exalted as they may be, are added to the “great book” (*kitāb-i a ʿzam*), the “tablet of decree” (*lawḥ-i qazā*), and “the pen of the ordained” (*kilk-i qadar*).⁷⁷ As the “great Ādam/human,” *ādam-i kabīr*, this figure

⁷⁴ For an overview of *zuhd*, see: Leah Kinberg, “What Is Meant by Zuhd,” *Studia Islamica* 61 (1985): 27–44.

⁷⁵ *man-am kitāb-i hama-yi ‘ālam-i kā’ināt-rā maṣḍar*

⁷⁶ Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 45.

⁷⁷ Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 45.

serves as the personification of the macrocosmic, superlunar world, which by definition may be understood through examination of the microcosmic, sublunar world of the “minor Ādam/human,” *ādam-i ṣaghīr*. One will note that there is an intertextual concordance in the language used by Āzarī to discuss the reflected macrocosm as appeared also in the *AMA*:

The Book of Creation is a copy and draft of the Book of Attributes [*kitāb-i ṣifāt*], such that whatever is in the Mother of the Book [*umm al-kitāb*], which is the Book of Names and Attributes [*kitāb-i asmā' va-ṣifāt*], is in the Book of Creation – which is a second Mother of the Book, and the Clear Book [*kitāb mubīn*], and the Well-Guarded Tablet [*lawḥ mahfūz*]. Whatever is in the Book of Creation is in the Qur'ān: *fresh or withered, that is not written in the Clear Book.*⁷⁸

Though not identical in usage, those areas of repetition – the tablet, the book, and the connection between creation, *kā'ināt*, and this recorded heavenly book – would seem to show a constancy between the Pure Soul of the *qaṣīda 'urūjiyya* and the *umm al-kitāb* of the *AMA*. In fact, after building a certain amount of anticipation through such increasingly potent signifiers, the *qaṣīda 'urūjiyya* reveals that the pure soul of light guiding Āzarī is none other than the light of the prophet Muḥammad, himself, the most exalted of beings in the spiritual hierarchy.⁷⁹ In other words, Āzarī is nodding here to the well-known convention in Islamic discourse related to the high status of the light of Muḥammad, the *nūr muḥammadī*, and indeed, its pre-existence and functioning as a “cosmological creative principle.”⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Āzarī, *AMA*, 20a.

⁷⁹ Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 46-7.

⁸⁰ On collected early reports on the light of Muḥammad, see two articles of Uri Rubin: Uri Rubin, “Pre-Existence and Light: Aspects of the Concept of Nūr Muḥammad,” in *Israel Oriental Studies, Vol 5* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv Univ, 1975), 62–119; Uri Rubin, “More Light on Muḥammad’s Pre-Existence: Qur’ānic and Post-Qur’ānic Perspectives,” in *Books and Written Culture of the Islamic World* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 288–311. On the development of the concept through the 7th/13th century, see: Khalil Andani, “Metaphysics of Muhammad: The Nur Muhammad from Imam Ja‘far al-Sadiq (d. 148/765) to Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (d. 672/1274),” *Journal of Sufi Studies* 8, no. 2 (2019): 99–175.

There is a certain unease, though, which still is generated by this intertextuality, and indeed, the invocation of the microcosm/macrocosm: if creation is a reflection of the *umm al-kitāb*, then how can materiality and the process of generation and decay be viewed with such misery? While Āzarī, to my knowledge, did not invoke any sort of disobedient demiurgic creator to resolve the matter, the following sections of the text will be show this ambiguity to be addressed through the ambivalence at the heart of humanity itself, capable of both virtuous and condemnable behavior. Consider the following lines, even more relevant to the poetics of Āzarī and their relationship to his occult compendia, consisting of a discourse of this macrocosmic soul of pure light, the guiding spirit of the prophet Muḥammad, on the relationship between right action in the world and pursuant reward in the world to come.

Whosoever does not achieve the attainment of perfection
 In this palace, such as the defiled soul of one of the nonbelievers
 After separation from the [human] body, it is of animal stock
 It has no share in the court of the holy
 Nor are opened unto its face the fields of holiness
 Its halter drawn down like an animal to his most base
 If it were so that [another] achieved perfect faith
 He may leave his reins, towards his sublime world
 Thus passing after the separation from the body to the world of holiness
 Arriving at the world of light from the world of darkness.⁸¹

Beyond the recurrence of the gnostic undertones of the escape from the darkness of materiality to the light of sublimity, one is struck by what seems to be a classical understanding of the transmigration of souls, *tanāsukh*. One will recall from the previous chapter that Āzarī was well-versed in debate over *tanāsukh* in an Islamic context, drawing from both the writings of ‘Azīz Nasafī and the earlier discourse of Ibn Sīnā on the status of the soul after death. What appears in this poetic fragment is, in fact, again a reflection of what might be found in the *AMA* and *AJA*:

⁸¹ Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 46.

the provocative argument that reincarnation for the human soul may involve iterations of existence at nonhuman levels. While the occult compendia of Āzarī did include a certain amount of hesitance about fully endorsing the concept of *tanāsukh* – though with a presentation of the topic that hardly singled it out for censure – here it is the light of Muḥammad itself which is proclaiming the rise and fall of the status of the soul after its separation from the human body. It would seem that there is strong reason to consider Āzarī as sympathetic to a belief in the cyclic transmigration of the human soul through the various levels of the material world.

Though enlivened by this meeting with the light of Muḥammad, this is, in fact, a relatively early stage in the ascent of Āzarī which, as will shortly be seen, must pass ultimately through the four worlds of *nāsūt*, *malakūt*, *jabarūt*, and *lāhūt*. It is only through direct appeal to God that Āzarī finds himself again ascending to a higher stage of existence, the world of *jabarūt*, and again with a unique guide, this time the very embodiment of divine love, *‘ishq ilahī*.⁸² Encouraged by the prophet Muḥammad, who accompanied Āzarī to this stage, Love welcomes Āzarī into his tent, an allegorical symbol of the entrance into a state of bewilderment. What Āzarī experienced at this point was not the gloomy darkness of materiality or redemptive power of light, but a full breakdown of dichotomies: neither light nor darkness, honey and vinegar taking on the same flavor, Fir‘awn and Mūsā setting aside their old enmities.⁸³ Asking Love what such a place could exist, Love explains that it is the *‘ālam-i jabarūt*, where the descriptive dualities of unbelief and faith or pride and shame lose their meaning in the face of the approach towards the unicity of God.⁸⁴ This would seem to be an easily-recognizable reference to

⁸² Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 48.

⁸³ Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 48.

⁸⁴ *dar-ū chi kufr u chi imān dar-ū chi fakhr u chi ‘ār* Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 48.

expression of the limits of the linguistic definitions of the contingent world when set against the overpowering truth of higher metaphysical realms as had been seen in the Islamic tradition previously.⁸⁵ In verse, this line of Āzarī’s could easily be placed alongside Rūmī’s fly in the yogurt of eternity, which having arrived at that stage could no longer be called Christian or Muslim, Zoroastrian or Jewish.⁸⁶ Given, particularly, the relatively frequent citations of Ibn ‘Arabī throughout the *AMA* and *AJA*, the philosophical underpinnings of the situation described here by Āzarī are likely informed by the understanding of *tawhīd*, divine unity, which may be found in the writings of *al-Shaykh al-Akbar*. This rejection of dichotomies, evocative of the *via negativa* of the earlier Jewish and Christian theologians,⁸⁷ would see in the Necessary Being, the *wājib al-wujūd*, “such utter nondelimitation that it is not delimited by nondelimitation.”⁸⁸ With the ascent towards the highest worlds, which is to say those most exalted and sublime, comes not only the need to rely on love rather than reason, but indeed, to accurately perceive that the limitations so inherent to a world of growth and decay would lose their explanatory power in higher realms.

⁸⁵ Many early examples could be raised, but consider such well-known examples in the Ṣūfī ecstatic tradition as Maṣṣūr Ḥallāj (d. 309/922) or al-Niffārī (d. 366/976-7). On the account of Ḥallāj, see: ‘Aṭṭār, *Tazkirat al-Awliyā’*, 114-123. For al-Niffārī, see: Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Jabbār Niffārī, *al-Mawāqif wa-al-Mukhāṭabāt*, ed. A. J. Arberry (Cairo: al-Hay’a al-Miṣriyya al-‘Āmma lil-Kitāb, 1405 [1985]).

⁸⁶ *magas-i rūḥ ki dar-uftād dar īn dūgh-i abad/na muslimān u na tarsā u na gabr u na juhūd*. Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, *Ghazal* #790. <https://ganjoor.net/moulavi/shams/ghazalsh/sh790>

⁸⁷ For a broad overview of negative theology across traditions, consult: Deirdre Carabine, *The Unknown God. Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition: Plato to Eriugena* (Louvain: Peeters, 1995). On the well-known negative theology of Pseudo-Dionysius, as well as useful references to additional academic literature on negative theology broadly: see: Jeffrey Fisher, “The Theology of Dis/Similarity: Negation in Pseudo-Dionysius,” *The Journal of Religion* 81, no. 4 (October 2001): 529–48.

⁸⁸ William Chittick, “Ibn ‘Arabī,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, n.d., <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/ibn-arabi/>.

With the conclusion of the *qaṣīda* ‘*urūjiyya*’ of Āzarī came not only an ascent to the highest of the fourfold spheres of existence as one might find in the writings of Simnānī, but a confrontation of the full implications of *tawḥīd* and the relationship between God and the believer. It would be in the highest realm of *lāhūt* that the once-illustrative Pure Light, *nūr-i pāk*, ceased to be of use for understanding (*dār-yābī*), as the very concept of distinctive understanding was melted away in the overwhelming unicity of the divine:

The fire of Unity burnt away my name and custom
 The form of the image of others left my sight
 When I did not remain, and I saw that I was all things
 The same veil of the seeking of knowledge was the forbidding of sight

 I saw by my own eye myself in the mirror
 Understand that there is nothing else I would have said.⁸⁹

After such an enigmatic statement, Āzarī found himself ripped away from the ascent of his heart, ‘*urūj-i dil*, and returned to his bed. Why, at this point in the *qaṣīda*, after such freely-given discourse, did Āzarī find himself turning mute? A likely cause is the fact that in this moment of pure *tawḥīd*, when everything except the unicity of God had been burnt away with divine fire, Āzarī saw that he “was all things,” *jumla man būdam*. Is this not approaching the territory of Maṣṣūr Ḥallāj, who would become iconic in the construction of Ṣūfī discourse as an early figure who spoke too freely of the implications of becoming lost in *tawḥīd*? Āzarī did not exactly state, as in the case of Ḥallāj, “I am the Truth,” *anā al-ḥaqq*, the statement for which Ḥallāj was persecuted and lost his life.⁹⁰ However, the fact that at the moment when he had arrived at the realm of the *lāhūt* and the essence of God he saw nothing reflected but his own self, saw himself

⁸⁹ *bi-sūkhāt ātash-i tawḥīd ism u rasm-i marā/bi-raft az naẓar-am naqsh-i šūrāt-i aghyār/chū man namāndam u dīdam ki jumla man būdam/hamān hijāb-i ṭalab būd māni ‘-i dīdār *** ba chashm-i kh’īsh dar āyina kh’īsh-tan rā dīdam/tu fahm kun ki digar nīst ḥājāt-i guftār. Āzarī, Dīvān, 49.*

⁹⁰ Farīd al-Dīn ‘Attār *Taẓkirat al-Awliyā*, 114-123.

as equivalent to “all things,” and shorty clarified that “whatever is other than the essence of God is mere fancy,”⁹¹ this would not seem to be all that different than the all-consuming loss of the self as experienced in the true perception of *tawhīd* as famously expressed by Ḥallāj. This would be in keeping with what was seen in the previous chapter, in which Āzarī – despite opening his earliest work of the *AMA* with the assurance that he would state openly what once had been reserved for innuendo or symbolic expression⁹² – opted for a certain amount of discretion around topics which might draw particular ire from his contemporaries, whether this was regarding the *ahl-i tanāsukh*, or the perception of unity brought on by his heart’s journey to the highest worlds of existence.

What is curious about the *qaṣīda ‘urūjīyya* is not the idea of a Ṣūfī visionary experience or the perception in a moment of religious ecstasy that the self had become lost in the overwhelming experience of the ecstasy of *tawhīd*. Rather, it is the fact that the work concludes with what first appears to be a softening of approach seen in the earliest lines of this verse work towards the material world. Rather than reiterating what had been expressed in the earliest sections of the visionary experience, in which the material world took on a frightening and repulsive form, Āzarī concluded his work by explaining that the “world of bodies is the house of the Truth,” *‘ālam-i ajsām khāna-yi haqq ast*. There is then an extended metaphor in which the world of humanity is now transformed into a mansion, with the earth as the courtyard of this abode, the angels as the dutiful servants, the planets and stars serving as lamps and candles, and where the human being is the guest.⁹³ This would certainly seem in line with any number of

⁹¹ *ba ghayr-i zāt-i khudā hast pindār ast*. Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 49.

⁹² Āzarī, *AMA*, 12a-12b.

⁹³ Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 49.

exhortations to not become too attached to the material world, as one is merely a guest passing through, but it is hardly the image of the world of growth and decay as that of a set of terrifying women and their argumentative partners. The previous chapter has shown Āzarī to periodically take a position of discretion with regard to his intellectual positions, and this might appear a similar retreat from the world-rejecting characteristic of certain strains of gnostic thought. The final lines of this *qaṣīda*, particularly in taking the previous lines in which the earthly world is an abundant manor at the service of humanity, would have Āzarī taking a more world-affirming approach to his subject:

Since you [, listener,] are a guest and neighbor to God,
Be not the shadow of wicked neighbors
Especially, as the neighbor of God,
Be as the shadow from the foot of the Neighbor as He walks
As a suitable offering for this guest of this house
In respect and courtesy, oh Lord, I have addressed you in fear
Generous of lords, we are as your guests
The profits of your generosity reach us all together.⁹⁴

This approach to the lowest, human level of existence – to walk in the path of God, receive His grace, and act as a “good neighbor” to the divine while a temporary guest – would not seem out of line with much pietistic writing in Islamic thought. How, then, to reconcile this conclusion with the signs of a more gnostic approach to the material world, which are easily perceptible in other places in the poetry of Āzarī? An analogous solution may perhaps be drawn from the prose works of Āzarī, which both reinforce the gnostic themes on display at certain points in his verse, while at other times considering pathways of interpretation which have little or no relation with typological “Gnosticism.” By the same token, the panegyric, esoteric works of Āzarī, while having certain easily-recognizable themes, maintain a certain multivariate approach. Of course,

⁹⁴ Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 49-50.

as with the *AMA* and *AJA*, certain notable themes can nonetheless be sifted out through an otherwise variegated approach to cosmological questions. After all, even if the mansion of the material world is well-appointed for the existence of humanity, one must never forget that they are merely a guest in this world, and the mansion must someday be departed.

4.10 The Imprisonment of the Soul: the *Tarjī*'-band on the Theosophical Journey

Finally, alongside the search for the hidden knowledge, *'ilm-i nāpaydā*, in *qaṣīda* 5 of *Āzarī*, and the journey of the soul beyond the narrow physical confines of the body in the *qaṣīda* *'urjīyya*, the 14th *qaṣīda* of the *dīvān*, perhaps the most explicit invocation of gnostic cosmological concepts may be found in the single *tarjī*'-band of the *dīvān*, *tarjī*'-band *dar siyar va sulūk-i 'irfānī* (*on the theosophical journey and path*). Organized into 14 sections, each of which conclude with the same refrain – “Oh, light of the morning of pre-eternity, glow!/Until I have taken the path to the first resting-place”⁹⁵ – this work addresses in clear terms the nature of the soul and its position in the cosmos in a way that fits aptly with the previously-discussed *qaṣīdas*, and which speaks directly to themes which figured throughout the *AMA* and *AJA*. In what little literature exists on the verse works of *Āzarī*, the *tarjī*'-band has received little to no attention, despite its utility in understanding the gnostic themes which underlie much of the philosophical discourses of *Āzarī*. For example, in one of the modern biographies of *Āzarī*, *Shaykh Āzarī-yi Isfarāyinī: Aḥvāl va Ash 'ār* (*Shaykh Āzarī-yi Isfarāyinī: [Life] Events and Poetry*), this poem is described as “in praise of ‘Alī [b. Abī Ṭālib], peace be upon him” (*dar madḥ-i ḥazrat 'Alī, alayhi al-salām*), and is reprinted in full.⁹⁶ It is a reasonable expectation that the work would be devoted to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, given how frequently ‘Alī and the rest of the 12

⁹⁵ *bar-afrūz ay chirāgh-i ṣubḥ-i azal/tā bīram rah ba manzil-i avval*

⁹⁶ Muḥammad ‘Alī Vuṣūqī, *Shaykh Āzarī-yi Isfarāyinī: Aḥvāl va Ash 'ār*, 65-78.

Shī‘ī imams are praised throughout the *qaṣīdas* of Āzarī, and Āzarī’s own periodic Shī‘ī affiliation.⁹⁷ I would argue, though, that this framing is ultimately mistaken, given that the *tarjī‘-band* includes no explicit discussion of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib in general, nor his position as imam in the view of the Shī‘a or his *wilāya* (sainthood/authority) as one might expect in Shī‘ī devotional writing. This conclusion of Vuṣūqī is likely drawn from the first line of the strophic work itself:

Love is the gate, oh First among Intellectuals
So open [it], oh key of the gates!⁹⁸

The key word which would lead to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib would be the “gate,” *bāb*, to which this first line obliquely refers. One might recall the well-known *ḥadīth* which would be popular particularly among the Shī‘ī traditionists, namely, Muḥammad having been reported to have said, “I am the city of knowledge, and ‘Alī is its gate. Whoever desires knowledge, let him pass through its gate.”⁹⁹ Given the actual content of the work, however, there is little on which to base an assertion that this opening line was a sign to interpret the work as in praise of ‘Alī, at least in the external meaning of the text. This is also reinforced by reading across the poetic works of Āzarī themselves, as the *‘urūjiyya* examined above uses *mufattiḥ al-abwāb* as an honorific for God, not for ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.¹⁰⁰ As will be seen, this *tarjī‘-band* itself is hardly cloaked in mystery as to its being a vehicle to express the ultimately gnostic view of the cosmos which can be traced throughout much of the work of Āzarī. It will be worth considering this third piece of

⁹⁷ Note the many devotional Shī‘ī poems in Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 1-87. On the dubious confessional attachments of Āzarī and his functioning in many practical ways as both Sunnī and Shī‘ī, see the previous chapter.

⁹⁸ *‘ishq bābī-st yā ūlū al-ālbāb/fa-aftaḥū yā mufattiḥ al-abwāb*. Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 89.

⁹⁹ *anā madīnat al-‘ilm wa-‘Alī bābuhā fa-man arād al-‘ilm fa-la-ya‘tiḥ min bābiḥi*. For the tradition as listed here, see: Yūsuf b. ‘Abd Allāh Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *al-Istī‘āb fī Ma‘rifat al-Aṣḥāb*, ed. ‘Alī Muḥammad Bajjāwī, vol. 3 (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1412 [1992]), 1102.

¹⁰⁰ Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 47.

verse, as it reveals perhaps the clearest explanation the material and spiritual realms as may be found throughout the poetic works of Āzarī. With this stanzaic work analyzed alongside both the previous panegyric works, as well as the *AMA* and *AJA*, one will be able to draw certain overall conclusions as to the positions held by Āzarī as he passed from court to court in the 9th/15th century.

Before highlighting certain elements of this *tarjīʿ-band* which display such themes as the imprisonment of the luminous soul in an inimical, dirty world of materiality, one might first note the refrain itself, inherent to this poetic form. One may already expect certain gnostic themes from the end of the first stanza:

Oh, light of the morning of pre-eternity, glow!
Until I have taken the path to the first resting-place.¹⁰¹

It is not merely significant that the oft-repeated refrain invokes light imagery, though, naturally, light imagery would exist in gnostic (and other esoteric) discourse. More important will prove the “taking of the path,” the journey of the soul (*rūḥ*) from its current, humble status back to the ultimate source of existence, the *manzil-i avval*. The key is, in fact, that the movement of the soul is not merely an *ascent* back to the divine, but is necessitated by its previous *descent* from a more exalted position. The early stanzas of the *tarjīʿ-band* establish a well-known emanatory framework of existence through a discussion of “mansions,” *manzils*, with this first *manzil* being the site of undifferentiated existence of the essence of God, *zāt-i khudā*, where there exists the cloud (*ʿamā*), a salient and well-known metaphor in Shīʿī and Ṣūfī discourse for the “veil” between the pure and unknowable existence of the unrestricted divine and the tangible, material

¹⁰¹ Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 89.

world of humanity.¹⁰² It is only with the second stage of multiplicity (*kaṣrat*) that there become any “things” (*ashyā*) which could rightfully be considered to have been made distinct (*mufaṣṣal*) from what was previously an undifferentiated divine essence.¹⁰³ One will note that this differentiation is achieved through the making-distinct of the letters of the alphabet, the *hurūf*, just as one would see the expansion of the essential point into the 32 attributes (*ṣifāt*) in Ḥurūfī discourse.¹⁰⁴ This lettrist differentiation brings with it, too, the issuing forth of a veritable army of soul[s], *lashkar-i rūḥ*, bound into the garb of (physical) form (*libās-i ṣūrat*), drowned in the sensible world (*shud gharaq-i ‘ālam-i maḥsūs*), and reduced to bearing the burdens of the created world (*takālīf-i shahr-i ‘ālam-i khalq*).¹⁰⁵ Already in the earliest stanzas of this work, Āzarī has expressed an emanatory framework of the universe (itself present in the *AMA* and *AJA*) and viewed the coming into being of material creation as being closely linked with the differentiation of the divine essence into its attributes, which is to say, the 32 Persian letters. However, these familiar themes from the prose works of Āzarī are paired with what could only be considered a deep alienation from the world of materiality, and what will prove a consistent theme of urging the once-exalted soul to cast off its shackles of the material world and return to its source.

¹⁰² Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 90. Note the discussions of the cosmological significance of the “cloud” (whether *‘amā*, *ghammām*, or other designations of cloud, covering, and shadow) in Shī‘ī and Sūfī discourse in the recent article: Ali Ashraf Emami and Vali Abdi, “The Appearance of the Lord in the Clouds in Shī‘ī and Sūfī Writings,” *Journal of Shi‘a Islamic Studies* 13, no. 1–2 (2020): 313–42. For example, the concept was important among followers of Ibn ‘Arabī, as the *‘amā* as veil between absolute and contingent worlds would appear in the writings of Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 673/1274), while ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī (d. 730/1329) found in the *‘amā* “an essence that exists prior to the revelation of the esoteric dimension in the form of [divine] names.” See in particular Emami and Abdi, “Lord in the Clouds,” 323–324.

¹⁰³ Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 90.

¹⁰⁴ *kaṣrat-i khalq dar ḥurūf-i hijā*. See the discussion of the relationship between the Ḥurūfīyya and the thought of Āzarī in Chapter 2.

¹⁰⁵ Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 90.

The need for a “return” to the source of creation, as well as the material world being a site of imprisonment, are not overdetermined assumptions based on Āzarī’s previous gnostic expressions, but rather may be drawn from his very work.¹⁰⁶ In fact, the soul/*rūḥ* does not even seem to begin in human form at all, but rather, finds itself first as an animal (*ḥayavān*), experiencing “one hundred thousand innumerable veils” (*ṣad hazārān ḥijāb-i nā-ma`dūd*) before even arriving at humanity.¹⁰⁷ Perhaps the hesitation regarding the transmigration of souls, *tanāsukh*, seen in the previous chapter was not intellectual uncertainty, but merely discretion in expression. Even the re-ascent of the soul from its initial descending (*tanazzul*) through the ranks of the animal kingdom to that of humanity is not a praiseworthy site of existence: the individual finds herself “imprisoned” (*maḥbūs*), a “stranger in this country and land,” (*gharīb an-dar īn diyār va bilād*), a soul wearing the “garment of affliction” (*kisvat-i balā*).¹⁰⁸ Reiterating the cosmological structure of the four worlds, *lāhūt*, *jabarūt*, *malakūt*, and *nāsūt*, Āzarī saw the status of humanity in its material realms as akin to being “prisoners in the trunk of the heavens,” or as “the corpse in the coffin.”¹⁰⁹ To be subject to birth in the material realm is to be confronted by the pounding waves of the “sea of the lower soul (*nafs*) and desire,”¹¹⁰ ensnared within the baser realms of pure desire and sensualism, only able to escape through discipline with the aim of control over the self (*qudrat-i khūd*).¹¹¹ It is necessary to discuss this contempt for the world at

¹⁰⁶ Āzarī will shortly describe the material world as “this prison,” *īn zindān*. Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 96.

¹⁰⁷ Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 90.

¹⁰⁸ Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 92.

¹⁰⁹ *mā ba ṣandūq-i āsmān maḥbūs/rāst chūn mayyitīm dar tābūt*. Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 93.

¹¹⁰ *mawj-zan gash baḥr-i nafs u havā*.

¹¹¹ Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 93-4.

such length due to Āzarī eventually addressing both its diagnosis and cure in the ninth stanza of the work. The issue of the material world is that of finding oneself in specifically the darkness of ignorance, subject to the whims of the *nafs* in this realm and hopelessly reduced to the vanity of temporal existence. This may seem to be merely a nod towards the well-known impulses towards renunciation seen in many pietistic strains of Islam, whether the Ṣūfīs or the followers of *zuhd* (self-denial, renunciation of the world).¹¹² The key, though, is the solution to this state, which is not found in eating little, abjuring sleep in favor of prayer, wearing rough clothing, or zealous pursuit of the ritual necessities of Islamic practice. Relief, rather, is found in knowledge, *‘ilm*:

Oh, camel driver, may you sound the drum of travel
So that we may go out towards the house of knowledge.¹¹³

This would seem, in other words, a more internal drive towards the development of one’s faculties, rather than the external path of renunciation. The drive towards knowledge and understanding will prove to be of utmost importance as the *tarjī‘-band* approaches its climax.

After a brief stanza on the ultimate unity of God, the source of all reality and the seed from which the roots and branches of the world stem, finally Āzarī turned again to ultimate significance of religious knowledge and its importance in grasping higher spiritual realms. For while the “city of *‘ilm*” is of great importance as a stopping-place on the path to escaping the bonds of the world, so too is it not the ultimate destination. The *shahr-i ‘ilm* could be considered as equivalent to the “station of the attributes,” *maqām-i ṣifāt*, and thus still in a lower stage of divine differentiation. Beyond the realm of knowledge one progresses in the direction of unity, passing through the source of created beings in the square of power (*‘arṣa-yi qudrat*), and the

¹¹² On the challenges of defining *zuhd* and a collection of early reports related to *zuhd*, see: Leah Kinberg, “What Is Meant by Zuhd.”

¹¹³ *bi-zan ay sār-bān tu ṭabl-i raḥīl/tā sū-yi khāna bar-kashīm ‘ilm. Āzarī, Dīvān, 94.*

country of the authority of the soul (*kishvar-i vilāyat-i jān*), which is the realm of command and restriction (*amr u nahī*).¹¹⁴ While there is little explication of these realms, those “cities” beyond these are given designations which, in light of what has been seen in the occult works of Āzarī, are of greater importance that might first be assumed. It is the city of gathering, *shahr-i jam*, which is the source of the “words” (*kalimāt*) and the ultimate storehouse of knowledge (*shahr-i ilm*). Beyond *ilm*, then, one has the kingdom of sight (*mulk-i baṣar*), the upper-worldly mirror of created forms (*ṣūrat-i kā'ināt rā mir'āt*), followed by the kingdom of speech (*mulk-i kalām*), which possesses “speech and words as though a pen case” (*kalimāt u ḥurūf rā chū davāt*).¹¹⁵ Knowing what has been seen quite clearly regarding the Ḥurūfī tendencies of Āzarī, arriving at the realm of the letters would bring one to the first stage of cosmological differentiation, the point (*nuqṭa*) splitting into the letters, which is to say, the “metalanguage” most closely approximated by the 32 Persian letters. What is curious at this stage of the *tarjī'-band* is not the presence of subtle allusions to Ḥurūfī doctrine or the ascent of the soul up the stages of creation, both of which have been seen throughout even the earliest prose works of Āzarī. More novel is that this poetic work, having finally brought the reader/listener to the threshold of divine unity after climbing the ranks of the cosmos, will soon take a far gloomier stance towards this same material existence which, in the previously-discussed *qaṣīda*, were the servants and helpers of all humanity.

It is in the *tarjī'-band* under discussion that perhaps the clearest articulation of recognizably gnostic concepts, specifically related to the soul, the material world, and the

¹¹⁴ Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 95.

¹¹⁵ Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 95.

properties of light and darkness, may be seen in the entire written corpus of Āzarī. Consider the following lines from the 11th and 12th stanzas of this work:

From what [condition] have I fallen into this prison?
Where, oh You to whom help is begged, is the path to salvation?
Hell has come as separation from the companion and his lands,
[But] when was hell fixed and established?

We are luminous, from those worlds,
Not from these gloomy rubbish-piles
We were travelers in the fields of holiness
Where are we now? And [with] beastly attributes?¹¹⁶

Following even the more expansive readings of the aforementioned typological definitions of “gnosticism,” there are a number of characteristics of even these short lines which would seem to fall into this category easily. There is not merely a dismissive nature towards the material world as inferior to the world to come – surely present in many pietistic discourses – but a feeling of the material world as fundamentally a form of imprisonment. The light-based soul, once pure in the higher realms of existence, has quite literally fallen into a state in which it is beset by animalistic characteristics, no longer a happy wanderer in the fields of holiness. It also cannot escape one’s attention that, once more, Āzarī seems to be nodding towards the beliefs of the *ahl-i tanāsukh* in his discussion of hell, the *dūzakh*. As noted in the previous chapter, Āzarī drew heavily from the collected epistles of ‘Azīz Nasafī in understanding how the latter understood the beliefs of the “people of transmigration,” including the fact that they would identify the material world and the cycle of rebirths as itself the hell out of which souls are striving to escape.¹¹⁷ It would not seem a leap in reasoning to pair the discussion of Āzarī earlier in the *tarjī‘-band* as to

¹¹⁶ *az chi uftādam an-dar īn zindān/ayna yā musta‘ān ṭarīq-i najāt/dūzakh āmad firāq-i yār u diyār/kay ba dūzakh būd qarār u ṣabāt *** mā az ān ‘ālam-īm nūrānī/na az īn khākdān ṣulmānī/rahravān-i ḥaḥā‘ir-i quds-īm/mā kujā u ṣifāt-i ḥayavānī. Āzarī, Dīvān, 96.*

¹¹⁷ ‘Azīz Nasafī, *Kitāb al-Insān al-Kāmil*, 410-11.

the progress of the soul through the lower realms, with his exasperation as to the *dūzakh* brought on by the breaking of the soul from its higher worlds and being deposited into the darkness and muck of materiality, and note once again that he seems to not only be recognizing the ideals of the *ahl-i tanāsukh*, but approving of certain elements of them. To see oneself as a luminous soul, individuated despite a previous existence in unity with the holy light of the higher metaphysical realms, and literally imprisoned in the darkness and shade of the material world, is a position that would place Āzarī in the close company of many movements which have themselves been identified as gnostic.¹¹⁸ In keeping with the nature of “Gnosticism” as a concept, it should not be understood that Āzarī accepted *every* concept that one might attribute to one group or another which has historically been given the label “gnostic.” There is, for example, none of the indulgence in the senses of the Carpocratians – this would almost certainly be seen as making allowances for the most “animalistic” characteristics of humanity – while the very questioning of Āzarī as to, “when was hell fixed?” is not answered with any sort of recourse to a demiurge as material creator.¹¹⁹ This, however, does not itself contradict the fact of the matter that this *tarjī*‘-

¹¹⁸ These antithetical conceptions of light and darkness, as well as their mixture being core to the cosmic drama of certain strains of gnostic thought, is discussed in the work of Hans Jonas: Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), 57-8. In the schema of Jonas, this particular form took its “most emphatic and doctrinally important use... in what we shall call the Iranian strain of Gnosticism, which is also one component of Mandaean thought.” For notable examples of the gnostic conception of light and darkness in both the Hermetic tradition and Manichaeism, see: Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, 147-73; 206-37.

¹¹⁹ On the legend of the Carpocratians as antinomians *par excellence*, one may note their hostile treatment by Irenaeus: Irenaeus of Lyon, *Libros Quinque Adversus Haereses*, ed. W.W. Harvey (Cantabrigiae: Typis Academicis, 1857), 204-210. For a considerably more sympathetic account of the apparent Carpocratian belief in the transmigration of souls, see a modern, theosophical consideration of the gnostic tradition in: G.R.S. Mead, *Fragments of a Faith Forgotten: Some Short Sketches among the Gnostics, Mainly of the First Two Centuries. A Contribution to the Study of Christian Origins Based on the Most Recently Recovered Materials* (London; Benares: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1900), 229-233. For examples of certain well-known creation myths involving the flawed project of the demiurge, one may consider the *Apocryphon of John* and the *Pistis Sophia*. One the demiurgic figure of Ialdabaoth and creation as light mixed with darkness in the *Apocryphon of John*, see: Michael Waldstein and Frederik Wisse, eds., *The Apocryphon of John: Synopsis of Nag Hammadi Codices II,1; III,1; and IV,1 with BG 8502,2*, Nag Hammadi and Manichaen Studies 33 (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 60-63; 68-9, corresponding to synopses 25-6 and 29. For the emanations of materiality from the wicked Authades, the descent of Sophia into the realms of

band maintained, and even expanded upon, certain recognizably gnostic themes which had also been made known in previous *qaṣīdas*.

Though this explication of the luminous soul confronting a prison of materiality in the 12th stanza of the *tarjīʿ-band* serves as a sort of climactic moment for the poem as a whole, the final two stanzas will provide a resolution as to what the individual is to do when confronted with such a predicament. In another curious parallel with his early prose writing, the conclusion to the *tarjīʿ-band* tempers the full religious secrets with a certain hesitance towards revealing the whole, unvarnished reality. There is a repetition in the 13th stanza of weariness in the heart of the author towards earthly matters, perfectly in line with the material discussed above.¹²⁰ And yet, this same heart of Āzarī, having engaged in clear discussion (*ṣuḥbat...āshkārā*) to that point, simultaneously pursued a kind of “hiding” itself (*nihān bi-girift*).¹²¹ In a statement reminiscent of earlier debates in the Ṣūfī tradition regarding how freely the divine secret (*sirr*) ought to be disclosed, this stanza includes a curious line regarding the limits of Āzarī’s disclosure:

I said, “I will speak of his secret!”
His jealousy slapped me and shut my mouth.¹²²

The question of how, or if, an individual who was party to a secret of a higher order should share information with a broader audience about said secret was a well-known trope in Ṣūfī literature. For example, in the well-known Ṣūfī epistle of Qushayrī, the *sirr* is that which is “protected and concealed between the servant and the real in the states,” known only to the seeker and the

Chaos, and the consumption of the light of Sophia by Ialdabaoth in the *Pistis Sophia*, see: Carl Schmidt, ed., *Pistis Sophia*, trans. Violet Macdermot, Nag Hammadi Studies 9 (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 44-52.

¹²⁰ *dil-am az kār-i īn jahān bi-girift. Āzarī, Dīvān, 96.*

¹²¹ *dil-am az ṣuḥbat-i banīn u banāt/āshkārā u ham nihān bi-girift. Āzarī, Dīvān, 96.*

¹²² *guftam az sirr-i ū sukhan bi-guyam/ghayrat-ash dast zad dahān bi-girift. Āzarī, Dīvān, 97.*

divine.¹²³ A policy of disclosure could have dire consequences in this world for one who was rash enough to share it, as in the re-telling of the martyrdom of Mansūr Ḥallāj in the early *tazkira* of Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār concerning important Ṣūfī figures, the *Tazkirat al-Awliyā’*. Wracked by the death of Ḥallāj and seeking an explanation from God, Abū Bakr al-Shiblī (334/945) is said to have heard from God, “I did this to him because he exposed Our secret to others.”¹²⁴ One may object that Āzarī has indeed protested too much, and that while insisting that the *sirr* shall not be revealed, he has spoken freely about topics that may well have been considered transgressive.¹²⁵ However, as with his reluctance to fully explicate the beliefs of the “Ṣūfīs” regarding *tanāsukh* in the *AMA*,¹²⁶ itself a tantalizing omission, the penultimate stanza of this particular work leaves one imagining what further “secrets” could theoretically be revealed.

The conclusion to the *tarjī’-band* – the work with perhaps the most explicitly gnostic approach to the material world – does not include the softening, final language which may be perceived in the aforementioned *urūjiyya*. In this circumstance, it is left clear that the physical cosmos as experienced by humanity is filled with “various fables” (*afsāna-yi gunāgūn*), a world which, through its artifices, could render even the “knowledge of Luqmān and thought of Plato”

¹²³ Michael A. Sells, ed. and trans., *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufī Qur’an, Mi’raj, Poetic and Theological Writings* (New York; Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1996), 149.

¹²⁴ Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār, *Farid al-Din ‘Aṭṭār’s Memorial of God’s Friends: Lives and Sayings of Sufis*, 407.

¹²⁵ My thanks to Cameron Cross and the participants of the Great Lakes Adiban Society workshop for considering whether the *tanāsukh* chapter of Āzarī may broadly be thought of as rhetorically apophatic, which is to say, discussing a taboo topic by explaining it at length before turning back to insist that, in fact, it is a topic about which nothing should be said. For a pithy definition of rhetorical apophasis, see: Lester Thonssen and A. Craig Baird, *Speech Criticism: The Development of Standards for Rhetorical Appraisal* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1948), 422. Theologically, apophasis would also commonly be used in reference to negative theology, in which a treatise on theology must – by the very nature of the wholly transcendent divine – confine itself to “unsaying” with regard to the ultimate object of study. See: Aydogan Kars, “Two Modes of Unsayings in the Early Thirteenth Century Islamic Lands: Theorizing Apophasis through Maimonides and Ibn ‘Arabi,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 74, no. 3 (December 2013): 261–78.

¹²⁶ Āzarī, *Miftāḥ al-Asrār*, 173a.

as inconsequential.¹²⁷ This is a world in which the pleasurable is tainted with the painful, “the sting with the sweet water, the poison with the opium,”¹²⁸ and while one may seek relief by means of its own constructions, this is task without ordered regulations (*bī-qānūn*).¹²⁹ This is not a position of nihilism, however, but a skepticism toward the external, material form of the world as currently experienced:

Its external form is clear, like a fire;
The smoke of the interior form and the burning within, hidden.¹³⁰

It is the pursuit of this interior meaning, *bāṭin*, which may be seen as animating much of the discourse on knowledge and discovery through these verse works of Āzarī. It is the search not only for the ‘ilm-i *nāpaydā* of the 5th *qaṣīda*, but those realms beyond the capacity of human knowledge and intellect as the degrees of all creation pass beyond the differentiated attributes to the wholly unified point of the divine. Most importantly, this passage is not a new discovery, but a *return* to what was once known. Recalling the second and third stanzas of the *tarjī‘-band*, the human soul had once experienced the “first resting-place,” *manzil-i avval*, before descending into the muddied ranks of material creation. It is through the glow of the light of pre-eternity, the symbolic representation of the gnosis of the true nature of things, that the soul may, in the worlds of the refrain of the *tarjī‘-band*, “take the path to the first resting place,” *bi-rah bi-manzil-i avval*. With this, the tension of the work – the reality of the luminous soul being trapped in the muddied

¹²⁷ *gashta ‘ājiz zi-fikr u ḥīla-yi ū/ ‘ilm-i Luqmān u fikr-i Aflātūn. Āzarī, Dīvān, 97.* This is, naturally, a reference to both the Plato of the Greek philosophical tradition, and the Luqmān of the Muslim prophetic tradition, to whom God granted wisdom (*wa-la-qad ātaynā Luqmān al-ḥikma*) in the telling of Qur’ān, Q31:12. On certain examples of Luqmān as sage, see, B. Heller and N.A. Stillman, “Luqmān,” *EP*².

¹²⁸ *nīsh bā nūsh u zahr bā taryāk*

¹²⁹ *az tarākīb-i ū shifā maṭlab/zi-ān-ki īn kār-i ū-st bī-qānūn. Āzarī, Dīvān, 97.*

¹³⁰ *zāhir-ash rūshan ast chūn ātash/dūd bāṭin nihān u sūz darūn. Āzarī, Dīvān, 97.*

darkness of the material world – is shown to have an ultimate resolution. What is left is for the seeker of the true nature of things to pursue the path back to their more sublime origin through the pursuit of correct religious knowledge.

4.11 Conclusion

There are both prosaic and provocative conclusions which might be drawn from the above examination of both Āzarī in the *tazkira* tradition, and some of the curious themes which recur throughout his *dīvān*. The former, which could reasonably be expected given the previous chapters, is that one is able to draw relatively clear connections between the verse and prose works of Āzarī. It would not be terribly shocking if, in contradiction to what has been displayed here, the choice of medium by the author brought with it a distinctive change in message.

However, in reading the works of Āzarī on “*irfānī*” topics, there are continuities on subjects such as the luminosity of the human soul, the imperative of the individual to ascend to higher planes of existence towards a return to the divine source, and this ascent and descent occurring through the mechanism of the transmigration of souls. One necessary caveat is that this analysis can rely only on those works of Āzarī which made their way into the *dīvān* and the *tazkira* tradition. This would seem to go without saying, but one will recall that poetry was a lifelong pursuit of Āzarī, including the period of his life in which he was known for his role as the foremost panegyrist at the court of Shāhrukh in Herat. Little can be said definitively about the timeline of composition of specific poems of Āzarī, though the standard narrative of his life – that after turning away from the court to the Ṣūfī path, his interests likewise turned from the worldly to the spiritual – would suggest that the time of works considered throughout this chapter may not have been the *qaṣīdas* which earned him courtly fame and compensation. One will recall that Dawlatshāh stated quite clearly that Āzarī composed at least one *qaṣīda* “in praise

of the sultan Shāhrukh...in an enigmatic manner,”¹³¹ a *qaṣīda* from which one line has been transmitted:

What is that water which removes the egg of discord?
The Khusraw of the cosmos surrenders from his arrow.¹³²

Though obscure, this line of poetry is nonetheless recognizable as panegyric in tone. This single line holds promise as an exception which would prove the rule: that the *dīvān* of Āzarī, filled with devotional and contemplative poetry, was self-consciously collected and organized so as to emphasize the poetic corpus of Āzarī which aligned with the attitude of quiet religious contemplation which he largely pursued from his return from India until the end of his life in Isfarāyīn. There may well have been full *qaṣīdas* of Āzarī devoted to Shāhrukh or other notables at the court in Herat, though these did not survive the editing process of the *dīvān*. By the same token, previous discussions in this project of the religious affiliation of Āzarī have noted his own wide-ranging and encyclopedic discussions with regard to spiritual knowledge, and an extreme difficulty in pinning down his confessional affiliation with any real certainty. It is possible that other works of Āzarī may have deviated from what is seen in his esoteric compendia and the *dīvān*, but this crosses into the realm of counterfactual. Barring the emergence of the collected *qaṣīdas* of Āzarī devoted not to the *ahl al-bayt*, but to the political notables of his time, which may theoretically have been written with a different approach, what can be determined from the available poetry of Āzarī is that much like the prose works of Āzarī, many of his verse works were peppered with what might be considered gnostic and illuminationist speculations.

¹³¹ *dar madḥ-i Shāhrukh sulṭān īn qaṣīda rā dar ṭūr-i lughz mī-farmāyad.*

¹³² *chīst ān ābī ki tukhm-i fitna bar-mī-afkanad/Khusrav-i gardūn zi sahm-i ū sipar mī-afganad.*

There are, however, more pressing questions than what is confirmed related to the thought of Āzarī. Given what is found in the *AMA* and *AJA*, the material included in these gnostic poems of Āzarī is somewhat predictable. What is of greater interest is taking the poetry of Āzarī and looking beyond this one figure to broader questions regarding the circulation of works and the anthology tradition in the 9th/15th century and beyond. There is a parallel to be found in the very approach taken by Āzarī in his prose works which can then be extended to his verse. One will note that in the course of introducing his first esoteric compendium and earliest verified written work, the *AMA*, Āzarī was explicit about the fact that his works were written in the interest of an open “discourse,” *ṣuḥbat*, in contradistinction to the earlier teachers who kept veiled what was revealed to them directly [*kashf*] from higher realms.¹³³ As seen in previous chapters, though there may have been isolated areas where Āzarī feigned discretion – as in the case of the position of the Ṣūfīs on *tanāsukh*, even after explaining *tanāsukh* in detailed, neutral terms¹³⁴ – so too were the highly controversial ideas of Faḏl Allāh Astarābādī discussed positively with no concern for dissimulation. A similar ethos would seem to be at work throughout the poetic *dīvān* of Āzarī, in which a gnostic contempt for the material world and the matter of the soul working its way up through the levels of creation across various lifetimes are presented with little fanfare. There is, however, an added wrinkle when it comes to the poetic works of Āzarī which is not true about his prose, namely, the existence of a known audience beginning with even his own contemporaries in Khurasan. Almost nothing can be said about the audience of the *AMA* beyond the fact that Āzarī himself discussed presenting a copy to the court of Aḥmad Shāh in his brief sojourn to the Indian Deccan. The review of Āzarī in the *tazkira*

¹³³ Āzarī, *AMA*, 12a.

¹³⁴ Āzarī, *AMA*, 173a.

tradition, though, suggests the circulation of at least certain verse works of Āzarī which became part of the collected *dīvān* as early as the end of the 9th/15th century. There is a certain amount of uncertainty about the collation of the *dīvān*, which brings with it a level of ambiguity about whether *all* of the works of the *dīvān* were given equal circulation in Persianate literary circles.¹³⁵ There can be little doubt, though, that there was at least a tangible reading audience for the poetry of Āzarī, where the audience of his prose works is more difficult to parse. One wonders whether this reading audience would likewise have been discussing the *qaṣīda* *urūjiyya* or the *tarjī* *-band* as examples of his more gnostic poetry.

That being said, there is a potential objection that might arise with regard to such close analysis of the gnostic poetry of Āzarī from the perspective of authorship. Namely, as seen in the earlier discussion of the *tazkira* tradition, the *qaṣīdas* discussed here were not shared in the poetic anthologies and attributed to Āzarī, unlike a number of other *qaṣīdas*, *ghazals*, and *rubā* *ʿīs* which can be found in both the *dīvān* of Āzarī and across the *tazkira* tradition. Is there a possibility that unlike the widely shared *qaṣīda* 24, *ghazal* 447, or *qiṭ* *ʿa* 30 that these gnostic works were composed by a different author and attributed by Āzarī, hence explaining their not being attributed to Āzarī by contemporary or later anthologists? There are both straightforward technical reasons why this line of argument is not terribly convincing, as well as content-based reasons for attributing them to Āzarī. First, the lack of a poem in the *tazkira* tradition does not seem to be grounds to dismiss a work in the *dīvān* as not having emerged from Āzarī himself. The analysis above has already shown that while there are certain poems which were technically more popular in the anthology portions of the *tazkira* entries for Āzarī, there was not a single,

¹³⁵ On the question of various methods of *dīvān* collation and circulation, see: Franklin Lewis, “Authorship, *Auctoritas*, and the Management of Literary Estates in Pre-Modern Persian Literature,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 45 (2018): 73–125.

stock set of lines or poems which can be traced easily through the *tazkiras*. The most frequently cited line appears in fewer than half of the available sources, while other *bayts* which may appear in only one or two anthology entries are also present in the edition of the *dīvān*. In fact, I would suggest that it is the very instability in the *tazkira* tradition which suggests the reliability of the *dīvān* as being a genuine compilation of the works of Āzarī. The *tazkira* analysis shows that there was *not* a coherent effort to define a “set works” of Āzarī in the anthologies; those works collected by Dawlatshāh Samarqandī were never the “canonical” works of Āzarī for later *tazkira* composers.¹³⁶ However, with sporadic exceptions, nearly every line of poetry cited in the *tazkira* traditions can be traced directly back to a work in the *dīvān* – the selfsame *dīvān* which collected the gnostic *qaṣīdas* of Āzarī alongside such less potentially controversial works.

Secondly, to return to the original purpose of this chapter – to consider whether the poetic corpus of Āzarī might reveal a consonance with his prose works, or whether the difference in form between the *AMA/AJA* and the *dīvān* would also involve a difference in function – the gnostic *qaṣīdas* of Āzarī are far from being a significant departure from what is contained in the prose compendia, and on the contrary, largely reinforce certain themes which can be found in his writing elsewhere. What is most striking is not merely the concordance between the sources, but the fact that the poetic works, if anything, speak more bluntly about certain gnostic themes than what can be drawn out of the prose works. For example, an interest in the ascent of the soul into higher realms, intermingled with a discussion of divine light, is already on full display in the discussion of the *Muqaṭṭa‘āt* found in the *AMA*.¹³⁷ Likewise, hints of the ascent and descent of

¹³⁶ One can see from Appendix C that it is not as though the works shared by Dawlatshāh were then mechanically reproduced by later authors. On the contrary, there are several poems which appear *only* in Dawlatshāh, though such rarely-cited works across the *tazkira* tradition have not been included in the table for the sake of clearly presenting major trends, or the lack thereof. *Qasīda* 12, and *ghazals* 114, 171, and 359, and *qit‘a* 29 all were shared only by Dawlatshāh.

¹³⁷ Āzarī, *AMA*, 23a-b.

the soul through the ranks of creation via metempsychosis should not be received with surprise, given the even-handed approach to *tanāsukh* in his occult compendia.¹³⁸ Given what is known of Āzarī already, these are wholly expected overlaps in content. More notable is that the poetry of Āzarī was not merely reflective of the more didactic presentation of esoteric concepts in the *AMA* and *AJA*, but expanded upon certain themes which receive less attention in the prose works. Put simply, the well-known gnostic concept of the luminous soul being trapped in the diametrically opposed darkness of materiality, with liberation from this existence and its multiple rebirths being borne out of right knowledge (gnosis), permeates the “*irfānī*” *qaṣīdas* of Āzarī in a more explicit manner than the esoteric compendia. While Āzarī himself in the autobiographical portion of the *AMA* expressed a certain discontentment with the pleasures of the material world and an interest in pursuing more durable, spiritual truths, this is a far cry from the hostility towards the material world on display in the *qaṣīdas* discussed above. By the same token, from a perspective of authorial voice, the *tanāsukh* chapters of the prose works are written with a certain detachment. As with their likely source, ‘Azīz Nasafī, the material is presented as a discussion of what the believers in metempsychosis believe, not what the compiler, Āzarī, believed. This would seem distinct from the *qaṣīda* ‘*urūjiyya* and *tarjī*’-*band* above, presumably framed as being from the pen of Āzarī, not a separate group or individual, and which are not shy in discussing metempsychosis. It would not seem unreasonable to take Āzarī at his word with regard to his openness to gnostic concepts being presented throughout the poetic works above.

There is a question, then, of the broader significance of these themes of light and darkness, the spiritual and material worlds, and the ascent and descent of the soul over time

¹³⁸ Āzarī, *AMA*, 171a-173a; *AJA*, 170a-172a.

beyond illuminating more of Āzarī's intellectual positions. This is an issue tied intimately to the matter of how audience should be understood in the context of the gnostic poems of this *dīvān*. The *tazkira* tradition, despite not involving a single, coherent set of information, nonetheless does suggest that there was a reasonably broad circulation of certain parts of the *dīvān* of Āzarī, and that there was an only partially-complete understanding of certain of his other works. What, though, of the examples presented here, which did not receive attention in the *tazkira* tradition, but which are nonetheless recognizable as emerging from the same pen as the composer of the *AMA* and *AJA*? One must wonder for what audience, if any, these poems would have been composed. There are both vertical and horizontal elements to the matter of audience and the circulation of gnostic ideals in the poetry of Āzarī, namely, patronage and common intellectual/spiritual circles, respectively. On the first point, very little can be said about patrons of Āzarī following his abrupt departure from the court of Shāhrukh. The two examples that could be mentioned would be, first his (potentially) being awarded handsomely for the composition of the palace *qaṣīda*,¹³⁹ though the record of this *qaṣīda* itself is not a fixture of the earliest *tazkira* literature; and second, the report of Āzarī having received support from Sulṭān-Muḥammad b. Bāysunghur, though this was said to have been in reward for his advice on “justice,” ‘*adālat*, for his poetical skills.¹⁴⁰ This does not necessarily mean that Āzarī had no patrons whatsoever, even if they ceased to be Timurid royals. There may be a worthy comparison in the career of Sanā’ī, whose early patrons included those connected with the Ghaznavid court, while his later supporters would have tended more towards figures in the Islamic clerical sphere.¹⁴¹ Could it be

¹³⁹ See above, mentioned first in Rāzī, *Haft Iqlīm*, 2:297.

¹⁴⁰ Dawlatshāh, *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā’*, 721.

¹⁴¹ See J.T.P. de Bruijn, “Sanā’ī,” *EIr*, as well as the discussion of patronage in: Franklin Lewis, “Reading, Writing and Recitation: Sanā’ī and the Origins of the Persian Ghazal” (Ph.D. Diss., University of Chicago, 1995), 140-71.

that Āzarī had patrons who supported his more religiously-minded poetry later in life, as opposed to the supporters of his courtly panegyrics prior to his pursuing the Ṣūfī path? There is little evidence that can be put forth as a definitive answer at this time.

The second question related to horizontal circulation – that is to say, not a patron-client relationship, but the expected reading community of the poetry of Āzarī – is wrapped up with questions which already exist regarding the prose works of Āzarī, as well. Were the gnostic poems of Āzarī being shared by other Ṣūfīs and poets in Khurasan in the 9th/15th century, or, unlike other *ghazals* and *qaṣīdas* of the *Dīvān*, did they receive little attention? Would friends and colleagues of Āzarī have listened to or read these poems with enthusiasm over their gnostic content, or would they have been viewed with suspicion due to their dabbling in such transgressive themes as the transmigration of souls? The specific answers to these questions may have to remain speculative for the moment, though, as mentioned in the introduction, we do know that Āzarī would have had connections and mentorship relationships with other poets of his time, as in the case of Ṭālib Jājarmī. One wonders whether these concepts would have been discussed at such length on account of their being notable to Āzarī, or whether they would have been raised in Kubrawī circles of 9th/15th century Iran and Central Asia, as well. To move beyond simply the thought of Āzarī, the presence of these openly gnostic themes in his collected *Dīvān* is also a starting point for research into the much larger topic of the circulation of occult material in the Ṣūfī networks of the period, and particularly those affiliates of the Kubrawī network who might trace their intellectual and spiritual lineage back to Sa‘d al-Dīn Ḥamuwayī and ‘Azīz Nasafī. Adding to the question of the courtly patronage of the occult sciences, such a project would provide additional layers to the understanding of the social history of Iran and Central Asia at the time, considering both methods of Ṣūfī network formation and the circulation of

certain gnostic concepts outside of the specific patronage networks of the courts. While such work will have to wait for a future project, the specific example of Āzarī hints at such work being productive in adding to the academic discussion of the circulation of esotericism and Ṣūfī discourse in the post-Mongol period.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

ز بهول روز جزا آذمی چه میترسی
تو کیستی که در آن روز در شمار آیی

What do you fear from the terror of the Day of Retribution, Āzarī?

Who are you who, will count amongst them on that day?

Āzarī, *Ghazal* 447¹

5.1. Introduction

While this project has sought to build from previous scholarship and develop a more comprehensive biography of the figure of Āzarī, in a certain sense, the biographical information is incidental to the broader themes at work. There are dramatic elements to the life of Āzarī, of course – attaining the heights of courtly success before seeking a more spiritual path, the sudden departure from Khurasan after the completion of the *AMA*, arriving in Bidar at a critical, transitional moment for the Bahmanid Sultanate as Aḥmad Shāh sought to shore up his own position after seizing power from his brother, Fīrūz Shāh – but these are made more compelling by the fact that they reflect high-stakes conflicts which were roiling through much of the Persianate world throughout his lifetime. In seeking out the Sūfī *ṭarīqa*, Āzarī likewise entered into a Kubrawī network which was itself still in the transitional stages of its development into a more institutionalized order. The flight of Āzarī from Herat to first the Ḥijāz and afterward to the Indian Deccan would seem to line up too well with the assassination attempt against Shāhrukh by a Ḥurūfī follower to be purely coincidental. While it is difficult to verify exactly *how* influential Āzarī was at the court of the Bahmanids – the uncertainty surrounding the *Bahman-*

¹ Āzarī, *Dīvān*, 281.

nāma and its existence has been mentioned in the previous chapter, while Firishta is the only source to mention Āzarī serving as the advisor to the crown prince-turned-sultan, ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Aḥmad Shāh II, and maintaining contact with the king into the 850s/1450s – there is no doubt that he was present at the court at a moment with the Bahmanid sultans were taking an increasingly outward-looking approach towards attracting intellectuals from other parts of the Islamic world. Even bracketing the matter of the official history of the *Bahman-nāma*, the Indo-Persian historiographical tradition is unified in having Āzarī recite the couplet officially emblazoned upon the new palace of Aḥmad Shāh I in Bidar, making the poet less an incidental observer of these events, and rather, one important figure among others in Bahmanid legitimacy construction. Note even the brief visit of Sulṭān-Muḥammad b. Bāysunghur, in which this ambitious young prince and Āzarī spoke of the “customs of justice,” *qānūn-i ‘adālat*. While the biographical entries note that Āzarī did periodically receive visitors from local notables after his return from India and permanent residence in Isfarāyīn, Sulṭān-Muḥammad was no mere local notable. On the contrary, the journey of Sulṭān-Muḥammad westward towards Qum in 847/1443 was indicative of a broader period of political instability in Timurid lands as Shāhrukh, himself nearing the end of his life, sent the upstart young prince to attempt to bring order to the otherwise roiled western Timurid territories. It is not only the fact that Sulṭān-Muḥammad would eventually then lead an abortive revolt against Shāhrukh in 850/1446, but that a key feature of his preeminence in the region included the close relationships between Sulṭān-Muḥammad and the local notables of his territories, including, specifically, a number of esoteric intellectuals and members of well-known Ṣūfī orders.² Āzarī, with his established Ṣūfī credentials and two extensive works on matters related to the occult sciences, would certainly fit into this effort on

² Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks*, 55-67.

the part of Sulṭān-Muḥammad to cultivate good relations with those notables who had respectable reputations on a local level, and who may have, directly or indirectly, borne the brunt of the crackdowns of Shāhrukh against esotericists in the 830s/1420s. In other words, this is yet another example of Āzarī just so happening to have been connected to some of the most pressing political and intellectual crises of the 9th/15th century Persianate world.

Put differently, the question of to what extent Āzarī may have influenced the events just discussed is difficult to determine based on existing source material, but the matter of the broader themes to which his presence at these powerful courts might speak is easier to pin down.

Receiving patronage from such major figures in the Persianate courts of the 9th/15th century as Shāhrukh, Aḥmad Shāh I, and Sulṭān-Muḥammad would indicate both that Āzarī was in exalted company, and that he was one of many dozens of intellectuals receiving similar attention.

However, I must wonder how many of these similarly-placed intellectuals had written works in both prose and poetry which touched on such transgressive themes as the teachings of Faḏl Allāh Astarābādī, or the specificities of the transmigration of the soul (*tanāsukh*) in its pursuit of perfection. The ability of Āzarī to gain what may well have been a comfortable living based on those writings of his to which we have access is illustrative as to what was in demand at Persianate courts of the 9th/15th century – courts which themselves were confronted with a crisis of confidence in the aftermath of Mongol and Timurid invasions, and the loss of anything resembling a universally- or near-universally-recognized ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate. It is possible that the poetry of Āzarī, despite its early frosty reception by Jāmī, was both well-regarded and was considerably better-known than his prose works, and so there would have been no potential risk in bringing into the court a figure like Āzarī, with all of his varied intellectual affiliations.

However, the biographical tradition almost immediately notes both the prose and poetic works of

Āzarī, including the *AJA*, and the recounts an episode of Āzarī being rewarded not for merely for his ability to craft the glowing praise of a *qaṣīda*, but because of his understanding of *justice*. This is in addition to the fact that one of the few points of note in the eminently discrete autobiographical portion of the *AJA* is that a copy of the *AMA*, known to be filled with not only Ḥurūfī teachings, but esoteric interpretations of religious matters from a variety of traditions, made its way along with Āzarī to the court of Aḥmad Shāh I in Bidar.³ It would be difficult to imagine based even on these scanty pieces of evidence that Āzarī was known only for the talents of poetry which had once propelled him to fame and fortune at the court of Shāhrukh. On the contrary, this would seem to indicate that Āzarī was indeed one representative example among others of the courts of the 9th/15th century Persianate world making a priority out of fostering good relationships with intellectuals who had expertise in fields which would include, but not be limited to, the occult sciences.

While Āzarī was well-placed as a subject for microhistorical study of the dissemination of occult concepts at courts across the Persianate world through patronage of specific intellectuals, this is likewise only one part of the story that his life and works may tell about the 9th/15th century. A parallel track to such practices as the science of the letters, geomancy, and numerology at the centers of political power in the post-Mongol Persianate world were the concordant challenges to these same centers by popular, militant, messianic movements emerging out of the countryside. In fact, the life of Āzarī intersected with this trend of an increased frequency of messianic movements from the earliest years of his life. As noted in the introduction, Āzarī was born into the Sarbadārid “republic” of Khurasan at almost the moment it ceased to be an independent polity, with Sabzavār and the surrounding environs having come

³ Āzarī, *AJA*, 3b.

under the sovereignty of Tīmūr Bārlās just prior to his birth.⁴ While becoming a Timurid protectorate would doubtless have put a damper on chiliastic activity by the Sabardārid polity itself, there can be little doubt that Āzarī had familial connections to the movement which extended back to its more militant roots, whether in the form of his father serving as a local administrator (*ṣāhib-i ikhtiyār*) or his ancestor who had worked as a director of proselytization, *ṣāhib-da'wa*.⁵ Likewise, the later period of Sarbadārid history under 'Alī Mu'ayyad, though involving the typical ambivalent relationship between the military and dervish wings of the Sarbadārid diarchy, involved the minting of at least one coin in the name of “Sulṭān Muḥammad al-Mahdī,” which is to say, the awaited 12th Imam of *Ithnā'asharī* Shī'ism.⁶ While this relationship to the occasionally-messianic Sarbadārid movement is known only through the biographies of Āzarī, his own writing is where a deeper understanding of another movement with messianic pretensions, the Ḥurūfiyya, are on full display. Indeed, working in the first half of the 9th/15th century, Āzarī would have been composing his *AMA* and *AJA* just as the inheritors of Faḏl Allāh were continuing to interpret his quite radical understanding of the cosmos and expanding upon a body of teachings themselves evincing a high degree of messianic interpretation.⁷ In this respect, Āzarī was in good company in the Kubrawī network of the time, itself struggling through a succession crisis and seeing the emergence of the mahdistic

⁴ Smith, *The History of the Sarbadār Dynasty*, 154-55; Aubin, “La fin de l'état sarbadār du Khorassan,” 110-11.

⁵ Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tazkirat al-Shu'arā'*, 718.

⁶ Mahendrarajah, “The Sarbadars of Sabzavar,” 384-5

⁷ On messianic elements of Ḥurūfī thought, see: Bashir, *Fazlallah Astarabadi and the Hurufis*, 81-4. On distinctions between the writings of Faḏl Allāh and his later successors, see: Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, “Notes sur deux textes ḥurūfī: le Jāvdān-nāma de Faḏlallāh Astarābādī et l'un de ses commentaries, le Maḥram-nāma de Sayyid Ishāq,” *Studia Iranica* 35, n° ii (2006): 203-35.

Nūrbakhshīyya movement.⁸ Recognizing certain unique contours of the thought of Āzarī, particularly through the more potentially transgressive concepts explored in such detail in the previous three chapters, there is a higher-order value in seeing in Āzarī one instance of the manifestation of esotericism and messianism at both courtly and more popular contexts in the post-Mongol period.

With the hypothesis that Āzarī, given his background and professional circumstances, would be well-versed in the occult discourses of his day confirmed, this project has highlighted only a few of the numerous subjects tangentially connected to Āzarī and deserving of additional research. It is worth considering a few of these themes which are deserving of further scholarly attention. The first question is related to the dissemination of the occult sciences at Persianate courts in the post-Mongol period more generally, and in the 9th/15th century in particular. It has been well-established in the existing literature on the period that there were highly influential intellectual networks across major courts of the Persianate world at the time in which subjects such as lettrism, numerology, geomancy, divination, and astrology were both discussed openly, and put to practice in the efforts of political leaders to present themselves as rightful holders of authority. With this necessary corrective of the near-omnipotence of occult discourses established, there is merit in considering more specifically *which* discourses on esoteric themes were most prominent, and which were determined to be unacceptable by those working within these discourses. This may include both the perception of better-defined (and more antagonistically-received) groups such as the Ḥurūfiyya, as well as the wide-ranging and fluid

⁸ Curiously, Āzarī does not mention Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh or his ideological program, though one would expect to find certain parallels in their lives and thought. Āzarī and his Kubrawī contemporaries will be the subject of a future, more detailed study. On the Nūrbakhshīyya, see: Bashir, *Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions*; Sayyid Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. ‘Abd Allāh Nūrbakhsh, “The Risālat al-Hudā of Muḥammad Nūrbakṣ (d. 869/1464): Critical Edition with Introduction,” ed. Shahzad Bashir, *Rivista Degli Studi Orientali* 75, no. 2001 (2002): 87–137; Deweese, “The Eclipse of the Kubrawīyah.”

people of unveiling and investigation (*ahl-i kashf va taḥqīq*). There is also the question of how determinative the occult sciences were in legitimation processes in comparison with many other well-known techniques, including focusing on descent (whether through *sayyid*-ship, Chinggis-khānid lineages, or other noble genealogies), or evoking pre-modern models of kingship, such as the legacy of ancient Iranian monarchs. The second issue is related to the formation of Ṣūfī networks prior to their being fully institutionalized as distinct “orders.” Taking Āzarī as a specific case study as a member of the Kubrawī network during the formative years of the 9th/15th century, and a somewhat idiosyncratic member as an *uvaysī*-style initiate of Sa‘d al-Dīn Ḥamuwayī, what further questions arise relating to the specific contours of this Ṣūfī path? Finally, there is a topic which receives frequent note in both the biographical dictionary tradition and in secondary literature on Āzarī, but which itself was only a brief episode in a rich life: his connection with the Bahmanid sultans of Bidar. With the legacy of Indo-Persian literature and the influence of Persian émigrés to South Asia already familiar topics, and with additional attention in recent years being paid to the region of the Indian Deccan in particular, it is worth revisiting the question of what the footprint of Āzarī in the Deccan may tell us about the Deccan in this period more broadly, if anything.

5.2 Āzarī and the Dissemination of the Occult Sciences in the 9th/15th Century Persianate World

While there are contours to the thought of Āzarī which distinguish him from contemporary Timurid intellectuals, most pressing being his affinity for the Ḥurūfiyya, it must also be mentioned that there is little present in the work of Āzarī which is *exceptionally* novel. As noted already above, an interest in the science of the letters and others of the occult sciences was nearly ubiquitous in the Islamic world of the post-Mongol period. The interests of the *ahl-i kashf va taḥqīq* were neither marginal nor controversial in the courts of the Persianate world in

the period. On the contrary, it was at the highest ranks of power that the interest in esoteric discourse, often shot through with a messianic impulse, would have found greatest purchase. There is the broader question of to what extent this phenomenon was directly connected to the deeply destabilizing effect of the Mongol invasions of the 7th/13th century and the subsequent political and social fluidity throughout vast swaths of the Islamic world. This is not to say that the occultism of the period was a completely new phenomenon, as an intense interest in the occult sciences can doubtless be traced back with certainty to the first two centuries of Islam.⁹ Rather, this is simply to note that an appeal to the occult was one source of legitimacy among many others to which sovereigns might appeal in the fluidity of the post-Mongol period, in which the established institution of the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate had been reduced to merely the Cairene “shadow caliphate” and the crisis of in whom proper authority should be invested was faced across much of the Islamic world.¹⁰ Of course, this dynamic has already been so well-established in recent literature that it is hardly worthy of note. There are, however, further questions which are raised by using the example of Āzarī to consider the patronage of the occult sciences in the courts of the Persianate world in the Islamic Middle Period. First, there is the fact that “lettrism” itself was anything but a single monolith, and rather may be viewed as having been made up by competing movements and thinkers who nonetheless may have been working from a largely shared background of occult writing and speculation. While lettrism and the

⁹ One clear example would likely be the work of the alchemist, Jābir b. Ḥayyān, whose lifetime can be placed as contemporary to the earliest days of the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate. For the basics of his (sometimes obscure) biography, see: Paul Kraus, “Djābir b. Ḥayyān,” *EP*. The more complete treatment of Jābir b. Ḥayyān by the same author may be found in: Paul Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān: contribution à l’histoire des idées scientifiques dans l’Islam*, 2 vol., Mémoires présenté à l’Institut d’Égypte, t. 44-45 (Cairo: Impr. de l’Institut français d’archéologie orientale, 1943).

¹⁰ Appeals to authority from a variety of sources are discussed in: Judith Pfeiffer, “Confessional Ambiguity vs. Confessional Polarization.”

occult *broadly speaking* were anything but taboo in the Persianate world of the time, the example of Ḥurūfiyya movement (of which Āzarī was a sympathizer) should indicate that there were nonetheless limits to what was considered acceptable esoteric discourse in the time. How were these limits determined, and to what extent were even “transgressive” concepts freely circulating within courtly circles? Second, while the occult sciences were nearly omnipresent and were often, indeed, directly used by political figures to bolster their own image as legitimate rulers, the example of Āzarī may be helpful in considering whether they always were the *determinative* method of legitimation, or if they were one notable example among others. I will consider each of these issues in turn with an eye towards openings for future research.

The first area worthy of additional research is not the admissibility or inadmissibility of the occult sciences *writ large*, but the process of orthodoxy-building *within* the field of the occult studies, itself. In other words, the issue is not the debate between those well versed in the *‘ulūm-i gharība* and those who would have viewed occult techniques as a category to have been largely illicit, as in the well-known case of the historian Ibn Khaldūn.¹¹ It should be sufficiently recognized by this point both that the occult sciences were viewed by mainstream, prominent intellectuals in the Islamic world as licit or even salutary, and, from a more meta perspective, that an automatic association of the occult sciences with the illicit or unsavory is a historically- and culturally-contingent view.¹² The question that deserves more attention is how those figures within the shared worldview of viewing the occult sciences as allowable and beneficial nonetheless sought to set up some sort of intellectual guardrails against what they would have

¹¹ See: Mushegh Asatrian, “Ibn Khaldūn on Magic and the Occult,” *Iran & the Caucasus* 7, no. 1/2 (2003): 73–123.

¹² See, for example, recent works of Melvin-Koushki to this effect: Matthew Melvin-Koushki, “Is (Islamic) Occult Science Science?,” *Theology and Science* 18, no. 2 (2020): 1–22; Matthew Melvin-Koushki, “Taḥqīq vs. Taqlīd in the Renaissances of Western Early Modernity,” *Philological Encounters* 3, no. i–ii (2018): 193–249.

considered the illicit use of otherwise licit knowledge. In fact, such boundary-setting would be perfectly natural to such an intellectual community.¹³ That being said, the difficulty is not in the *premise* that those who pursued the *‘ulūm-i gharība* would have normative positions as to the correct and incorrect usage of these sciences, with fierce condemnations naturally following for those who were believed to have done things in an incorrect manner. What deserves further scrutiny are the particular *mechanisms* through which this orthodoxy would have been enforced, or at the very least, articulated. This is made difficult by the very nature of networks such as the *ahl-i kashf va taḥqīq*, whose membership (as it were) could be as simple as self-declaration, and which served as more of a community of letters than an institution *per se*. This was not an institution of learning which may grant or withhold a diploma, much less a church or religious confession with the authority for censure or excommunication. As a starting point for considering orthodoxy construction in occult circles, let us consider the reception of Faḏl Allāh Astarābādī and his followers in the 8th-9th/14th-15th centuries specifically among those figures prominent in the occult sciences, whose voices may have sounded loudly enough to contribute to a sort of gatekeeping with regard to ideas which may have been considered truly transgressive.

Though there can be little doubt that the governmental authorities reacted with intense distrust and hostility towards the Ḥurūfiyya – in no small part because of the attempt on Shāhrukh’s life, frequently referenced in the previous chapters – the movement was viewed by perhaps comparable hostility by contemporary intellectuals in the occult sciences. These fierce critics of Ḥurūfī doctrine have already received a passing mention in chapter 2 above, which

¹³ It would be to accept the mistaken post-Enlightenment frame of the occult sciences as inherently transgressive, dangerous, or marginal to assume that their intellectual practice would take place in a context which was inherently libertine, uncontrolled, or revolutionary. There may be no honor among thieves, but there are certainly standards among occultists.

dealt with Ḥurūfī themes in the writing of Āzarī. Some of the most aggressive critique was directed by Ṣā' in al-Dīn Turka in the form of two treatises against the Ḥurūfiyya and other groups of 9th/15th century Iran felt to have fallen into error. The followers of Fażl Allāh, far from being bearers of esoteric truths, were in this conception libertines following a false messiah, “ringleaders of depravity and sedition,” who had dispensed with necessary spiritual discipline in favor of the indulgence of the senses.¹⁴ Nor were critiques of Fażl Allāh limited to Timurid spheres, where the dominant authorities in the person and courts of the sons of Tīmūr – both Shāhrukh and his older brother, Mīranshāh (d. 810/1408), who was himself responsible for the execution of Fażl Allāh – but rather, followed with the spread of the Ḥurūfiyya themselves to other lands. Criticizing the Ḥurūfiyya in almost identical terms to Ṣā' in al-Dīn, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Bisṭāmī likewise saw in the followers of Fażl Allāh corrupters of the otherwise noble science of the letters, with Fażl Allāh a “friend of Satan” whose licentious followers corrupted occult teachings with the aim of pursuing the pleasures of the flesh.¹⁵ In fact, the stakes for the Ottoman empire and its newly-minted sultan in Muḥammad II were as high as in Iran, where the Ḥurūfiyya were spreading rapidly and apparently catching the ear of local political leaders, as in the case of the Muẓaffarid descendant and player in Timurid politics, Sulṭān-Mu‘taṣim.¹⁶ No lesser an Ottoman personage than Muḥammad II himself is reported to have briefly dabbled in the Ḥurūfism of Fażl Allāh, with a Ḥurūfī proselyte living in residence at the court. This close

¹⁴ As noted by Melvin-Koushki, the vehemence of Ṣā' in al-Dīn was no doubt influenced by the fact that his own interrogation and torture by Shāhrukhid authorities was a direct result of the hostile governmental response to *all* lettrist speculation after the assassination attempt by the Ḥurūfī follower, Aḥmad-i Lur. Melvin-Koushki, “Quest,” 428-33.

¹⁵ Fleischer, “Ancient Wisdom,” 234-5.

¹⁶ Sulṭān-Mu‘taṣim and his supposed connections to the Ḥurūfiyya are covered in: Binbaş, *Intellectual Network*, 156-9. As noted by Binbaş, we disappointingly do not have much in the way of a direct discussion of Fażl Allāh and the Ḥurūfis by Sharaf al-Dīn ‘Alī Yazdī, though their description in the quoted passage on Sulṭān-Mu‘taṣim (“excessive ignorance and aberration,” “confused minds”) is hardly positive.

contact between a Ḥurūfī propagandist and one of the foremost leaders of the Islamic world came to an abrupt end in approximately 848/1444¹⁷ after the eavesdropping of the *shaykh al-islām*, Mullā Fakhr al-Dīn ‘Ajamī on the statements of his Ḥurūfī interlocutor (arranged through the machinations of the minister Maḥmūd Pāshā), after which point the Ḥurūfīs of the realm were promptly arrested and executed with great enthusiasm on the part of the scandalized Fakhr al-Dīn.¹⁸ These were not the only instances of a rapid collapse in otherwise-promising Ḥurūfī fortunes. Only a few years before the collapse of the Ḥurūfī proselytization efforts at the Ottoman court, the Tabriz branch of the Ḥurūfiyya, led by the Ḥurūfī follower Mawlānā Yusūf and the daughter of Faḏl Allāh, Kalīmat-Allāh al-‘Ulyā, was able to make brief inroads with one of the more capable Qarā Qyunlu leaders, Jahān-shāh, only to once more face the criticism of other dervishes and clerics, with the liquidation of this considerable Ḥurūfī community of 500 individuals being carried out in 845/1441.¹⁹ However, the shift in the position of Jahān-shāh and the scholar close to him, Mawlānā Najm al-Dīn Uskū’ī, came in this case not alongside criticisms from occult intellectuals but from the urging of an “intoxicated” pietist, a *majzūbī*, who encouraged the destruction of the Ḥurūfīs of Tabriz.²⁰ However, to return to the question of occult intellectual orthodoxy creation, there is evidence that it was not merely governmental

¹⁷ In other words, though the exact dating is unclear, this may have occurred shortly after the first accession of Muḥammad II in Rabī‘ II 848/July 1444. Halil İnalçık, “Meḥmed II,” *EF*.

¹⁸ The account is reported by Babinger: Franz Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror and His Time*, ed. William C. Hickman, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978), 34-5. It is also referenced in: Hamid Algar, “Horufism,” *Elr*.

¹⁹ Algar, “Horufism;” Muḥammad Jawād Mashkūr, “Fitna-yi Ḥurūfiyya dar Tabrīz.”

²⁰ The criticism is still coming from a figure with a certain kind of spiritual prestige and from outside the non-occult scholarly-clerical institutions, though the wandering *majzūb* dervish is admittedly of a different typological category than the lettrist intellectual. As noted by Bashir, this account is referenced in: Ḥusayn Karbalā’ī Tabrīzī, *Rawḍat al-Jinān va-Jannāt al-Janān*, vol. 1 (Tehran: Bungāh-i Tarjumah va Nashr-i Kitāb, 1344-49 [1965-70]), 478-81. Shahzad Bashir, “Enshrining Divinity: The Death and Memorialization of Faḏlallāh Astarābādī in Ḥurūfī Thought,” *Muslim World* 90, no. 3/4 (Fall 2000): 289–308.

authorities or juristically-minded scholars who took issue with the teachings of the Ḥurūfiyya, but also those who *themselves* were practitioners of the *‘ilm-i ḥurūf*, who saw in the practices of Faḏl Allāh and his followers a perversion of a science that was dear to their own intellectual projects.

While the citations above indicate a dissatisfaction with the specific teachings and practices of Faḏl Allāh by his lettrist critics, I suspect that there are also institutional concerns at play. Namely, these were not lone intellectuals striving for the secrets of the world of the unseen, but members of *networks*, and as such, concerned with the transmission of knowledge through said networks and the intellectual lineages of previous masters who made up such communities as the *ahl-i kashf va taḥqīq*, or the neo-Ikhwān al-Ṣafā. Consider, for example, the importance of Mamlūk Cairo in the establishing of the occult careers of Ṣā’ in al-Dīn Turka, Sharaf al-Dīn ‘Alī Yazdī, and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Bisṭāmī. Both Ṣā’ in al-Dīn and Sharaf al-Dīn would have studied with Sayyid Ḥusayn Akhlāṭī, a fixture on the Cairene esoteric scene at the end of the 8th/14th century.²¹ While ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Bisṭāmī would not be placed in this exact esoteric *silsila*, nevertheless did he study in Cairo with Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Kūmī (active *circa* 810/1407), who claimed a spiritual lineage of his own leading back to the Prophet.²² One might contrast this with the figure of Faḏl Allāh. While it can be speculated that Faḏl Allāh received a religious education in his youth, and it is known that he traveled widely throughout his lifetime, it is difficult to place him in the instruction of a known lettrist, such as Akhlāṭī or Kūmī.²³ Rather, the sources of the

²¹ Also included in the disciples of Akhlāṭī would be Badr al-Dīn Simāwī, involved in the Ottoman civil war of the early 9th/15th century through his connection with a militant, millenarian faction. Noah Gardiner, “The Occultist Encyclopedism”; Dimitris J. Kastritsis, “The Şeyh Bedreddin Uprising in the Context of the Ottoman Civil War of 1402-1413,” in *Political Initiatives “From the Bottom Up” in the Ottoman Empire: Halcyon Days in Crete VII, a Symposium Held in Rethymno 9-11 January 2009*, ed. Antonis Anastasopoulos (Rethymnon: Crete University Press, 2012), 221–38.

²² Gardiner, “Occult Encyclopedism,” 17-19.

knowledge of Faʿl Allāh come from prophetic or otherworldly sources. There is the report of a dream in which receives teaching from the prophet ʿĪsā which “allowed him to understand many things.”²⁴ Likewise, when Faʿl Allāh claimed to have achieved the ability of perfect esoteric interpretation (*ṣāhib-taʿwīl*), this occurred with the counsel of the prophet Muḥammad, but was, properly speaking, effected by the light of a rare star pouring into his eye.²⁵ It is not simply that Faʿl Allāh was making a quite expansive claim of having instantly gained perfect interpretive powers, though this was a grandiose claim, indeed. There is also the practical matter that this knowledge was not gained through known channels for the transmission of lettrism and other occult sciences. There is an analogy to be drawn with very similar debates occurring in the world of Ṣūfī networks in the 9th/15th century, itself a key transitional moment as what had been loosely-connected groups of students and teachers came to be increasingly institutionalized. Consider, for example, the picture in Central Asia during the lifetime of Āzarī: though one could find in Ṣūfī circles certain systematizers working towards a coherent, *silsila*-based Naqshbandī order, so too were there (among other varieties of Ṣūfīs) “charismatic,” unaffiliated saints, who in some cases articulated an initiation into privileged spiritual knowledge by virtue of an *uvaysī*-style connection.²⁶ As in the case of the figure discussed by DeWeese, the solitary Sayyid Aḥmad Bashīrī, who received *uvaysī* instruction from higher realms rather than from a known teacher on the earthly plane, the charismatic and peripatetic Faʿl Allāh would be seen to have cut a similar path by his contemporaries who nonetheless shared his pursuit of mastery of the occult

²³ Mir Kasimov, *Words of Power*, 8; Bashir, *Fazlallah Astarabadi*, 1-32.

²⁴ Other dreams saw advice being bestowed by the Shīʿī imam, ʿAlī b. Mūsā al-Riḏā, and the prophet Solomon. Bashir, *Fazlallah Astarabadi and the Hurufis*, 8-11.

²⁵ Bashir, *Fazlallah Astarabadi and the Hurufis*, 11; Mir-Kasimov, *Words of Power*, 9-10.

²⁶ Devin DeWeese, *An ‘Uvaysī’ Sufi in Timurid Mawarannahr*, 33-36.

sciences. This is not exactly to discount that the detractors of Fażl Allāh criticized him on account of his teachings: by their own words, they had serious misgivings with the content of Ḥurūfī doctrine. It is merely to observe the intertwined matter that the realm of intellectual esotericism, comparable to the Ṣūfī networks of the 9th/15th century, saw the dynamic of *silsila*-builders, sometimes with more tangible connections to governmental institutions, casting a wary eye upon unaffiliated (and perhaps more undisciplined) individual saints.

This project has tended to privilege the portions of the writing of Āzarī which are particularly focused on those topics which might be considered the occult sciences, whether it is through the radical lettrism of Fażl Allāh, the speculations of the *ahl-i kashf va taḥqīq*, or the gnostic themes of the poetry of Āzarī, analogues with which could be found in a number of earlier and contemporary esoteric movements. There is value in focusing so heavily on the occult speculations of Āzarī for a number of reasons. Chief among these would be their having received scant scholarly attention despite making up a large portion of Āzarī's prose works, as well as the notable popularity of the occult sciences among certain well-placed intellectuals in comparable courts of the 9th/15th century. There is novelty to recognizing that Āzarī, having been a member of both courtly settings and Ṣūfī orders at important transition periods in the history of each, would have been composing books with conclusions that could be considered risky at best in the eyes of the authorities of these same court. There is likewise utility in a study of Āzarī seeming to confirm certain hypotheses about the near-ubiquity of the occult sciences in the post-Mongol world and their being put to good use in legitimation efforts by sultans facing the crisis of whence rightful leadership should spring. Whether it is his background in growing up in a (sometimes) messianic community, his interest in the science of the letters and their relationship with the organization of the cosmos, or his sympathy for the People of Unveiling and

Investigation, the parallels with figures such as Idrīs Bidlīsī, Sharaf al-Dīn ‘Alī Yazdī, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Biṣṭāmī, Maḥmūd Gāwān, or Ṣā’ in al-Dīn Turka are immediately evident, and have been noted throughout this project as such. Given what is known about the biographies of these figures, it might be reasonable to see in Āzarī yet another example of courts appealing to intellectuals well-versed in a number of occult skills in order to provide some claim to their holding sovereignty in the absence of the historical legalistic methods based in caliphal recognition.

With this having been said, similar to the notes surrounding “influence” above, a cautionary note is necessary for transitioning from the figure of Āzarī himself to what role he may have had regarding the official positions of the courts at which he periodically served. The relationship between Āzarī and the Bahmanid sultans, for whom the contemporary historical record is already so thin, is an apt test case for this point. There is a temptation to look at the reported high position of Āzarī at the court of the Bahmanids and his gifting of the *AMA* to Aḥmad I and assume that the Bahmanids were interested in the occult doctrines considered in such detail throughout this work. Though this is surely possible, it is largely circumstantial evidence. To my knowledge, there are not sources which can be seen as explicitly suggesting a Bahmanid interest in solidifying their roles as the rulers of the Deccan through an appeal to numerology, geomancy, or what might be called a “monarchical messianism,” as seen in other post-Mongol polities.²⁷ There are, however, much more tangible pieces of evidence regarding an appeal by the Bahmanids to not only a sometimes-mythical idea of Persian kingship, but to also

²⁷ Contrast this with: Cornell Fleischer, “Shadows of Shadows: Prophecy in Politics in 1530s Istanbul,” *International Journal of Turkish Studies* 13, no. 1–2 (2007): 51–62; “A Mediterranean Apocalypse.” Hints of Bahmanid curiosity regarding the occult sciences in the chronicles are typically more oblique, as in the case of Ṭabāṭabā suggesting an interest in the part of Aḥmad I in intellectuals pursuing the science of the letters. See: Ṭabāṭabā, *Burhān*, 54; Firouzeh, “Dynastic Self-Fashioning,” 164.

to the tangible empire of the Sassanians. Though Firishta and Ibrāhīm Shīrāzī reported variants of the questionable “Gāngū Bahmanī” fable in explaining the origin of the “Bahmanid” moniker in the first place, the evidence would seem to point more strongly towards the genealogy likewise shared in the *Gulshān-i Ibrāhīmī*, in which ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Ḥasan Bahman Shāh is said to have a family line reaching back to Bahman, son of Isfandiyār.²⁸ This would be in keeping with the presence of Sassanian motifs in the architecture of the Bahmanids, which at the very least speaks to an effort to associate the official architectural style of the Bahmanid sultans with pre-Islamic Persian kings.²⁹ One might also consider the circumstances surrounding the accession of the first Bahmanid sultan. There are recognizable signifiers of a connection to an early Islamic past on display, as ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Ḥasan is both adorned with the “crown of the sultanate” (*tāj-i salṭanat*) and bears the “black parasol, which was a symbol of the ‘Abbāsīd caliphs” (*chatr-i siyāh ki nishān-i khulafā-yi ‘abbāsī būd*).³⁰ There is a hint of the value of occult knowledge at the court in the anecdote of a debate between the Muslim and Hindu astrologers of the court as to which date of accession would suggest a longer and more prosperous reign for the Bahmanids,

²⁸ Firishta, *Tārīkh-i Firishta*, 2:251; Ibrāhīm Shīrāzī, *Tazkirat al-Mulūk*, 8a. The Iranian royal lineage is discussed in Ṭabāṭabā, *Burhān*, 11-12. For the debate over this issue in the secondary literature, on the side more willing to accept the version of Firishta and Ibrāhīm Shīrāzī, see: R.V. Ortukar and G. H. Khare, “The Origin of ‘Gangu Bahmani’: Is Firishta’s Legend Absurd?,” in *Indian History Congress Proceedings, Second Session, Allahabad, October 8-10, 1938* (Allahabad: Dikshit Press, 1938) 304-8. For those opposed, who considered a claimed descent from Bahman more likely as a royal title, see: Haroon Khan Sherwani, “Gangu Bahmani,” *Journal of Indian History* 20, no. 1 (1941), 95-9; T. W. Haig, “Inscriptions in Gulbarga,” in *Epigraphia Indo-Moslemica*, ed. E. Denison Ross (Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Govt. Printing, 1907), 1–10; Haig, “Some Notes on the Bahmany Dynasty,” *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 73, Extra No. (1904): 1–15. The first inscription shared by Haig, cut in a mosque in Gulbarga in 754/1353 and identifying the king as “‘Alā’ al-Dunyā wa-al-Dīn Bahman Shāh,” is compelling in arguing that the correct form of the name from the start was Bahman, and not, for example, Brāhmanī or Bahmanī, as one would expect if this was a title referring to his being known as “Gāngū Bahman.” The fact that the story ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Ḥasan being connected in his youth with a Brahmin benefactor by Firishta and Ibrāhīm Shīrāzī is significant in that it suggests that the story was circulating in the 11th/17th century Deccan historiographical tradition, and that could be used as a piece of evidence to study the later reception of the Bahmanids. However, its historicity is doubtful.

²⁹ M. Shokoohy, “The Sasanian Royal Emblems and Their Reemergence in the Fourteenth Century Deccan,” *Muqarnas* 11 (1994): 65–78.

³⁰ Firishta, *Tārīkh-i Firishta*, 2:237.

with the Muslim faction eventually emerging successful.³¹ However, while astrology is certainly an aspect of the occult sciences and may sometimes appear paired with methods of other sciences of the *‘ulūm-i gharība*, so too is it such a nearly omnipresent feature of historiographical writing of the period that it is almost unworthy of note. There are not additional descriptions at this moment, for example, of a structuring of the physical court around the arrangement of the heavenly spheres, with an associated importance given to the embodied rituals associating the king with either the heavenly spheres or with the divine presence.³² It is true that a major limiting factor in this arena is the relative lack of contemporary source material available for the Bahmanid sultans, and that should various lost histories or religious and political treatises from this era come to light, then it will be possible to more fully understand what sort of occult themes were woven into the Bahmanid worldview. Considering again the example of Āzarī, it is clear that there was *some* level of interest in esotericism, or that it at least was not something looked down upon by the court of Aḥmad Shāh I in the process of hiring courtiers and cultivating a royal library. However, there is simply a high level of obscurity as to whether the Bahmanid sultans were considering themselves in the same cosmological terms as their contemporaries, while their interest in presenting themselves as bearing a certain hereditary charisma from the Persian imperial sovereigns of the past is on more obvious display.³³

³¹ Firishta, *Tārīkh-i Firishta*, 2:238-9.

³² This might be contrasted with the elaborate cosmological symbolism at the court of the Mughal emperor, Humāyūn: Eva Orthmann, “Court Culture and Cosmology in the Mughal Empire: Humāyūn and the Foundations of the Dīn-i Ilāhī,” in *Court Cultures in the Muslim World: Seventh to Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. Albrecht Fuess and Jan-Peter Hartung (London & New York: Routledge, 2011), 202–20.

³³ In this way, the Bahmanids were well in line with what Wink would specify as the second phase of the presence of Islam in India, namely, “Persianate-Turkish...associated with agrarian-fiscal state-formation on the Middle-Eastern model.” This would be in contrast with the earliest links between the Islamic world and the lands termed *al-Hind*, the “Arabic variant” largely centered around trade connections (and not limited to Arab merchant families, but including diaspora communities such as Jews and Parsis who worked across the two geographical regions). André Wink, *al-Hind: The Making of the Islamic World*, 1:360.

It may seem, in other words, that while the occult sciences were a feature of the court of nearly every ruler in the 9th/15th century, they were not necessarily the single determinant of the efforts of said court or ruler to claim to be legitimate sovereigns. It may be that they were one method among others to which sultans had access, and existed largely in balance with other appeals to, for example, practical ethics rooted in the Greek philosophical tradition, the prestige of Persian kingship, Chinggis-khānid descent, or other attempts to construct a royal bloodline which might bear with it the charisma necessary to elevate oneself above competing claimants to power through military means.³⁴ This may seem a mundane point, as the wide variety of legitimation methods, often employed simultaneously by rulers in the post-Mongol period, are well-trodden ground, per the earlier cited work of Judith Pfeiffer. However, I note this simply to build off of the much-needed corrective literature of recent years, cited throughout this dissertation, emphasizing the presence and importance of the occult sciences in courtly spheres as a key method of claiming that a sovereign has not simply military might but cosmic approval. An area for further research may be distinguishing between those courts who fully embraced esoteric means of legitimation in the late Middle Period of Islamic history, and those courts which, though employing figures well-versed in the occult sciences, it is more difficult to perceive a tangible influence of these thinkers upon the ideology of the particular polity. The Bahmanid sultans in particular, despite the difficulty in attaining source material throughout the formative period of the late 8th and early 9th/late 14th and early 15th centuries, are well placed for this sort of future study.

³⁴ Consider the discussions of the construction of both Timurid and Ottoman vocabularies of rule in: Markiewicz, *The Crisis of Kingship*, 151-91; 240-84.

5.3. The Development of Esoteric Networks in the Post-Mongol Period

There is a particular value in taking up Āzarī as the source for a microhistorical approach to the 9th/15th century Islamic world, even despite limitations with regard to sources related to his own potential influence. This is particularly the case with regard to *political* influence. Though there is a considerable amount of raw writing which can be attributed to Āzarī, those works which would have the most direct connection to the political centers of Iran and the Indian Deccan in his lifetime – *qaṣīdas* for Timurid rulers, the *Bahman-nāma*, the correspondence between Āzarī and ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Aḥmad II regarding policies towards the Oldcomer and Newcomer factions – are those selfsame works which have been lost to date. This would require that a microhistory with Āzarī as subject must necessarily take a somewhat different approach than one might have for his contemporaries in networks of Islamic esotericism, whose works would have a more palpable political impact. Further concrete discussions of the political leanings of Āzarī will have to wait for the concordant availability of additional source material.

However, this does not mean that the works of Āzarī must be thought of in largely self-contained terms, or that they cannot be used to understand better certain overarching intellectual trends which were operating at a much larger level than simply this one individual. An important area where a study of Āzarī the individual can speak to a much broader Persianate world which has not yet been fully discussed throughout this project would certainly include both the gradual development of Ṣūfī networks into what would eventually be concrete and institutionalized “orders.” The more significant Ṣūfī attachment of Āzarī is also the one that has largely been overlooked in biographical materials about him, namely, the Kubrawī line to which he stated he belonged. This connection raises further questions about the nature of Ṣūfī “initiation” in this period across orders, the status of the Kubrawiyya in Khurasan and Central Asia in the 9th/15th

century, and the relationship between the Kubrawiyya and the networks of occult intellectuals discussed above. There is also the matter of Āzarī having met with Ni‘mat Allāh and, supposedly, having received a robe (*khirqā*) and diploma (*ijāzat*) from him.³⁵ This raises additional questions about the nature of “membership” in Ṣūfī networks of the time, to the extent this is a useful category in the first place, and whether Āzarī was in any way connected with the fortuitous transfer of the Ni‘mat-allāhī network to the Deccan shortly after his own residence at Bidar.

The relationship between Āzarī and the Kubrawī Ṣūfī network-turned-order is more sophisticated than it might initially seem. The membership, as it were, of Āzarī in the Kubrawī network is indicative of certain trends in Ṣūfī discourse of the 9th/15th century which already point towards, most pressingly, the unsettled nature of the *silsilas* which would eventually prove to be of such importance in the crystallization of recognizable and distinct Ṣūfī *orders*. Little is known about the first teacher of Āzarī, Muḥyī al-Dīn Ṭūsī Ghazālī, beyond the relatively anodyne reports of him found in Timurid-era histories and biographical dictionaries, which have been shared in the introduction to this project.³⁶ One known surviving work from this figure, the *Kanz al-‘Āshiqīn*, is likewise largely a formulaic discussion of Ṣūfī pietistic practices with little immediate concern towards *silsilas* either spiritual or genealogical besides the author’s apparent descent from Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad Ghazālī.³⁷ This issue is compounded by the fact that the

³⁵ Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tazkirat al-Shu‘arā’*, 719-720

³⁶ Mīrkhānd, *Tārīkh-i Rawḍat al-Ṣafā*, 10:5395-6; Khāndamīr, *Ḥabīb al-Siyar*, 4:6; Jāmī, *Nafahāt al-Uns*, 454.

³⁷ Muḥyī al-Dīn Ṭūsī Ghazālī, *Kanz al-‘Āshiqīn*, MS.PERS.105, Bibliothèque universitaire des langues et civilisations, 2b. While further study is needed of the *Kanz al-‘Āshiqīn* as a work of Ṣūfī anecdotes from the 8th-9th/14th-15th centuries, this early discussion of descent, along with references in the work to such figures as ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb and ‘Ā’isha, would suggest the author not so much confessionally ambiguous as outwardly Sunnī, in contrast to his student, Āzarī. Again, this is not terribly surprising – confessional ambiguity as a feature of the time would suggest the very absence of strict confessional boundaries which otherwise might call into question Ṭūsī

folio in which Āzarī would have most likely discussed his connection with this first teacher is defective in the single known manuscript of the *AMA*.³⁸ Even with this uncertainty, there are curious elements to the connection of Āzarī to well-known figures in the Kubrawī network. First, returning to the discussion of Ṣūfī affiliation in the 9th/15th century, there is little effort by Āzarī to connect specifically his own religious mentors to a clearly defined and chronologically consistent *silsila*. In fact, the discussion of this topic in the actual work of Āzarī is curious, as, grammatically speaking, it seems to invoke a connection to the well-known figure in the earliest Kubrawī, Rāzī al-Dīn ‘Alī Lālā:

The robe [*khirqā*] of our master, Rāzī al-Dīn ‘Alī Lālā, goes back firmly to Shaykh Abū Sa‘īd-i Abī al-Khayr.³⁹

This is, naturally, a figurative discussion of the bestowal of the significant *khirqā* of the Ṣūfī tradition, as Rāzī al-Dīn Lālā would have died long before Āzarī in 642/1244. I would read this sentence as Āzarī indicating that the robe and authority of his spiritual masters extended back to Lālā, and hence, back to the earliest roots of the Kubrawīyya. However, while one may read Lālā as a synecdoche for the Kubrawī network at large, one will also recall the quite explicit discussion of an *uvaysī*-style connection between Āzarī and Sa‘īd al-Dīn Ḥamuwayī.⁴⁰ Unlike the brief mentions of Muḥyī al-Dīn Ṭūsī Ghazālī in the supporting histories, and the near absence of this worldly mentor altogether in the *AMA*, it is Ḥamuwayī to whom Āzarī would have more explicitly attached himself with regard to spiritual matters. With this apparent spiritual “father-

Ghazālī being the teacher of a figure like Āzarī, whose apparent sympathies to Shī‘ī thought have been on clear display – but it is another worthy data point in attempting to understand the religious dynamics of 9th/15th century Iran, nonetheless.

³⁸ Āzarī, *AMA*, 10b.

³⁹ Āzarī, *AJA*, 52b.

⁴⁰ Āzarī, *AJA*, 98b.

son” exchange, one can more easily place Āzarī not simply within a Kubrawī tradition leading back through Raḏī al-Dīn Lālā, but specifically, a branch of the Kubrawī network in which figures such as Ḥamuwayī and his own direct student, ‘Azīz Nasafī, would have been discussing matters of the science of the letters, metempsychosis, and the *mahdī* in a way not dissimilar from Āzarī himself.

It is this self-declared *uvaysī* connection which ensures that Āzarī serves both as a way of illuminating and adding confusion to the status of the Kubrawī network in the first half of the 9th/15th century. From one perspective, Āzarī would seem to be a valuable source for determining such matters of the state of the Kubrawī *silsila* as it was being transmitted in roughly the 830s/1420s by virtue of his sections on the “sayings of the shaykhs” in both the *AMA* and *AJA*. Presumably, there is not only a literary component, but a practical, institution-building component, as well. While we have little information about the afterlife of Āzarī and his teachings in the form of his students or spiritual inheritors, one might expect to add his acolytes to a broader charting of the Kubrawī Ṣūfī order and its development in Khurasan. There is a temptation to consider the more transgressive elements of the work of Āzarī – sympathy for the Ḥurūfiyya, an apparent acceptance of *tanāsukh* as a cosmological doctrine, the palpable gnostic themes scattered throughout his *dīvān* – and read from these a particular esoteric strain in the Kubrawī Ṣūfī network by virtue of their being written by a Kubrawī Ṣūfī. The same assumption could also extend to the Ni‘mat-allāhī network: while, in reality, Āzarī only sporadically cited Ni‘mat Allāh in his written works, and does not seem to intellectually or practically have had connections with the nascent Ni‘mat-allāhī network besides his brief visit to Ni‘mat Allāh in Māhān, he nonetheless was a recipient of a Ni‘mat-allāhī robe and diploma. Could it be that, in fact, these Ṣūfī networks were not simply organizations in which a figure might speculate as to

the nature of the Disconnected Letters or various occult sciences (though they were surely that), but sites in which doctrines which would have been considered quite radical for the time could easily percolate and spread throughout these Ṣūfī networks?

Rather than pursue this speculation to its full conclusion, I would offer that the picture is not quite as clear as it first appears, based on the very nature of the connections of Āzarī to these Ṣūfī orders as narrowly understood. The Ni‘mat-allāhiyya, for one, do not seem to have figured very strongly in the thought of Āzarī, even despite the incidental fact of their becoming the Ṣūfī-network-in-residence in the Deccan shortly after the return of Āzarī from Bidar to Isfarāyīn. Second, one will recall that as far as can be determined through the existing tradition of biographical dictionary entries on Āzarī, read in conjunction with his own work, Āzarī did not have much of a *tangible* connection to the Kubrawī network, either. Even if Muḥyī al-Dīn Ṭūsī Ghazālī had some sort of Kubrawī link, developed during his time as a relatively well-regarded Ṣūfī figure near Timurid Herat, it is not immediately emphasized in his work, nor does Āzarī return to Muḥyī al-Dīn in his discussion of the role of the *khirqā* among the shaykhs. On the contrary, the premier Ṣūfī connection to which Āzarī could boast was, indeed, his *uvaysī*-style connection to Sa‘d al-Dīn Ḥamuwayī.

Whether this experience “actually occurred” is irrelevant for the question at hand, namely, to what extent was Āzarī, *practically speaking*, connected with other members of the Kubrawī network on the earthly plane? Presumably, by virtue of his works including a notable genealogy of ‘Alī Hamadānī, Āzarī at the very least had access to a Kubrawī textual tradition which would have been circulating at the time. However, as far as can be determined, he likewise did not spend extended amounts of time in Kubrawī Ṣūfī lodges, for example, or in discourse with a Kubrawī network which was already in the midst of a considerable schism in

the 830s/1420s by virtue of the claims to *mahdī*-hood of Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh (whose claim would have occurred by 826/1423).⁴¹ In fact, the works of Āzarī, despite their date and place of composition, evince no awareness of the dispute over the spiritual succession to Kh^wāja Ishaq Khuttalānī (d. 827/1424) by Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh and ‘Abd Allāh Barzishābādī (d. 872/1467-68), respectively.⁴² There may be practical reasons for such an omission. The ambiguity in the autobiographical portions of the *AMA* and *AJA* mean that it is unclear whether Āzarī may well have still been pursuing his first round of travels throughout the Islamic world at the time of Nūrbakhsh publicly making his claim to *mahdī*-hood in 826/1423,⁴³ though he would have been back in Khurasan by some point in 830/1426-7 to complete the *AMA*. This is not to mention that Khuttal/Khuttalān, the site of the announcement of the public mission of Nūrbakhsh, is many hundreds of kilometers away from Āzarī’s familial lands of Isfarāyīn and Baqhaq/Sabzavār, while Nūrbakhsh would have spent much of the 830s/1420s and 1430s traveling throughout other portions of the Islamic world (though his rival, Barzishābādī, would have been in Khurasan at points which overlapped with the residence of Āzarī.)⁴⁴ However, by the composition of the *AJA*, the succession issues which had plagued the Kubrawī Šūfī network on account of the claims of Nūrbakhsh would surely have circulated widely through Iranian lands. One is left to wonder how Āzarī, himself having shown an interest in issues of messianism and an apparent follower of the Kubrawī network, would not find it necessary to comment on the split between the followers of Nūrbakhsh and Barzishābādī in his lifetime.

⁴¹ Hamid Algar, “Nūrbakhshīyya,” *EP*.

⁴² On the dispute, see: DeWeese, “Eclipse of the Kubrawīyah,” 51-63; Bashir, *Messianic Hopes*, 44-54.

⁴³ Bashir, *Messianic Hopes*, 49.

⁴⁴ Bashir, *Messianic Hopes*, 54-63.

Both the scanty information regarding Āzarī's first earthly/tangible mentor, Muḥyī al-Dīn Ṭūsī Ghazālī, and the silence of Āzarī towards the significant Kubrawī schism which occurred at roughly the time he would have been composing his esoteric compendia, suggests certain limits as to how instructive his writings are for the broader network as a whole. I would suggest that, based on the available textual evidence, Āzarī likely considered himself as being a part of the Kubrawī *silsila* primarily through his *uvaysī*-style initiation through his connection with Sa'd al-Dīn Ḥamuwayī, with a possibility that his first shaykh Muḥyī al-Dīn also had some relationship this same network. In other words, his linkage to the Kubrawiyya would have occurred more on the spiritual, *ma'navī* plane than on a tangible, *ṣūrī* level. This naturally does not mean that his writings are wholly unhelpful in considering the state of the Kubrawiyya in the first half of the 9th/15th century: it is notable in itself that a figure such as Āzarī would see fit to join himself into the intellectual and spiritual lineage of Sa'd al-Dīn Ḥamuwayī, and his report of the genealogy of 'Alī Hamadānī would suggest access to certain Kubrawī textual materials as he composed his own written works. Certainly, more research is needed on the reach of the writings of Ḥamuwayī, his legacy in Persianate esoteric circles well beyond his death, and the specific portions of his writings which would have been transmitted by both Āzarī and other occultists of the 9th/15th century and beyond. The limits of the *AMA* and *AJA* with regard to the Kubrawī network come in the thinness of the actual institutional connections between Āzarī and Najm al-Dīn Kubrā and his successors (based on what evidence is currently known). It would likely be faulty to draw expansive conclusions from the writings of Āzarī as to what texts and concepts were circulating in Kubrawī circles over his lifetime, as it would likewise be a possibly faulty assumption to suggest that the presence of Ḥurūfī doctrines in the *AMA* and *AJA* mean that these concepts were popular among the Kubrawī network as a whole. Taking these notes of caution

into account, the writings of Āzarī and other figures who showed a certain intellectual flexibility and novelty should be a starting point for additional research into both the transmission of Kubrawī writings among esotericists of the post-Mongol period, as well as the fits and starts by which the Kubrawī *network* was hammered into the Kubrawī *order*. Whether the quite all-encompassing position of Āzarī towards a variety of different intellectual traditions was an outlier in the 9th/15th century Kubrawī network – a marker of his own position as an individual, *uvaysī*-initiated follower, as opposed to a tangible disciple of figures such as Khuttalānī or Barzishābādī – or, in fact, a representative example of the intellectual tradition of the Kubrawī network of his time, remains to be seen.

5.4 Āzarī, the Bahmanid Sultans, and Indo-Persian Culture of the 9th/15th Century

The lost, and possibly wholly misattributed, *Bahman-nāma* not being available for study does not mean that nothing additional can be said about the significance of Āzarī appearing at the court of the Bahmanid Sultans in the 830s/1420s, and the state of Indo-Persian culture in particularly South India at this period. There is already one particular oddity when it comes to the presence of Āzarī in India, namely, its quite short duration. This is not a situation comparable to, for example, the later Bahmanid minister Maḥmūd Gāwān, or Zuhūrī Turshīzī (d. 1025/1616), poet-in-residence at the Bijapur court of Ibrāhīm ‘Ādil-shāh II (d. 1035/1626), each of whom spent the rest of their lives in India following their emigration from Iran.⁴⁵ Perhaps the appeals from Āzarī to Aḥmad Shāh I were not simply a discrete means to take leave from Bidar without disrupting courtly etiquette, and he truly missed his homeland of Khurasan. It is likewise possible that the backlash against lettrist intellectuals initiated by the court of Shāhrukh after the unsuccessful assassination attempt of Aḥmad-i Lur had quieted down sufficiently, and Āzarī felt

⁴⁵ See: Sherwani, *Maḥmūd Gāwān*; Paul Losensky, “Zuhūrī Turshīzī,” *EP*.

comfortable returning to Timurid lands following his extended absence. As neither the author nor his later biographers have spoken about the specific motivations for this travel to and from South India, the matter will have to remain speculative. However, the very presence of Āzarī in Bidar in the 830s/1420s, however brief, would place him as one member of a prominent cast of émigrés from distant parts of the Islamic world to the sultanates of South Asia in the post-Mongol period.⁴⁶

Building from this relatively well-trodden point, however, is a topic which is deserving of additional research, namely, the specific manifestations of this particularly broad dynamic of patronizing newcomer litterateurs as a means of legitimation in the sultanates of the Indian subcontinent. By inviting not only poets and occultists such as Āzarī, but masters of correspondence (*inshā*) and statesmen such as Maḥmūd Gāwān, and known Ṣūfī figures such as the descendants of Ni‘mat Allāh, the Bahmanid sultans were simply continuing a well-established tradition of premodern Indian sultanates. Lahore, so notable as a waystation for raids further into North India, would have hosted figures skilled in the literary arts who hailed from “Iran, Khurasan, and Mawara-an-nahr [Transoxiana],” with a recognizable Persian literary culture being present in Punjab from at least the Ghūrīd period onward.⁴⁷ The Delhi court of Iltutmish (d. 633/1236) would have absorbed vast numbers of émigrés from other parts of the Islamic world – many of them fleeing the disruptions of the Mongol invasions – just as the Bahmanids would have taken in and patronized figures such as Āzarī, himself almost certain fleeing the political and social atmosphere of Shāhrukhīd lands in the 830s/1420s.⁴⁸ This

⁴⁶ On the Bahmanid case alone, see the examples of Khalaf Ḥasan Baṣrī and Maḥmūd Gāwān, as well as the emigration of the Ni‘mat-allāhī order: Flatt, *Deccan Sultanates*, 120-64; Muhammad Suleman Siddiqi, *The Bahmani Ṣūfis*, 78-85. Additional cases will be cited below.

⁴⁷ Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam*, 116-17.

dynamic of figures making their way from more far-flung regions of the Persianate world for a variety of reasons, including refuge and/or employment, would likewise have continued on well beyond Āzarī and the period of the Bahmanid sultans.⁴⁹ I would suggest two areas where the specific examples of Āzarī and the Bahmanids would be useful in speaking to much broader related to premodern Indo-Persian culture and legitimation efforts in, specifically, the Persianate world as it manifested in South Asia. The first question is the extent to which the Bahmanid legitimation efforts mirrored other polities in both Hindūstān and the broader Persianate world. A situation in which the Bahmanid sultans largely pursued a set of policies *recognizable* compared to what was seen across vast swaths of the Islamic world is as significant as those areas in which they may have seemed *distinctive* from their Ottoman, Timurid, Qarā Qyunlu, and Aq Qyunlu contemporaries. The second issue is tangential to the first: in what ways did the Bahmanid polities reflect the sort of intercultural exchange which may be seen in a number of sultanates across the Indian subcontinent in the premodern period? Did they put into practice what might be considered “Indic” signifiers as a means to promote themselves as the rightful rulers of the Deccan, or did they primarily rely on what might be considered the markers of the “Persianate

⁴⁸ André Wink, *al-Hind: The Making of the Islamic World. Volume 2: The Slave Kings and the Islamic Conquest, 11th-13th Centuries* (Boston; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 190-2.

⁴⁹ For examples of travelers across the Persianate world in slightly later contexts, whether figures journeying to India from elsewhere or vice versa, see: Mana Kia, *Persianate Selves: Memories of Place and Origin Before Nationalism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020). The issue of India as a place of refuge from those fleeing, in particular, the religious and social dynamics of Šafavid Iran, have received attention recently in the context of the *šulḥ-i kull* (“universal conciliation”) of Akbar, as well as the potential influence upon this policy by figures from the Nuḡṭawiyya, the Ḥurūfiyya offshoot, who faced fierce persecution under the Šafavids. The eastern branches of the Ḥurūfiyya and Nuḡṭawiyya, including their influence and presence in India, will be the subject of a future study. On the *šulḥ-i kull* and the Nuḡṭawiyya, see: Abbas Amanat, “Persian Nuḡṭawīs and the Shaping of the Doctrine of ‘Universal Conciliation’ (Šulḥ-i Kull) in Mughal India,” in *Unity in Diversity: Mysticism, Messianism and the Construction of Religious Authority in Islam*, ed. Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, Islamic History and Civilization: Studies and Texts 105 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 367–91.. For a recent study of the *šulḥ-i kull* in which the Nuḡṭawiyya are mentioned in passing, see: Daniel J. Sheffield, “Exercises in Peace: Āzar Kayvānī Universalism and Comparison in the *School of Doctrines*,” *Modern Asian Studies* 56 (2022): 959–92.

cosmopolis” in fashioning themselves as sultans of South India?⁵⁰ It will be worth mentioning a few salient points on each of these questions, as given both their prominence in their own time, and their role as (unintentional) progenitors of such later, long-lived sultanates as the ‘Ādil-shāhs and Quṭb-shāhs.

The first question – the extent to which the Bahmanids pursued methods of legitimation in claiming to be the rightful authorities in their territories were recognizable as part of a larger tapestry of the Persianate world – is the easier question to answer. There is the somewhat tangled matter of what, precisely, it would mean to display signs of being a “Persianate” polity, as that which has been considered the Persianate world would have stretched over thousands of kilometers, and lasted for multiple centuries. For the sake of argument, one might consider the four “modalities” of the Persianate put forward by Abbas Amanat:

A tradition of governance and methods of statecraft; a common literary heritage; the prevalence of Sufism and Sufi networks; and finally, common features of a Persianate material culture.⁵¹

Taking each of these in turn to test the hypothesis of the four modalities of the Persianate, it will rapidly become clear the extent to which the Bahmanids fulfill these qualities. This is the case even in taking into account the constant issue in Bahmanid historiography of a lack of

⁵⁰ The framing of political, social, and cultural trends in terms of the linguistic cosmopolis, frequently invoked in discussions of pre-modern South Asia, can be better understood through the work of Sheldon Pollock: Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2006), 1-36. The specific mechanics of the “Persianate Cosmopolis” as discussed by scholars of South Asian history in relation to the premodern Muslim sultanates of the Indian subcontinent will be discussed shortly.

⁵¹ Abbas Amanat, “Remembering the Persianate,” in *The Persianate World: Rethinking a Shared Sphere*, ed. Abbas Amanat and Assef Ashraf, vol. 18, Iran Studies (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2019), 29. At various points in the chapter, this patronage of Sufism and Ṣūfī networks is defined instead as fostering “an alternative socio-cultural milieu” (Amanat, 50), which is not necessarily synonymous, particularly given the number of Ṣūfī networks active throughout the Persianate world which still maintained a certain Sharī‘a-mindedness. The reality of there being a vast spectrum in Ṣūfī practice, up to and including a unified “Sufi-sharī‘a paradigm” – and thus, evidence for skepticism of Sufism as an inherently “alternative path” (an alternative path to what, one might ask) – is, in a slightly contradictory manner, presented in this same discussion (Amanat, 41).

contemporary sources. The titulature used on the coins of the early Bahmanid sultans largely fits expected conventions in their being the “preeminent sultan,” *al-sultān al-a‘zam*, while their being a “second Alexander” (*iskandar-i s̄ānī*) could be read as tapping into the epic and romantic Alexander cycles of the Persianate literary tradition. To be clear, there is likewise a holdover of a somewhat outdated deference to the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate, as at least through the period of Mujāhid Shāh (d. 779/1378) the Bahmanid sultans were still referring to themselves as the Right Hand of the Caliphate, *yamīn al-khilāfat*.⁵² More significant, and more distinctly “Persianate,” is the construction of a genealogy reaching back to the earliest Iranian kings of the Persian epics (such as the *Shāhnāma*) in claiming descent from Bahman b. Isfandiyār, as already discussed above. The issue of Persianate-style governance would be easier to determine were it not for the loss of the ethical treatise of one of the earliest and most influential Bahmanid ministers, Sayf al-Dīn Ghūrī, whose *Naṣā’ih al-Mulūk* (*Advice for Kings*) is no longer extant.⁵³ Without seeing the text itself, it is difficult to speak to the accuracy of what Siddiqui has shared. However, from what can be summarized, the work would seem to fit in a well-known tradition of Persian advice literature composed for monarchs, and ideally could be compared against other works of practical ethics such as the *Qābūs-nāma*, or manuals of administration such as the Ṣafavid-era *Tazkirat al-Mulūk*.⁵⁴ To continue through the remaining Persianate modalities, while the

⁵² E. E. Speight, “The Coins of the Bahmani Kings of the Deccan,” *Islamic Culture* 9 (1935), 288-90.

⁵³ Certain portions of Ghūrī’s work have purportedly been copied and transmitted despite the loss of the original manuscript in a major flood. See: Abdul Majeed Siddiqui, “Malik Saifuddin Gori, the Constitution-Framer of the Bahmani Kingdom,” *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 3 (1939): 701–11.

⁵⁴ See the analysis of the Qābūs-nāma in Browne’s *Literary History of Persia*: Edward Granville Browne, *A Literary History of Persia Volume II: From Firdawsī to Sa‘dī*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956). 276-87. There are other curious elements of the supposed *Naṣā’ih* reported by Siddiqui, as in the list of titles of officials which includes Mongol (*dārūgha*, *īlchī*), Uyghur (*bakhshī*), and Hindūstānī (*chawkī[-navīs]*) titles: Siddiqui, “Malik Saifuddin Gori,” 710-11. On this *Tazkirat al-Mulūk*, consult: *Tadhkirat al-Mulūk: A Manual of Ṣafavid Administration (circa 1137/1725), Persian Text in Facsimile (B.M. Or. 9496)*, E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Series, New Series 16 (Cambridge, England: Trustees of the E.J.W. Gibb Memorial, 1980).

Bahman-nāma remains stubbornly lost, the existence of the *Futūḥ al-Salāṭīn* of ‘Iṣāmī, composed in the earliest days of the newly-formed Bahmanid sultanate, should speak to the efforts of the Bahmanids to self-consciously patronize pieces of Persian epic literature in the mode of such works as the *Shāh-nāma* which would situate them in an older and well-known tradition of Persianate kingship.⁵⁵ The patronage of Ṣūfī figures as a means of supporting a polity’s claim to legitimacy, and the idea that Ṣūfī shaykhs may bestow or withdraw the spiritual stamp of approval which would allow for the practical authority of the sultan to be enacted is on full display throughout Bahmanid history. As already discussed in the literature of Siddiqi and Eaton, the Bahmanid sultans took particular care to support shaykhs from a variety of spiritual genealogies in their realm, including Zayn al-Dīn Shīrāzī, Sirāj al-Dīn Junaydī, Gīsū Darāz, and the invited descendants of Ni‘mat Allāh.⁵⁶ Finally, there are a number of signs of Persianate influence in the material culture of the Bahmanids, including but not limited to Sasanian motifs appearing in Bahmanid architecture.⁵⁷ Naturally, more could be added to this brief discussion of a polity which existed for more than a century and a half, particularly in the context figures such as Āzarī, namely, intellectuals from Iranian lands who either temporarily or permanently took up

⁵⁵ ‘Iṣāmī, *Futūḥ al-Salāṭīn*. See also the brief analysis of the work by Peter Hardy, which takes careful note of the explicit and self-conscious efforts of ‘Iṣāmī to place his work in the longer *Shāh-nāma* tradition: Peter Hardy, *Historians of Medieval India: Studies in Indo-Muslim Historical Writing*, 94-110.

⁵⁶ Muhammad Suleman Siddiqi, *The Bahmani Ṣūfis*; Richard Maxwell Eaton, “Muhammad Gisu Daraz (1321–1422): Muslim Piety and State Authority,” in *A Social History of the Deccan 1300-1761*, 33–58.

⁵⁷ On the Sasanian architectural flourishes, see: Shokoohy, “Sasanian Royal Emblems.” Architectural styles in the Deccan broadly were discussed by Percy Brown as involving “the fusion of two styles of Islamic architecture,” namely, that of the Delhi Sultanate and that of Iran. There are certain challenges identified in fully defining various forms in the architecture of Gulbarga, though: the Jāmi‘ Masjid, for example, though designed by an architect from Qazvīn, is said to be a monument which “cannot be identified as either Persian or Indian,” but rather, may include inspiration from multiple styles “so subtly amalgamated as to be indistinguishable.” Percy Brown, *Indian Architecture: Islamic Period* (Bombay: D.B. Taraporevala Sons & Co., 1956), 66-72. For a discussion of Bahmani architecture, particularly related to sultanic tombs, in Bidar, see: Yazdani, *Bidar, Its History and Monuments*, 114-148; Payvand Firouzeh, “Sacred Kingship in the Garden of Poetry: Aḥmad Shāh Bahmanī’s Tomb in Bidar (India),” *South Asian Studies* 31, no. 2 (2015): 187–214.

residence with the Bahmanid sultans and produced works of Persianate literature in their employ. A more comprehensive discussion of the Bahmanids *specifically* through this lens of the symbols of the Persianate will have to wait for a future project, but the examples shared here should leave little doubt of their being within an understandable matrix of Persianate sultans of the Islamic Middle Periods.

The second issue of asking to what extent the Bahmanid sultans put to use some measure of intercultural exchange in their efforts to bolster their political position in the Deccan is a thornier topic. In large part, this is a question of source material: to say that textual materials dating to the period of the Bahmanids themselves is paltry would be an understatement. This is not only a challenge for historians when it comes to historiographical materials, though the as-yet undiscovered contemporary histories of the Bahmanid sultans continue to serve as a major lacuna in considering the political and social history of the Deccan. The historian of the medieval Deccan is likewise confronted with the fact that the extant sources make it difficult to construct a picture of to what extent the Bahmanids, though operating within the “Persian cosmopolis” – a collection of signifiers with which even non-Muslim sovereigns could easily interact – made use of South Indian signifiers in both their legitimation efforts and the cultural and artistic materials which may have found patronage at their courts. Without delving too deeply into the considerable literature in South Asian studies on the issues of cultural exchange and the interaction of two “cosmopolises” – Sanskrit and Persianate –, suffice it to say that there are widely-recognized fatal flaws with considering the political, social, and cultural history of premodern South Asia through the strictly *religious* terms of Muslims and Hindus.⁵⁸ It has

⁵⁸ On the Persian and Sanskrit cosmopolises see: Richard M. Eaton, “The Persian Cosmopolis (900–1900) and the Sanskrit Cosmopolis (400–1400),” in *The Persianate World: Rethinking a Shared Sphere*, ed. Abbas Amanat and Assef Ashraf, vol. 18, Iran Studies (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2019), 63–83.

already been established that Persianate cultural signifiers figure prominently in Muslim sultanates of India from nearly the earliest days of the Ghaznavid invasions, in no small part because of the role of the Ghaznavid court itself in patronizing such Persian litterateurs as Firdawsī or Mas‘ūd Sa‘d Salmān.⁵⁹ This overall spread of the Persianate as the dominant cultural mode in particularly the post-Mongol period for nearly the entirety of the eastern Islamic world allowed for a remarkable amount of ideological flexibility by those falling under its umbrella. Most significantly for breaking down confessional determinism in South Asian history, one can find generous examples of both Hindu kings adopting Persianate cultural symbols, as in the case of certain flourishes in the royal architecture of Vijayanagara, as well as Muslim, Persianate sovereigns displaying a remarkably flexible attitude towards Hindu symbols in their own political and cultural production.⁶⁰ By the same token, it would be mistaken to consider this

⁵⁹ On Firdawsī, see the work of Julie Scott Meisami: Julie Scott Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987), 80; Meisami, “Firdawsī’s Shahnama,” in *Persian Historiography to the End of the Twelfth Century*, Islamic Surveys (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 37-45. On Mas‘ūd Sa‘d Salmān, see: Sunil Sharma, *Persian Poetry at the Indian Frontier: Mas‘ūd Sa‘d Salmān of Lahore* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2000).

⁶⁰See Eaton, “Persian Cosmopolis,” 63-4; 78. This chapter is notable not only for its extensive discussion of the significance of the “Persian cosmopolis” in South Asia, but its criticism of the practicality of the Hodgsonian neologism of, “Islamicate.” In the course of evaluating the approach of Hodgson toward certain Persianate architectural qualities at the capital of Vijayanagara, Eaton has written:

But the problem with his formulation is that because the terms “Islamdom” and “Islamicate” contain the word “Islam,” their usage implies some sort of interaction with the superhuman world, when in fact Hodgson was referring to structures such as former government buildings in Vijayanagara that had nothing to do with such interactions, but which happened to feature pointed arches, domes, or vaulted arcades (63-4).

I would argue that while criticism of the utility of “Islamicate” may be well taken – particularly its distinction between “religion” and “culture,” itself easily traceable to Hodgson seeing piety as the core of religion (Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization Volume 1: The Classical Age of Islam*, 360) – this particular criticism is somewhat lacking given Hodgson’s intention of how “Islamicate” was meant to be applied. One may very well choose to see the inclusion of “Islam” in any adjective as evoking the inherently “superhuman” elements of core Islamic beliefs, such as the existence of God and the Day of Judgment. However, it would be a bit tortured to gather this from Hodgson’s “Islamicate,” and even from “Islamdom.” While the latter is the “complex of social relations” occurring in “the society in which the Muslims and their faith are recognized as prevalent and socially dominant, *in one sense or another*” (Hodgson, 58), “Islamicate” would be intended to define the following:

There has been, however, a *culture*, centered on a lettered tradition, which has been historically distinctive of Islamdom the *society*, and which has been naturally shared in by both Muslims and non- Muslims who

dynamic as unidirectional, with cultural prestige flowing only via Persianate symbols from Muslim domains into the lands of non-Muslim polities. On the contrary, benefitting from the flexibility of the umbrella of the Persianate itself, there are generous examples of Muslim figures embracing non-Muslim, non-Persianate symbols in their artistic and cultural production,⁶¹ as well as individuals who were able to move with relative ease between high courtly societies both Muslim and non-Muslim.⁶² Surely, though, such a broad and overarching dynamic as interactions between the Persianate and Sanskrit “cosmopolises,” cultural production in both Persian and the local languages of the Indian subcontinent, or markers of the synthesis of certain religious and political signifiers in the Hindūstān of the post-Mongol period, covers such a wide range of polities over such a varied chronological period that it must be tested and considered against the backdrop of specific cases. The Bahmanid sultans are one area where this kind of

participate at all fully in the society of Islamdom. For this, I have used the adjective 'Islamicate'. I thus restrict the term 'Islam' to the *religion* of the Muslims, not using that term for the far more general phenomena, the society of Islamdom and its Islamicate cultural traditions. (Hodgson, 58).

It is one thing to refer casually to the “Islamic world,” or define certain intellectual positions as “Islamic.” It is another to refer to culture signifiers which emerged from a “lettered tradition” – one hardly limited to Muslims themselves – which emerged from a “complex of social relations” in the civil society in which *in some sense or another* Islam and Muslims maintain a certain predominance. The original Hodgsonian definition of Islamicate, in other words, does not strike me as being necessarily connected to supernatural or superhuman elements except by a number of degrees of separation.

By the same token, I would raise the point that while the adjective “Persianate” foregrounds a literary/linguistic tradition, one would be hard-pressed to find discussions of political legitimacy in particularly the post-Mongol Persianate world which were not replete with references to the superhuman world, as have been cited generously throughout this dissertation. The Persianate world certainly saw many iterations of a religio-political vision of the sultan as a figure stamped with cosmic approval and bolstered by embodied ritual. The likely response to this line of discourse would be to highlight the flexibility of the Persianate to be embraced by a wide variety of religious communities, which is well-taken. The question is whether this is not equally true of the Islamicate and those figures identified by Hodgson as being Islamicate non-Muslim thinkers.

⁶¹ Consider, for example, the *Nujūm al-‘Ulūm* of ‘Alī ‘Ādil Shāh I, which, among other things, discusses “Indic religious knowledge:” Flatt, *Courts of the Deccan Sultanates*, 210-267.

⁶² See the example of ‘Ayn al-Mulk Gīlānī in: Phillip B. Wagoner, “Fortuitous Convergences and Essential Ambiguities: Transcultural Political Elites in the Medieval Deccan,” *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 3, no. 3 (December 1999): 241–64.

more specific study might be useful in considered broader political and social trends in South Asia during the Islamic Middle Periods.

While approaching the history of the Bahmanid sultans with a greater focus of their being rooted in the particular space of the Indian Deccan is beyond the scope of this study, there are certain hints that such a study might bear fruit.⁶³ The period of Bahmanid history roughly corresponding to the courtly career of Āzārī would be particularly ripe for further investigation. There have been certain preliminary studies, as in the case of the articles of Sherwani on intercultural and interreligious dialogue in the reigns of both Fīrūz Shāh and Aḥmad Shāh I.⁶⁴ While often still framed in terms of Muslim-Hindu dynamics, Sherwani nonetheless had already noted the multiple occasions in which a more outdated approach to medieval history – hypostasized Muslim and Hindu communities, sealed off from each other and necessarily at odds – could easily be shown to be erroneous in the Bahmanid case. In simply the case of Fīrūz Shāh, there is evidence in the narrative sources of his employing Hindu Brahmins in his administration, of the king of Khērla being recognized as a Bahmanid military commander (*amīr*), and of certain “Hindu styles” in the architecture of the time.⁶⁵ While Sherwani would argue that the architecture, in particular, of the time of Aḥmad Shāh I, saw a lessening of Tughluqid or Hindu-inspired forms in favor of “Iranian” styles, so too is cited the recognition of the anniversary of

⁶³ The Bahmanids, having been one of a number of distinctive sultanates of the Deccan, do receive periodic attention in the monograph of Emma Flatt, though not in the specific manner and in service of the particular questions I am raising here. See: Flatt, *Courts of the Deccan Sultanates*, *passim*.

⁶⁴ Haroon Khan Sherwani, “Tāju’ d-Din Fīrōz and the Synthesis of Bahmanī Culture,” *New Indian Antiquary* 6, no. 4 (1934): 75–89; Sherwani, “Cultural Influences Under Aḥmad Shāh Wali Bahmani,” *Islamic Culture* 18 (1944): 364–76.

⁶⁵ As recognized by Eaton in the aforementioned chapter, there are certain limitations to relying on how much information about official religious and political policy can be recognized in architectural styles, however. See: Sherwani, “Tāju’ d-Din Fīrōz,” 75–8; Eaton, “Persian Cosmopolis,” 63–4.

the death of Aḥmad Shāh by followers of the (Hindu) Lingayat movement as evidence of continued cultural synthesis into the reign of Aḥmad Shāh.⁶⁶

There are also artifacts of Bahmanid culture and society beyond the person of the sultan that demand further work. For example, in the realm of religious personages, a great deal of attention has been paid to the saint Muḥammad b. Yūsuf Ḥusaynī, known as Gīsū Darāz, with studies of both his political role in the transition of power from Fīrūz Shāh to Aḥmad Shāh I and his own religious writings.⁶⁷ Of particular note in these discussions would be the fact that not only was Gīsū Darāz apparently conversant in Hindavī, but that he learned Sanskrit and elements of Hindu thought so as to more effectively conduct debates with Brahmin interlocutors.⁶⁸ There are likewise works written in Deccanī which have been attributed to Gīsū Darāz, such as the *Mi'rāj al-Āshiqīn*, but the authorship of these works is in doubt.⁶⁹ While the question of whether Gīsū Darāz himself would have been composing in the nascent Dakhnī language may be more ambiguous, the role of the Bahmanid sultans in patronizing Dakhnī as a literary language may be

⁶⁶ Sherwani, "Cultural Influences," 365-6; 375-6. For the Lingayat movement and the social and cultural dynamics of the Deccan up to and including the period of the Bahmanids, see: Richard Maxwell Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur*, 9-12. On the Lingayat movement as a whole, one might note the second appendix of the collection of translated *vacanas* (religious poetry in free verse, composed in Kannada), *Speaking of Śiva*: William McCormack, "Appendix II: On Lingayat Culture," in *Speaking of Śiva*, by A.K. Ramanujan (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin, 1973), 175–87. This work might likewise be read alongside the work of Ishwaran, with its emphasis on Basava (d. 1167) as a social reformer: Karigoudar Ishwaran, *Speaking of Basava: Lingayat Religion and Culture in South Asia* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1992). Each of these are discussed in the following reivew: Daniel Gold, "Review: *Speaking of Basava: Lingayat Religion and Culture in South Asia*, by K. Ishwaran," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 52, no. 3 (August 1993): 754–55.

⁶⁷ On the religio-political dynamics of saintly patronage by the Bahmanid sultans with a particular focus on Gīsū Darāz, see: Richard Maxwell Eaton, "Muhammad Gisu Daraz," 33–58. See also the broader discussion of Śūfī dynamics in Bahmani realms, including the legacy of Gīsū Darāz, in: Muhammad Suleman Siddiqi, *The Bahmani Śūfīs*, 47-69.

⁶⁸ Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India* 1:250-56.

⁶⁹ Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India* 1: 253. The work is attributed to Gīsū Darāz in certain Urdu-language literature discussing the history of Deccanī: Muhiuddin Qadri Zore, *Dakkanī Adab kī Tārīkh: ya 'nī, Urdū Zabān ke Qadīm Markazon Gulbarga, Bidar, Bījāpūr, Golkunḍa, Haidarābād aur Aurangābād ke Shā'iron aur Adībōn kī Urdū Khidmāt kī Tafṣīlī Tārīkh, 1350 tā 1750* (Delhi: Book Emporium, 1344 [1965]), 11-13.

worthy of closer study. One of the earliest works in Dakhnī, the *maṣnavī* of Fakhr al-Dīn Nizāmī, *Kadam Rao Padam Rao*, includes a section in praise of the son of Aḥmad Shāh I, ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Aḥmad Shāh II, who – one will recall – was also the mentee of Āzarī during his time in the Deccan.⁷⁰ While the development of Dakhnī literature is well beyond the scope of this project and the linguistic dynamics of the Deccan sultanates has been discussed elsewhere, particularly in the context of the successor states following the collapse of the Bahmanids,⁷¹ there are a number of parallel areas for future research raised by these examples. The first is the question of the use and patronage of Dakhnī in the Bahmanid sultanates, including both literary works and official documents (if any). The second is the relationship between using a “local” language such as Dakhnī – as opposed to a “cosmopolitan” language, such as Persian – and discussions of matters such as religion, philosophy, and ethics in the Bahmanid sultanate. As noted in the previous paragraph, earlier literature on the Bahmanid sultanates has raised valid points related to the structuring of the Bahmanid military in the form of the promotion of Hindu commanders, or the dynamics of war and peace between the Bahmanids and their neighbors in Vijayanagara to the south or Telangana to the East. There are likely productive avenues for further research on the question of linguistic politics, patronage, and religious discourses in the Bahmanid sultanate in a more comprehensive manner than has yet been conducted.

⁷⁰ Fakhr al-Dīn Nizāmī, *Maṣnavī Nizāmī Dakkanī; al-Ma ‘rūf ba Maṣnavī Kadam Rā ‘o Padam Rā ‘o (Jo 1461 ‘īsvī/825 Hijrī aur 1435 ‘īsvī /839 Hijrī ke Darmayān Kilkī Ga ‘ī)*, ed. Jamīl Jālibī, *Silsila-yi Maṭbū ‘āt-i Anjuman-i Taraqqī-yi Urdū Pākistān* 353 (Karachi: Anjuman-i Taraqqī-yi Urdū Pākistān, 1352 [1973]), 73-85.

⁷¹ See, for example: Roy Fischel, “Locality, Vernacular, and Political Language,” in *Local States in an Imperial World: Identity, Society and Politics in the Early Modern Deccan* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 149–91.

5.5 Additional Works of Āzarī

As a final note on areas of further study related to the contents of this particular project, there is almost certainly more to be found within the unpublished works of Āzarī which would continue to illuminate such themes of Persianate intellectual history such as the diffusion of the occult sciences in the post-Mongol period in even courtly settings, the nature of the formation of Šūfī networks over time, and the endurance of certain gnostic concepts in religious discourse in both poetry and prose. This project has focused primarily on three sources from a larger Āzarī *oeuvre*: the *AMA*, the *AJA*, and the *Dīvān*. Constraints of time and space meant that only certain portions of these texts which seemed of major importance could be included, despite their containing many more hundreds of folios of information relating to the religious thought of Āzarī. While the *Dīvān* of Āzarī has received a certain amount of attention in other literature, primarily in Persian-language scholarship, the occult compendia contain far more than what, practically speaking, this project has been able to include. The portions shared throughout this project have served as suitable case studies for the work of Āzarī speaking to certain prevalent discourses in the post-Mongol Persianate world, but there will be additional value in considering these works in a more comprehensive manner.

Even this work, though, has suggested that to work on Āzarī is not only to work on Āzarī, but rather is an opportunity for investigating much higher-stakes discussions related to authority, legitimacy, and religio-political discourse in the post-Mongol period. As such, a more comprehensive project on the life and works of Āzarī would consider not only his work of wonders and oddities in the *Gharā'ib al-Dunyā wa 'Ajā'ib al-Ālā*, but would investigate what might be contained in largely unstudied works such as those which make up *al-Mir'āt*. More investigation is likewise needed into certain rarely-mentioned works which have been attributed

to Āzarī but have not been confirmed to have existed, such as the *Ṭughrā-yi Humāyūn*, *Mathnawī-yi Imāmiyya*, or *Mathnawī-yi Samarāt*. Though I have cast certain doubts on the likelihood of the existence of the *Bahman-nāma* within the lifetime of Āzarī, not only through my own archival investigation, but on account of the *tazkira* tradition focused on the life and works of Āzarī, it is likewise not impossible that a copy of this text might emerge. While any of these lost works of Āzarī might speak directly to some of the observations and questions raised regarding his life and thought, the *Bahman-nāma* would be of immense importance to the historiography of the Deccan, and would constitute an extremely rare example of a contemporary chronicle of the Bahmanid sultans. Even without the *Bahman-nāma*, though, there is more work to be done regarding the life and works of Āzarī based simply on known sources.

Appendix A: Works Cited in the AMA¹

From the books of exegesis (*tafsīr*):

Anwār Ma‘ālim al-Tanzīl, an abridgement for ease of use of the great exegesis of the *Kashshāf Aḥādīth-i Shīḥāh-i Mashāriq*
Firdaws al-Akḥbār

From the Books of the Shaykhs:

Maḥbūb
Fuṣūṣ [al-Ḥikam], and commentaries
[*al-*] *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*
Sharḥ al-Iṣtilāḥāt
Mawāqī‘ al-Nujūm
Qūt al-Qulūb
‘Awāriḥ al-Ma‘ārif
Miṣbāḥ al-Hidāya
Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā‘
Tazkirat al-Awliyā‘
Siyar al-Ṣūfiyya
Naqd al-‘Aqd
Faqd al-‘Aqd
Sawāṭi‘ al-Qawāṭi‘ [=Qawāṭi‘ al-Sawāṭi‘]
Qudsiyyāt
Sharḥ al-Qaṣīda
Manāzil al-Sā‘irīn-i Khwāja [‘Abd Allāh Anṣārī]
Manāzil al-Sā‘irīn-i ‘Azīz [Nasafī]
Mirṣād al-‘Ibād
Risāla-yi Hurūf-i Abū al-‘Abbās al-Būnī
Uns al-Tā‘ibīn-i Shaykh Aḥmad
Tazkira-yi Sayyid Aḥmad
Zubda-yi Asrār-i Nuqṭa
Jāvidān-nāma
Kashf al-Maḥjūb-i Jullābī [Hujvīrī]

From the Epistles, Many of Which are Aforementioned:

Risāla-yi Sarmadiyya
Risāla-yi Aḥbāb
Risāla-yi Shāhān-i ‘Ishq
Risāla-yi Khurūj al-Mahdī
Risāla-yi Chahār Bāb-i Ghā‘inī
Kitāb al-Mahdī
Sharḥ-i Nuqṭa-yi Shaykh Sa‘d al-Dīn
Jām-i Gītī-namā
Risāla-yi Vujūd
Risāla-yi Dhū al-I‘tibār

¹ The following material is listed in: Āzarī, *AMA*, 14b-15a.

Sharḥ-nāma-yi Shaykh Maṣṣūr
Risāla-yi Fakhriyya
Risāla-yi Nūriyya
Risāla-yi Shaykh-zāda Abū al-Ḥasan
‘Arsh-nāma
Sharḥ-i Lama ‘āt
Nuzhat al-Arwāḥ
Zād al-Musāfirīn
Kanz al-Rumūz
Gulshan-i Rāz
Rushanā’ī-nāma
Risāla-yi Su’āl-Javāb

Epistles Mentioned in their Entirety:

Sharḥ-i Rubā’ī-yi Sayyid Ni‘mat Allāh
Sharḥ-i Rubā’ī-yi Sayyid Qāsim [-i Anvār]
Sharḥ-i Rubā’ī-yi Mawlānā Ḥakīm [Sabzavārī]
Sharḥ-i Fātiḥa
Sharḥ-i Kibriyya
Sharḥ-i Qalandariyya
Sharḥ-i Ghazal-i Kanār va Miyān
Sharḥ-i Mushkil
Sharḥ-i Jārūb
Sharḥ-i Mushkil-i Sinjānī
Sharḥ-i Anā Aqall
Sharḥ-i Mu‘ammā-yi Hindūstān
Sharḥ-i Pārsā, Amīr Qawwām al-Dīn

From the Books of the Sharī‘a Scholars:

Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm [al-Dīn]
Kīmīyā-yi Sa‘ādat
Ḥadā’iq al-Anwār
Ishārāt-i Mavāqif
Ṭawālī ‘ [al-Anwār]
Sharḥ-i ‘Aqā’id-i Hidāyat
Sharḥ Jungī
Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī
Zakhīra-yi Aghrāz
Maqāmāt Ḥarīrī
Zīj-i İlkhānī
Qānūn-chi
Ja‘mīnī
Sharḥ-i Sayyid-i Ṣamarat
Tārīkh-i Ṭabarī
Siyar al-Mulūk
[Tārīkh-i] Jahān-Gushā’ī

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