

CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

---

Inner Truth and Outer History: The Two Worlds of the Ahl-i Haqq of Kurdistan

Author(s): Ziba Mir-Hosseini

Source: *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (May, 1994), pp. 267-285

Published by: [Cambridge University Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/164736>

Accessed: 04/03/2014 17:04

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at  
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Cambridge University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to  
*International Journal of Middle East Studies*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

**Ziba Mir-Hosseini**

## INNER TRUTH AND OUTER HISTORY: THE TWO WORLDS OF THE AHL-I HAQQ OF KURDISTAN

A principal belief of the Ahl-i Haqq, an esoteric sect centered in Iranian Kurdistan, is that the Divine Essence has successive manifestations in human form. The Ahl-i Haqq religious universe comprises two distinct yet interrelated worlds: the inner world (*‘ālam-i bāṭin*) and the outer world (*‘ālam-i zāhir*), each with its own order and its own rules. We as ordinary human beings are aware of the order of the outer world, but our life is governed by the rules of the inner world, where our ultimate destiny lies.

This article analyzes the events surrounding one of the last manifestations of the Divine Essence, one of those rare moments in which a passage is made between the two worlds, and explores the ways in which these two worlds interact, as perceived by the believers and as reflected in the recent developments within the sect.

### AHL-I HAQQ: AN INTRODUCTION

The followers of the sect are found mainly among the Kurds of Iran, Iraq, and Turkey. Although generally subsumed under Shi‘i Islam, Ahl-i Haqq beliefs defy many Shi‘i orthodoxies. Two obvious examples are *dūnādūnī*, the belief in transmigration of souls, and *mazhariyyat*, the belief in manifestation of the Divine Essence in human form. The former belief puts the sect beyond the bounds of Islam, and the latter aligns it with the extremist tendencies of Shi‘i Islam, crystalized in the deification of ‘Ali, the first Shi‘i imam.<sup>1</sup> Taking pride in their mystical understanding of Islam, the followers of the sect separate themselves from both Shi‘is and Sunnis. This is reflected in the name by which they like to be known: Ahl-i Haqq, which translates as “followers, or people of the truth, the divinity.”<sup>2</sup> They class other Muslims as either Ahl-i Tashayyū‘ (followers of Shi‘ism) or Ahl-i Tasannun (followers of Sunnism).

The Ahl-i Haqq provide an interesting example of how the popularization of certain mystical aspects of Islam can take the form of a religious system negating many of Islam’s fundamentals in terms of belief, ritual, and symbolism. The Ahl-i Haqq neither observe Muslim rites, such as daily prayers and fasting during the

Ziba Mir-Hosseini is an independent scholar residing in London, U.K.

© 1994 Cambridge University Press 0020–7438/94 \$5.00 + .00

month of Ramadan, nor share Islamic theology and sacred space, such as belief in the day of resurrection and sanctity of the mosque. Instead they have their own sacred universe and their own rituals, which center on the *jam*<sup>c</sup> (lit., assembly) when they chant their sacred hymns (*kalām*), play their sacred lute (*tanbūr*), make offerings of food, and share a sacrificial meal. The Ahl-i Haqq were—and to some extent still are—labeled heretics and subjected to religious persecution by their “orthodox” neighbors.<sup>3</sup> Until recently, their reaction was, first, to isolate themselves by retreating to remote places where they could practice their creed in peace; and second, to adopt a strict code of secrecy about every aspect of their dogma and ritual. The Ahl-i Haqq still define their religion as a *sirr* (mystery), a secret that can be revealed only to an inner circle of initiates.

Therefore, it is not surprising that so little accurate information is available about the sect and its history. It is almost impossible to verify its claim that there are as many as 20 million members worldwide, of whom 5 million are in Iran.<sup>4</sup> The date of the sect’s formation, the events of its history, and the manner of its expansion are also obscure. The material that exists on the history of the sect is at best speculative. The first scholar to take a serious academic interest in it was Vladimir Minorsky, who came into contact with the sect early in this century when he was with the Russian embassy in Iran. He dates the sect’s formation to the late 14th or early 15th century, an era when religiopolitical movements in the Irano-Turkic world proliferated, culminating in the establishment of the Safavid dynasty in Iran in 1501.<sup>5</sup> The Safavids, originally a Sufi order, adopted Shi’ism as an ideology and later made it the official religion of Iran.<sup>6</sup> Yet there is no reference to the Ahl-i Haqq in the rich historical literature covering this and subsequent periods; the name of its supposed founder, Sultan Suhak, is not mentioned in any historical source. In other words, there seems to be a total silence as to the early history of the sect.<sup>7</sup>

In contrast to the reticence of outsiders, the members themselves possess a rich tradition regarding the sect’s formation and development. This mainly oral tradition exists in the form of poetry known as *kalām* (lit., word, or discourse). To the Ahl-i Haqq, *kalām* are divinely revealed and historically factual “sacred narratives,” transmitted orally from generation to generation. Eventually they were written down<sup>8</sup> and there are now many written collections of *kalām*, each belonging to a specific period; the most important of them belongs to the period of Sultan Suhak, the sect’s founder. This collection, which is in the Gurani language, is known as *Kalām-i Saranjām* (end, conclusion). It is held that it was written down by the “Golden Pen” of Pir Musi, the Ahl-i Haqq angel in charge of recording human deeds and one of the five companions of Sultan Suhak. No one has seen the original, although all know of someone who has seen it with his own eyes. Some maintain that Pir Musi’s copy of the *Saranjām* was destroyed, whereas others are convinced that it exists but the right time for its appearance has yet to come. Some even say that it is kept in a university in England: it was taken by the British, who owe their scientific progress and their material prosperity to it. I was told to look for it there. The book itself is part of that “mystery,” the *sirr*, which characterizes every facet of the Ahl-i Haqq religion.

There are, however, other written collections of *kalām* that are less elusive but equally sacred, belonging to subsequent periods of the manifestation. These exist

in the form of poetry, not solely in Gurani, but also in other Kurdish languages, as well as in Luri and Turkish. They are regarded as texts originating in the world of *bāṭin*, revealed to those who are referred to as *bāṭin-dār*, that is, those with a knowledge of the inner world. Until very recently, all collections of *kalām* were guarded jealously from outsiders, and even within the sect only a few people had access to them, namely the sayyids (the sect's religious elite) and *kalām-khān* (those versed in *kalām*, who know them by heart). Although this is no longer the case, and one can quite easily find copies of some collections for sale, the *kalām* have retained their mystery. The relaxation of the rules of secrecy followed the expansion of literacy and the integration of Ahl-i Haqq communities into the wider Iranian society in the 1950s. They have ignited in the sect's youth a yearning for access to the "mystery" which is widely believed to be found in the *kalām*. In the 1980s, a Kurdish writer, Safi-Zada Burka<sup>2</sup>i, successfully manipulated this yearning by writing several books based on the *Saranjām* and other texts.<sup>9</sup> Today, not only has one of the essential rules of the Ahl-i Haqq, secrecy, been relaxed, but its theology is being redefined in terms of Shi'ci orthodoxies.<sup>10</sup>

This article explores the ways in which Ahl-i Haqq perceive their history in relation to their sacred narrative and focuses on certain events in the recent history of the sect for which both historical documentation and sacred narratives are available. By Ahl-i Haqq sacred narrative I mean not only their *kalām*, which are believed to have come from the world of *bāṭin*, but also stories and legends that recount the events as perceived by ordinary believers, with no experience of the world of *bāṭin*. In other words, I make a distinction between *kalām* and non-*kalām* narratives, a distinction that I see as essential to our understanding of the Ahl-i Haqq religion.<sup>11</sup> It is the latter that provides context and meaning to the *kalām*, whose style is more allusive than narrative and must be seen as a part of a larger, evolving body of Ahl-i Haqq narratives.

#### THE AHL-I HAQQ OF GURAN AND SAHNEH

Iranian Kurdistan stretches across three administrative provinces: Kurdistan, Kermanshahan, and part of western Azarbayjan.<sup>12</sup> Although the Ahl-i Haqq are found also in Azarbayjan, Kermanshahan is their Kurdish center in Iran. In contrast to its neighboring province Kurdistan, which contains exclusively Sunni Kurds, Kermanshahan has always been religiously diverse.<sup>13</sup> Its population of 1.5 million is more or less evenly divided between Shi'ci, Sunni, and Ahl-i Haqq Kurds.<sup>14</sup> The Ahl-i Haqq of Kermanshahan, numbering up to half a million, live in two main clusters. The larger of the two is in the west on the border with Iraq, scattered in the mountainous territory of the Guran; most of the sect's sacred places are also located there. This area, with the densest concentration of the Ahl-i Haqq in Iran, has a population of once nomadic but now settled tribes: the Guran and Qalkhani (almost all are Ahl-i Haqq), Sanjabi (90% Ahl-i Haqq), and some sections of the Kalhur, Jalilvand, and <sup>c</sup>Usmanvand. Because of both their geographical situation and their tribal structure, the Ahl-i Haqq communities of Guran remained highly isolated and relatively autonomous until early in this century; and since the mid-19th century they have been under the religious leadership of one single sayyid family, the Haydaris. The

religious center of Guran is the village of Tutshami, which is also the seat of the Haydari sayyids.

The second Ahl-i Haqq cluster is found in the town of Sahneh and its surrounding villages in the eastern part of the province. The Ahl-i Haqq of Sahneh are not only fewer but less isolated and more prosperous than the first group; they are peasants and do not include any tribes of the region. Since the early 19th century, the religious center of Sahneh has been the village of Jayhunabad, the seat of the Shah Hayasi sayyids, whose influence has diminished greatly in recent years. Unlike Guran, Sahneh now is not led by any single sayyid family, but has instead been the scene of fierce competition for leadership between two factions of Ahl-i Haqq. One of these follows a reformist leader who is attempting to reconcile Ahl-i Haqq dogma with Shi<sup>c</sup>ism.

The most important differentiation within the Ahl-i Haqq community is that between the two broad strata of sayyids and commoners. Sayyids are direct descendants of the sect's founder or one of his later manifestations, and they fall into eleven holy lineages, referred to as *khāndān* (lit., house or dynasty). Each *khāndān* is headed by a certain sayyid family referred to as *pir*. Seven of these *khāndān* were formed at the time of Sultan Suhak in the 15th century; the rest were formed as the Divine Essence made further manifestations.<sup>15</sup> Sayyids have a kind of religious office; they are the only ones who can recite the special Ahl-i Haqq prayers. This means that no Ahl-i Haqq ritual can be conducted without a male sayyid, regardless of his knowledge of *kalām*, piety, or social standing.

Besides these two hereditary strata, there are a number of achieved ranks and positions of religious significance, almost always filled by commoners. Thus, very few sayyids possess copies of the sacred texts or are able to provide religious instruction; for such guidance people turn to the *kalām-khān*, men who know the *kalām* by heart and chant them to the accompaniment of *tanbūr* during the *jam<sup>c</sup>*. Unlike sayyids, the respect and authority that a *kalām-khān* commands are derived from his mastery of the sacred texts, not from his descent.<sup>16</sup> There are two other ceremonial offices during the *jam<sup>c</sup>*: the *khalīfa*, whose role is the distribution of offerings, and the *khādīm*, who stands by the door and helps the *khalīfa*. Two other, more spiritual religious ranks are those of dervish and *dīda-dār* (also referred to as *bāṭin-dār*), who renounce the world of *zāhir* in order to have their *bāṭin* senses awakened. All of these ranks and offices are filled by commoners.<sup>17</sup> *Dīda-dār* is a disputed category and has little significance in the spiritual hierarchy of the Ahl-i Haqq in Guran, but it provides the basis for the reformist group's claim to spiritual superiority and its challenge to the sayyids in Sahneh.

Earlier, more textually oriented studies of the Ahl-i Haqq depict a more complex religious hierarchy, which does not exist in Kurdistan. It is essential to note that I have described the hierarchy as it exists today, which is not the same as that which may have existed at the time of Sultan Suhak and in subsequent manifestations as reflected in the *kalām*.

One of the many functions of a *khāndān* is to ensure a personal connection between the holy lineages of sayyids and the commoners, a connection that is similar to that between a Sufi master and his disciples and suggests the Sufi origins of the Ahl-i Haqq. Sayyids are believed to have inherited the divine quality of their ancestors in whom the Divine Essence (*zāt-i ḥaqq*) was once manifested. It is their

divine ancestry that enables them to act as *pīr* (spiritual master), leading the commoners along the right path. Every Ahl-i Haqq man and woman must recognize as a *pīr* a sayyid from the *khandān* in which his or her father was initiated. The initiation is called *sar-sipurdan*, which literally means “dedicating one’s head”; it should take place not later than a year after a child is born. In this way the relations between certain sayyid families and commoners extend over generations. This relationship, referred to as *pīr-murīdī* (master–disciple), is at the core of the Ahl-i Haqq community and is regulated by a network of mutual obligations and duties.

Two salient aspects of these obligations are the payment of religious dues and a ban on intermarriage between the strata. The dues, called *sarāna*, are paid at the end of the fasting period that marks the main Ahl-i Haqq festival by a commoner to the sayyid-*pīr* who has performed his/her initiation ceremony. The ban on intermarriage is likened to the incest taboo: the Ahl-i Haqq consider their community to be a large family in which sayyids are seen as spiritual parents of commoners, who are referred to *īāyifa* (lit., family or tribe).<sup>18</sup>

On a theological level, the doctrine of *maḥhariyyat*, or manifestation of the Divine Essence, forms the very core of the Ahl-i Haqq religion, informs its cosmogony, and defines its theology. Both find expression in Ahl-i Haqq *kalām*, which are basically accounts of the successive manifestations of the Divine Essence. In each manifestation the Divine Essence appears in a different human form, likened to putting on a different robe (*jāma*). Cosmic time and the universe have cyclical dimensions, consisting of different cycles of divine manifestations.<sup>19</sup> The Ahl-i Haqq religion existed from the very beginning, from before eternity (*azal*), when the Divine Essence was hidden in a pearl; the pearl in a shell; the shell in an ocean, encompassing the universe. The creation of the universe was the outcome of the first of these cycles, when the Divine Essence was manifested in Khavandgar, the Creator. Islam is the product of the next cycle when the Divine Essence was manifested in ‘Ali, the first Shi‘i imam; this established the stage of *shari‘at* (Islamic law). Then, in the course of two other cycles, the stages of *ṭariqat* (Sufism, teachings and rituals of the order) and *ma‘rifat* (gnosis, knowledge of the Divine Reality) were established. Finally, the Divine Essence manifested itself in Sultan Suhak, who brought new laws, establishing Ahl-i Haqq as a separate creed. This is the stage of *ḥaqīqat* (Ultimate Truth, mystical experience of the Divine Reality), which supersedes the previous stages and thus frees Ahl-i Haqq from observing the shari‘a rules incumbent on Muslims.<sup>20</sup>

#### THE RISE OF THE HAYDARI SAYYIDS IN GURAN

Although not on the same level, there are many other cycles of manifestation whose impact is confined to the populations among whom the manifestation took place. One of these occurred in the Dalan valley in the mountains of Dalahu, the heart of Ahl-i Haqq territory, around the year 1834. This is how it came about, according to the Gurani version told to me by the *kalām-khān* in Tutshami.

Haydar, an obscure sayyid of the Khamushi *khāndān*, is a simple peasant from the Valley of Dalan in Guran who has always shared the fruits of his labor with others. He is told in a

dream that *ẓāt* [Divine Essence] will soon come to him. He then sets his wife free, telling her “I have to live according to the rule of *ẓāt*; you are divorced; take whatever you want from my worldly possessions; I can have no worldly attachments.” His wife, aware of the world of *bāṭin*, replies “Baraka [i.e., my brother], let me stay and prepare the bread for you and those who will gather around you by the Divine order.”

Soon many gather around Sayyid Haydar, who is now known as Sayyid Baraka, including thirty-six dervishes who were told in a dream of the coming of *ẓāt* to the Valley of Dalan. They build a *takiya* [place of worship, lodge] there, and as a tribute to *ẓāt*, the tribal chiefdom of Guran [*hukūmat-i Gūrān*] donates the nearby agricultural land to the *takiya*, to provide food for its growing numbers of visitors. As Sayyid Baraka’s reputation spreads, more and more people come to him and the *takiya* becomes a sanctuary, providing refuge for poor peasants and nomads. They stay there to cultivate the land, and work at the mill constructed by Sayyid Baraka. And this is how the village of Tutshami came into being.<sup>21</sup>

My Gurani informants were extremely reluctant to elaborate on details.<sup>22</sup> My repeated efforts to learn more and to clarify conflicting points were often futile and always dismissed as irrelevant. They said that I should not bother with trivialities; what was important for me to know was that Sayyid Baraka was *ẓāt-dār*, the holder of *ẓāt*; that he, two of his sons and a grandson, together with the thirty-six dervishes who came from all around, formed the Assembly of the Forty (*chiltan*); that they were reincarnations of those who held a similar assembly at the time of Sultan; and finally and most importantly, that the *kalām* revealed by them are the last collection, as sacred as *Saranjām* itself. The rest were insignificant details. Other “insignificant details” gradually emerged in the course of my fieldwork, and I found them fascinating as they shed a different light on the nature and dynamic of the age of Divine Manifestation, as Ahl-i Haqq would have it.

The first story was of a fight in which Sayyid Baraka’s eldest son Ayaz is beheaded by one of his father’s dervishes; Sayyid Baraka not only forgives the dervish who murdered his son but saves his life by attending to his wounds and giving him shelter. The second story recounts the exile of the sayyid and his followers, coinciding with a power struggle among the tribal chiefs of Guran. The paramount chief, Asadullah Khan, who had allocated land to the sayyid, is killed on the orders of his own brother, who then denies the *ẓāt* in the sayyid and removes his protection, and thus the *takiya* ceases to be a sanctuary. The sayyid and his dervishes take refuge in Siyavana mountain where they build another water mill, enabling them to earn a living. The remains of this mill are one of the sacred places of Ahl-i Haqq. Within a year they return to Tutshami. The man who caused his exile dies; his death is not only sudden but unusual; he shoots himself in his sleep when the cover of his gun accidentally releases the trigger. The sayyid is invited back by his successor.

The third story involves another dispute among dervish followers of the sayyid; I will describe it in more detail as one of the dervishes involved, Taymur, is an important figure in the tradition of the second major Ahl-i Haqq cluster in Sahneh, where he is believed to be the holder of *ẓāt*.

One of the dervishes of the sayyid is Nauruz, a Sanjabi peasant from the village of Suran. He is among the first to join the sayyid, ahead of all other dervishes; he also exceeds others in his yearning (*shūr*) for the divine. In a dream, Nauruz sees himself watering the *takiya* land, when a young man appears carrying a spade; he takes water from Nauruz and breaks his leg with the spade. Nauruz does not understand the dream but becomes extremely disturbed.

Next day as a *jam*<sup>c</sup> [the central Ahl-i Haqq ritual during which offerings are made and *kalām* recited] is about to be held, Nauruz asks Sayyid Baraka to choose someone as a *khādim*, a ritual position which involves serving all participants. The sayyid says the *khādim* is coming; soon a young man arrives carrying a spade. He is Taymur from the village of Banyaran, who left his village after a dispute with the landlord and is now seeking refuge in Tutshami. Nauruz immediately recognizes him: he is the man who appeared in his dream. The sayyid asks Taymur to be *khādim*. A *jam*<sup>c</sup> is always concluded by the *khādim* kissing the hands of all those present, as a symbol of his selfless service. Nauruz refuses to give his hand to Taymur; but the sayyid instructs him to do so, saying “Nauruz, your time is over, it is now Taymur’s.” Nauruz obeys; as he gives his hand to Taymur his *shūr* (spiritual yearning) is transferred to Taymur. Nauruz then himself becomes silent.

Taymur’s inner eye opens and he starts revealing *kalām*. His yearning (*shūr*) is too intense and too wild. He wants to change the outer world, beseeching the sayyid to declare the coming of the rule of *zāt*, urging him to use his *bāṭin* power. The sayyid tells him that the time has not come. In one of the *kalām*, he tells Taymur “you are like a cock whose untimely crowing will one day cost him his head.” After two years the sayyid takes back two things that he gave Taymur: a hat and a belt. His dervishes chase Taymur and his dervish group out of the village. Shortly afterwards Taymur is arrested and beheaded on the orders of the vali (governor-general) of Kermanshah: the sayyid had withdrawn his blessing, which was in the hat and the belt.

The final story relates the disappearance of volumes containing the *kalām* of five dervishes, including those of Nauruz. A certain dervish steals them and then disappears. Despite all efforts, none of the five volumes was traced, but upon the sayyid’s instruction Nauruz’s *kalām* were rewritten.<sup>23</sup>

There is much to be inferred from these narratives about the dynamics of Ahl-i Haqq communities, which appear in various forms common to those of Sufi orders. But in this context all that needs to be understood is the pivotal role of the person in whom the *zāt* finds manifestation and a constant rivalry among his disciples. It is through him that the others have mystical awareness; the experience is always sudden and often comes after a dream (*khāb*), which like *zāt* can mediate between the two worlds.

But important here is that the nature and extent of this mediation became the main cause of the rift among the sayyid’s dervishes. Taymur’s vision of changing the world of *zāhir* by the power of *bāṭin* seems to have been shared by a number of other dervishes. Not only did some of them side with Taymur and leave Tutshami, but those who stayed behind echoed Taymur’s vision in their *kalām*. The *kalām* left from the period (mid-19th century) have a strongly revolutionary and millenarian tone, promising the imminent coming of the shah of *haqīqat* and the total destruction of the world of *zāhir*. They denounce the misery caused by the tyranny of the shah of *zāhir*.<sup>24</sup> Yet what is interesting is that this evident revolutionary message of the *kalām* of the period is ignored totally and even denied by the Ahl-i Haqq. When I suggested it to my informants, I was told “this is a *zāhir* interpretation, these *kalām* belong to the world of *bāṭin*; their real meaning is *sirr* (mystery).” The same logic is applied to whatever occurred in that period: the murder of a sayyid’s son, his exile, Taymur’s execution, and the disappearance of five volumes of *kalām* all had an inner meaning. To impute any political meaning to either these *kalām* or the events in them is to deny their *bāṭin* reality. Politics is something that operates only in the world of *zāhir*.



Nevertheless, perhaps it is useful now to focus on the world of *zāhir* to see the background against which these events were unfolding. If we take Taymur's execution as our point of departure, we find ourselves in mid-19th century Qajar Iran, to be precise, the year 1851. This is the second year of the reign of Nasir al-Din Shah, and the first year of the rule of Prince Imam-Quli as vali of Kermanshah. Kermanshah is gradually but surely emerging from the aftermath of a systematic religious cleansing by Aga Muhammad ʿAli (popularly referred to as Aqa Mamdali), a powerful clergyman who, long before Khomeini, argued for a greater role for the ulema in the government; and to a degree he succeeded in achieving this as *ḥākim-i sharʿ* in Kermanshah.<sup>25</sup> Unlike Khomeini, Aqa Mamdali abhorred mystical Islam and saw his mission as that of ridding Kermanshah, a stronghold of Sufism, of such deviant tendencies. He earned the title "dervish killer" for his efforts: he personally ordered the killing of a number of Sufis on the grounds of heresy (*kufr*), sometimes without the vali's seal.<sup>26</sup> Aqa Mamdali died in 1801 after a short illness, in exactly the way that was foretold by an Indian dervish whom he had executed forty days earlier. His death, and perhaps the realization of the curse, put an end to further dervish killings. What is significant is that Taymur's execution, which happened exactly fifty years later, seems to have been motivated by political rather than religious concerns. This is evident in the sole historical reference that exists, to be found in the chronicle of Nasir al-Din Shah's reign recounting the events of 1851. It reads as follows:

A man from the Guran tribe named Taymur staged a great conspiracy. He declared himself to be the deputy of the hidden Imam, whose mission was the destruction and annihilation of all governments and all kings on earth. He was to accomplish this by 15th Jamadi al-Awal by the power of his sword. He invited all people of all tribes to join him and they gave him their allegiance, all ready to sacrifice their lives and children for him. He was about to undermine religion and the state, as the Bab had. Prince Imam-Quli, unable to rely on the Zuhab regional militia, did not dispatch them to confront Taymur: he saw them all as devoted to Taymur; people from all over Kurdistan, Kermanshah, Luristan and Sulaymaniyya were coming to join forces with Taymur. He thus devised a ploy; he made a pact with those whom he could trust among the militia and sent them without warning to fetch Taymur. Before the people knew it, they brought Taymur to Kermanshah. The vali, without allowing time for hesitation, ordered Taymur to be executed. When people saw Taymur was dead, they understood that his message from the hidden world was all false.<sup>27</sup>

This passage, although obviously colored and loaded with the political concerns of the day (drawing a parallel with the Babi revolt, the major event of the era),<sup>28</sup> imparts two new facts. First, it contradicts the Gurani narratives in which Taymur is indeed a minor character, only one of Sayyid Baraka's thirty-six dervishes, who is later rejected and thus loses his *bāṭin* power. Second, it indirectly implicates the Guran chieftom and Sayyid Baraka in Taymur's execution: neither offered him protection or refuge, which both could have done. Their role in Taymur's arrest becomes clear in another document to which I had chance access. This document is a letter to be found among the correspondence between two notables of Kermanshah, one of whom relates the story of Taymur as he heard it from an old mullah in Guran territory where he and his family took refuge in 1916 at the time of the Russian invasion. The old man had been among Taymur's followers.<sup>29</sup>

Shah Taymur, one of the dervishes of Sayyid Yaqub [note: not of Baraka, but his ancestor] suddenly changes and becomes intoxicated with Divine Love. He retires to a cave in the mountains of Dalahu and remains there all winter, without human company and without food. By spring his reputation reaches everywhere and people [Ahl-i Haqq and non-Ahl-i Haqq alike] come to him. In less than two months there are at least 15,000 men following him.

Soon news reaches the shah of Iran that a certain Taymur has named himself shah and has gathered a great following. The shah orders his arrest, and the vali of Kermanshah, Prince Imam-Quli, sends an officer and some militia to the paramount chief of the Guran, Asadullah Khan, and demands that he arrest Taymur. Asadullah Khan, himself an Ahl-i Haqq, does not know what to do. He consults the other chiefs and the Ahl-i Haqq sayyids; they all say that as long as Taymur remains in the mountains he cannot be touched. They suggest a ploy: to invite him to a special *jam*<sup>c</sup>; and as he leaves to return to the mountain, he can be intercepted by the vali's officer and his men who can then arrest him.

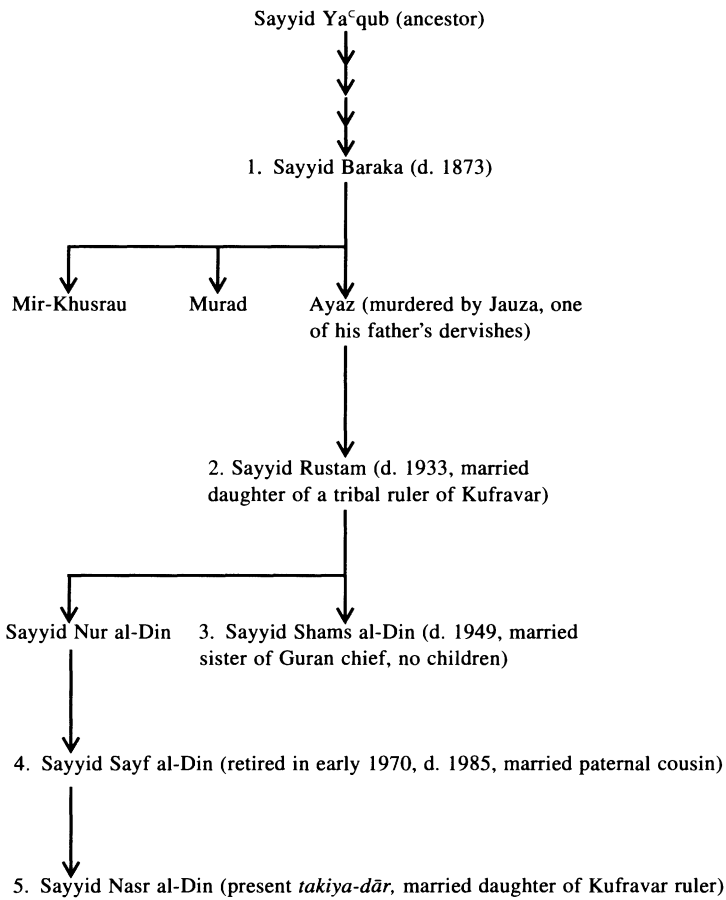
The day that Shah Taymur receives the invitation, I [the narrator] was present. When Shah Taymur sees the letter, he says: "My death order has come"; he then hands the letter to me; I read it [Taymur was illiterate] and tells him that it is only an invitation to a *jam*<sup>c</sup> in Gahvara [the seat of the Guran chiefdom], written with the utmost respect. He replies, "You do not know." He then turns to his followers and tells them, "You must now leave this place, this is an order from the world of *bāṭin*. I must go now, and you shall not see me again. But I will come back in the company of the king of Dalahu."

Taymur prepares to set off on his journey to Gahvara, and I ask permission to accompany him, as my home village is near there. He agrees to it. As we approach Gahvara we see the Guran paramount chief, a number of other chiefs and sayyids, and a large crowd coming to welcome Taymur. The *jam*<sup>c</sup> ritual lasts until early evening, and is followed by *kalām* and discussion until late at night. Taymur retires to a room prepared for him which is guarded by armed men appointed by the vali's officer.

The following day before dusk, the officer comes and sits in front of the room, where he is joined by others; but Taymur does not come out. He waits for a couple of hours and finally loses his patience and opens the door to find the room empty. The officer accuses the Guran chief of having conspired to allow Taymur to escape. The paramount chief, puzzled, sends one of his men to see whether Taymur has returned to his cave, but the man comes back saying that the cave is empty and there is no sign of Taymur's crowd. The chief and others are still pondering what has happened when a messenger arrives from Kermanshah bringing the news that Taymur has been beheaded in the early hours of the morning. He had gone to Kermanshah to surrender.

These two accounts, although inherently different, agree on two essential points: Taymur had a large number of followers, and he was somehow betrayed by the Ahl-i Haqq elite. It was this betrayal that changed the Ahl-i Haqq situation in Guran and paved the way for an alliance between the sayyids, as inheritors of power in the world of *bāṭin*, and the tribal chiefs of Guran, as holders of power in the world of *ẓāhir*. One direct result of this alliance was to reduce the influence and power of the sayyids from the other Ahl-i Haqq *khāndān*, in particular those from Shah Ibrahimī, who were until then the undisputed religious leaders of Ahl-i Haqq. In this way, in less than fifty years, Sayyid Baraka's progeny became religiopolitical leaders of the Ahl-i Haqq in Guran, marking the beginning of a new trend.

Figure 1 shows those who inherited the spiritual office of Sayyid Baraka; they are all referred to as *takiya-dār*, that is, custodians of the place in which Sayyid Baraka and his dervishes held their spiritual gatherings. As is evident, in time this office became tied to the tribal structure of power through a number of marriages

FIGURE 1. Haydari Sayyids of the Khamushi *khāndān*.

between women from the chiefly families and the male descendants of Sayyid Baraka, which entailed the modification of Ahl-i Haqq marriage rules.

Two of these men and their periods are of great importance. The first is Sayyid Shams al-Din (numbered 3 on Figure 1), who witnessed the emergence of central power in Iran following the demise of the Qajars and the rise of the Pahlavi dynasty. One of the first political steps taken by Reza Shah Pahlavi was to dismantle tribal chiefdoms and replace their private armies with a national army. Sayyid Shams al-Din was a shrewd man who was able to use these changes to increase his influence. After two years of enforced exile in Tehran, he returned to become governor of the Guran district. He also attempted to unify and centralize the Ahl-i Haqq religion; he appointed a number of sayyids to carry out ritual functions, in particular that of initiation; he banned all sayyids from using the religious dues they received for any purpose other than offering them in the *jam*<sup>c</sup>. He also ordered the *kalām* left from Sayyid Baraka's dervishes to be collected; he had a number of *kalām* scribes whose task it was to check the existing versions and produce an "authentic" copy. The collection of *kalām* of the period is the result of these efforts. Rumors that it was then

that the Ahl-i Haqq *kalām* were tampered with, so as to undermine the rival Shah Ibrahimī *khāndān*, lie behind the factionalism among the Ahl-i Haqq sayyids.<sup>30</sup> Sayyid Shams al-Din died without leaving any children; he married the Guran chief's daughter, Shahzanan, who had just become a widow of the Kalhur tribal chief. She was renowned for her beauty, and Sayyid Shams al-Din resisted all pressures to take another wife, even though she was thought to be barren.

The second Haydari sayyid to live through an important era is Nasr al-Din (numbered 5 on Figure 1). He took office in the early 1970s, while his father was still alive. The revolution of 1979 and the emergence of the Islamic Republic seemed to promise persecution of the Ahl-i Haqq communities, but Sayyid Nasr al-Din's excellent leadership not only protected them from a Shi'ī backlash but gave them an important role to play during the eight years of war with Iraq. He personally headed an Ahl-i Haqq militia, fighting side by side with the state-organized *basij* to guard the frontier, and that sector of the frontier remained the only one that the Iraqi army failed to penetrate. In doing so, he turned the clock back: until the formation of the national army, the Ahl-i Haqq tribes had traditionally been the guardians of the frontier. In the 1992 parliamentary election, as in the previous one, he proved that his support for one candidate could affect the electoral results, at least at the provincial level. The candidate who went to parliament with the support of the Ahl-i Haqq communities in the previous election was disqualified at the last minute; when the news reached Kermanshah, less than five hours were left before the end of campaign time. The Ahl-i Haqq were then without any substitute, leaving the field to the candidate supported by the authorities in Kermanshah. Sayyid Nasr al-Din gave his blessing to a third candidate, a young mullah, unknown and without enough funds even to distribute posters. He defeated the others by a very large margin; it is no exaggeration to say that the entire population of the district (including two towns) voted for the young mullah, who otherwise had no chance of success.

If the Ahl-i Haqq found some kind of centralization with Sayyid Shams al-Din, it is certainly with Sayyid Nasr al-Din that the Ahl-i Haqq of Kermanshah have found a degree of unification, which I believe is unprecedented in their history. Sayyid Nasr al-Din is now regarded as the leader not only by a large majority of the Ahl-i Haqq of Kermanshah, regardless of their *khāndān* affiliations, but also by the authorities of the Islamic Republic.

#### SAHNEH AND THE RETURN OF TAYMUR

In Sahneh, the other Ahl-i Haqq center in Kermanshah, there is a different account of the manifestation of the Divine Essence. The common element is that Taymur was again the main protagonist. Again events must be seen in their dual aspect, inner and outer. This is how they are recounted in Sahneh:<sup>31</sup>

During the Turkman rebellion which occurred in the early years of Nasir al-Din Shah's rule, among the forces of the Guran chiefdom, heading towards the north, is one Taymur from the village of Banyaran. On the way to Turkman territory, they encounter a Turk with whom Taymur starts speaking in fluent Turkish. From this moment Taymur's state changes and there are signs of his "*bāṭin* eye being opened." When asked how a Kurd like him, who never set foot outside Guran, could speak Turkish, Taymur replies, "I was once a Turk," that is, in one of his previous lives.<sup>32</sup>

Taymur is now revealing *kalām*; his fellow soldiers, men of *zāhir*, think him mad, and their head decides to send Taymur back to Tehran to let the Guran chief decide his fate. The chief, Malak Niaz Khan, being a man of *bāṭin*, immediately understands Taymur's change of state and sends him to an Ahl-i Haqq village near Tehran. Accompanied by Dusta, a fellow villager, Taymur remains in this village for a while. When Taymur feels that Dusta is homesick, he tells him, "Close your eyes." When he reopens them, he finds himself and Taymur behind the orchards surrounding their own village, Banyaran.

Taymur's father comes to take him home but Taymur prefers to go to the house of his maternal uncle. That night the people of Banyaran see a light surround their village; they then realize that this is a reflection of Taymur's inner light. People from all around come to see Taymur; in less than six months their number reaches sixty thousand. The news upsets the mullahs in Kermanshah, who see Taymur's appeal and his miracles as anti-Islamic. Because of their insistent complaints, the vali orders Taymur to be arrested; he is then beheaded in the main square of Kermanshah. Taymur knew his fate; he had foretold it in a *kalām*, which reads: "Taymur give your head—like a sacrificial animal, let go of the temporal—to have the eternal."

As was customary as a caution to others, Taymur's body is left for three days, guarded by three Jews. The third night, the Jews see a light from the sky heading towards the square; the light turns into a horseman who takes Taymur's head and vanishes into the sky.<sup>33</sup> Some days later, young girls fetching water from a spring near Balavand, a village six miles away from Kermanshah, see a young man whose neck is covered with a red scarf; he asks for Shahdusta, a woman renowned for her spirituality. As soon as Shahdusta sees the young man, she cries out, "It is Taymur who has come back."

Taymur stays in her house until Lutfa, a village notable, insists on taking him in. Taymur accepts but tells him, "Soon the vali's officers will come to arrest me and you will help them; what good you have done will perish." Lutfa swears that he would never do such a thing, but eventually Lutfa betrays Taymur when he inadvertently gets drunk. Once again, Taymur attracts a large crowd; mullahs start their agitations and Taymur is arrested. This time Taymur spends eighteen months in jail; the vali, apprehensive about his previous act, does not want to be implicated in another murder of a man of *haqq* (God), and offers Taymur an escape route. He accepts the offer only after the vali agrees to free other innocent prisoners.

Taymur wanders around but soon gets arrested again; this time he is sent to a jail in Tehran where he acquires a number of followers, including the jailer himself. He was childless and Taymur's blessing brought him two children. One day he hears that the shah has had a dream and is looking for someone to interpret it. The jailer seizes the opportunity to repay his debt to Taymur and takes him to the shah.

When Nasir al-Din Shah sees Taymur, he asks him, "Are you also shah?" Taymur replies, "Yes, but I am the shah of *bāṭin*." The shah says, "How can you prove it?" Taymur replies, "Give me that 100 toman then I will give you the hawk." The shah is startled, this was the dream that he had not told any one. Taymur then interprets the shah's dream in such a way that the shah is deeply moved. He calls Taymur his brother, offering him his protection and an annual stipend.

Taymur, now free and protected, resumes his travels and eventually settles in Hamadan (a town near Sahneh, with a small Ahl-i Haqq population), where one of the notables offers him his daughter in marriage. His son, Shah Hasan, becomes attached to the shah's court and goes to Tehran. But Taymur himself remains in Ahl-i Haqq land, spending a great deal of time in Sahneh so as to be with his followers.

To the Ahl-i Haqq of Sahneh, Taymur is what Sayyid Baraka is to the Ahl-i Haqq of Guran: the one in whom *zāt* was manifested. He is always referred to as either Taymur the Second (*Sānī*) or Taymur Shah. The Ahl-i Haqq of Guran deny

the very existence of Taymur the Second, holding that there is only one Taymur, a man from Banyaran, who was one of the thirty-six dervishes of Sayyid Baraka. The Ahl-i Haqq of Sahneh are aware that these two characters are two different persons; yet they maintain that “both had the same *zāt* and since we are people of *bāṭin* what matters to us is their *zāt* not their persons.” Independent observers hold that Taymur the Second was one of the first of Taymur’s dervishes, who later claimed that Taymur’s *zāt* was manifested in him. His claim seems later to have been appropriated by the Shah Ibrahimī sayyids—who had already lost ground in Guran—as a symbol from the world of *bāṭin* to match Sayyid Baraka’s status.

In any case, what is beyond doubt is the simple fact that whereas the Guran chiefdom upheld Sayyid Baraka’s *zāt*, the central power, the shah, protected Taymur the Second’s. Yet the whole legacy of this manifestation differs substantially from that of Guran, in the sense that it has left no tangible impact on the religio-political fabric of Sahneh. There are two reasons for this. First, the absence of a tribal structure of power in Sahneh prevented the emergence of any kind of spontaneous alliance between the local elites of the worlds of *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin*. Situated in the most fertile plains of Kermanshah province, Sahneh and its villages have always been under tighter government control. The power in Sahneh, unlike Guran, did not rest with tribal chiefs but with a landed gentry who enjoyed close ties with the central government. In fact, a large part of Sahneh’s agricultural land was state owned (*khāliṣa*), whose rent was allocated to certain court notables in lieu of salary or as a reward for service.

Second, there already existed a well-established alliance between the Ahl-i Haqq sayyids and this landed gentry. Both the way that this alliance came about and its subsequent structure resemble the rise of the Haydari sayyids in Guran. The center of this alliance was the village of Jayhunabad, the seat of the Shah Hayasi *khāndān*. This *khāndān* came into existence in the early 18th century when the Divine Essence was manifested in Shah Hayas. It had its base in Iraqi Kurdistan until the early 19th century when, under pressure from the Sunni Ottomans, Aqa Ismaʿil, the grandson of Shah Hayas, came to Iran. The legend has it that Aqa Ismaʿil was invited to come to Iran by Muhammad Shah Qajar. The shah was in a desperate situation in a battle; his vizier, Haj Mirza Aqasi, a man of Sufi inclination, suggested that he appeal to the *bāṭin* power of Shah Hayas. He did so, whereupon Aqa Ismaʿil appeared to him in a dream, gave him a sword, and encouraged him to fight on. Having won the battle, the shah invited Aqa Ismaʿil and his entourage to Iran. In the vicinity of the village of Jayhunabad, Aqa Ismaʿil was welcomed by one of his landed disciples, who invited him to settle there. Aqa Ismaʿil chose a site overlooking the village, and there he built a *takiya*. Later the disciple dedicated one-third of the land of each of the three surrounding villages to the *takiya*. The shah allocated the land tax of the state lands of Sahneh and seven of its villages as a contribution to Aqa Ismaʿil’s *sufra* expenditure, that is, to provide for his guests.

The Haydari and Shah Hayasi sayyids have a great deal in common in the way that they gained influence by forming alliances. In other ways, they differ greatly. Thus, whereas the Haydari Sayyids were able to maintain, even to strengthen, both their power base and their popularity in the face of changes in the wider Iranian society, the opposite has happened to the Shah Hayasi sayyids. Their influence began to erode

with the start of the Pahlavi dynasty, the creation of a national army, and the growth of literacy, and they suffered a final blow with the land reform of the 1960s and subsequent limitations imposed on land ownership after the 1979 revolution. Above all, their claim to spiritual leadership was seriously contested around the turn of the century. In fact, the reformist group had its origin in this contest when, three generations ago, Hajj Ni<sup>c</sup>mat, a commoner, was declared to be a *didādār* (lit., with eyes to see the world of *bāṭin*). He was a literate man and had served as scribe to the vali until 1899 when, at the age of twenty-eight, he decided to retire in Jayhunabad to comply with a spiritual calling. He was a charismatic man, well versed in the Ahl-i Haqq sacred narrative, and had a large number of dervish followers who believed that he was the holder of *zāt*. This enraged the then leading sayyid of the Shah Hayasi *khāndān*, who ordered Hajj Ni<sup>c</sup>mat to be exiled from Jayhunabad and his dervishes to have their hair cut off, thus depriving them of their dervish status. After the intercession of sayyids from other *khāndān* (mainly Shah Ibrahim of Sahneh), Hajj Ni<sup>c</sup>mat came back and his dervishes dropped their claim. He then retired from the world of *zāhir* and devoted all his efforts to writing a history of the sect and introducing reforms.<sup>34</sup> His efforts were continued by his son Nur<sup>c</sup>Ali, who brought to the surface the mystical aspect of the sect, relegated its heretical elements to the realm of myths, and devised a symbolic language to explain them in the context of orthodox Shi<sup>c</sup>i tradition.<sup>35</sup> At present, the *takiya* in Jayhunabad is the focus of religious activity only for those who have remained loyal to the Shah Hayasi *khāndān*, and those who have opted for the reformist leader Nur<sup>c</sup>Ali's son Bahram Elahi turn to *māl-i ḥājī* (the house of his father, Hajj Ni<sup>c</sup>mat). In fact, there is now talk of the formation of the last *khāndān*, in line with the reforms introduced by Nur<sup>c</sup>Ali. It is interesting that the new *khāndān* is named after the Twelve Imams, additional evidence of its pursuit of compatibility with Shi<sup>c</sup>i orthodoxies.<sup>36</sup>

#### SOME WIDER THEMES

In his "structuralist" analysis of the myth of the Virgin birth, Edmund Leach posed a question that I find particularly relevant to Ahl-i Haqq: "How should we interpret ethnographical statements about palpable untruth?"<sup>37</sup> Both the Gurani and Sahneh versions of the Divine Manifestation are "palpably untrue ethnographic statements." Yet, seen from the Ahl-i Haqq perspective, they seem untrue only to those who are only aware of their *zāhir* reality; the inner reality always remains unknown to those who are only concerned with the outer world. It is somehow like a drama in which parts of the plot are unfolding on an invisible stage, the world of *bāṭin*.

Whether real or contrived, the Guran and Sahneh versions of the Divine Manifestation reflect their outer history. We have seen how and through what processes the manifestation of the Divine Essence in Sayyid Baraka brought an alliance between his progeny and the tribal chiefdom of Guran and how the same did not happen in Sahneh when the Divine Essence was manifested in Taymur the Second. The dynamics and the processes involved in Guran are similar to those observed in other Muslim communities where such alliances are often generated and maintained through marriage.<sup>38</sup> This pattern appears to be more likely in a Sunni con-

text, where Sufi orders enjoy a certain degree of religious autonomy, than a Shi'ī context, where the well-organized religious hierarchy hinders new local alliances. In this sense the Ahl-i Haqq of Guran have more in common with Sufi orders in a Sunni context. Interestingly, despite the abolition of tribal chiefdoms early in this century and despite the continued efforts to undermine tribal political structures everywhere in Iran, they have survived in Guran precisely because there is an added religious dimension. It is this factor that accounts for the present unification of the Ahl-i Haqq in Guran, capable of bringing different factions together whenever necessary, as witnessed by events during the Iran–Iraq War and more recently in the election campaign. Developments in Sahneh, however, for the reasons already explored, are more in line with the Shi'ī context, where holy men are part of a religious hierarchy with an urban base and close ties with the central power. It is no wonder that it is in Sahneh that the reformist movement, whose prime aim is to align the Ahl-i Haqq with Shi'ī orthodoxies, has its roots.

The obvious differences between the Guran and Sahneh versions of the Divine Manifestation clearly relate to differences in the “outer” history of these two Ahl-i Haqq clusters. At the level of inner truth, however, the two versions have much in common. In both we find a conceptual segregation of the two worlds, in line with the very essence of Ahl-i Haqq cosmology in which the two worlds are clearly separated yet closely connected. We have seen how successive manifestations of Divine Essence act as a link between these two distinct worlds without ever bringing them together. The same is even more true of the other cardinal Ahl-i Haqq dogma: the transmigration of souls (*dūnādūnī*). According to this, human life is nothing but a series of journeys during which the soul migrates from one world to the other. In each of these journeys, the soul takes on a different body, likened to putting on a new garment (*dūn*). Death is only an interval in the world of *bāṭin* during which one is confronted with the sum total of one's deeds in the world of *zāhir*. Suffering and good fortune can only be understood in relation to one's deeds and thoughts in the course of one's previous incarnations. The whole purpose of all these comings and goings, whose number and duration are already fixed at 1,000 incarnations in the course of 50,000 years, is for the soul to gain perfection. Those who have completed the journey become perfect souls, part of the *bāṭin*, and if they come back to the world of *zāhir*, it is always for a purpose, a mission.

What was puzzling to me in the field was the force with which informants appeared to reject the relevance of any *zāhir* (political) interpretation of the stories. On reflection, these interpretations were not so much rejected as taken for granted. But they insisted on the overriding importance of the *bāṭin*, and the stories seemed to show less the connections between the two worlds than their separation. I suggest that such a conceptual segregation of the two worlds is necessary to sustain another central dogma of the sect, a dogma shared by all sectarians, that they alone are the “followers of *Ḥaqqīqat*” (Ultimate Truth). This dogma is challenged in the everyday experience of ordinary Ahl-i Haqq, living in communities in which they are a despised religious minority, always surrounded by hostile Muslims. This presents a kind of existentialist dilemma to ordinary members of the sect and poses the question, “Why are Ahl-i Haqq, the people of *Ḥaqqīqat*, subjugated by the people of *Shari'āt*?” It is through such conceptual separation that the belief in the power of



*bāṭin* and the necessary compromises with the rule of *zāḥir* can be reconciled. After all, a loss in the outer world is always a gain in the inner, a fact patently embedded in the Shiʿi notion of martyrdom. In this sense, both clusters of the Ahl-i Haqq in Kermanshah undoubtedly belong to the Shiʿi tradition.

## NOTES

*Author's note:* I thank the Economic and Social Research Council and the British Academy for grants in support of the field research during 1992 upon which this article is based. An earlier version of the paper was presented in a seminar at the London School of Economics; I am grateful to Maurice Bloch and others for their comments. The anonymous reviewers for *IJMES* and David McDowall also made helpful suggestions. Above all, I am indebted to Richard Tapper for his support and comments on various drafts of the article.

<sup>1</sup>Although ʿAli is not the major character in the Ahl-i Haqq religious schema, his veneration is the main criterion for including them among the Shiʿi extremist sects. Present-day Ahl-i Haqq are indeed sensitive about being known as “Ali-Ilahi,” which implies a belief in the divinity of ʿAli, and is the name by which they were (and still are) referred to by their Shiʿi or Sunni neighbors. Another name for the Ahl-i Haqq is Yarsan, “the land of *yār*” (lit., friend, but in the sect’s terminology it denotes Ultimate Truth). They also refer to their religion as *din-i yāri* (religion of *yār*).

<sup>2</sup>“Ahl-i Haqq” is generally used by Sufis to refer to themselves, and here *haqq* has a wider implication than “truth,” as it denotes God in His attribute of Ultimate Truth. It appears that the term was also used by Persian Nizari Ismaʿilis; see W. Ivanow, *The Truth-Worshippers of Kurdistan, Ahl-i Haqq Texts* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1953), 1.

<sup>3</sup>A very recent instance of this occurred in spring 1992; in a national television program, a popular religious character condemned the Ahl-i Haqq dogmas and invited their youth to rise against their fathers’ archaic beliefs and become true Muslims. The episode caused a great uproar and much dismay within the sect.

<sup>4</sup>This is certainly an exaggeration, but it is important to note that there are large pockets of Ahl-i Haqq populations in many parts of Iran, in both urban and rural zones. Their principal locations, apart from Kermanshah, are in Luristan, Azarbaijan, Shiraz, Tehran, Qazvin, and Mazandaran.

<sup>5</sup>See V. Minorsky, “Ahl-i-Hakk,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960), 1:9.

<sup>6</sup>For instance, see M. M. Mazzoui, *The Origins of the Safawids: Shiʿism, Sufism and the Gulat* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1972).

<sup>7</sup>One reason for this can be the very marginality and isolation of the Ahl-i Haqq communities, although the inward focus of the sect must have played a role here, as will become clear later in this article.

<sup>8</sup>Although there is no accurate information, it seems that this happened in the 18th century. The oldest manuscript known is the one found by Minorsky, dated 1843. Since then, other *kalām* have found their way into the hands of outsiders. Among them, two are prominent: W. Ivanow, a Russian scholar who in 1953 edited and published a number of Ahl-i Haqq texts under the auspices of the Ismaili Society; and M. Mokri, an Iranian scholar of Kurdish, but not Ahl-i Haqq, origin, who acquired some collections of *kalām* in the 1940s, many of which he has edited, translated, and published under the auspices of Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in Paris.

<sup>9</sup>For instance, see *Nivishtahā-yi Parākanda dar Bāra-i Yārsān: Ahl-i Haqq* (Scattered Writings about the Yarsan, i.e., the Ahl-i Haqq; with a list of Gurani words) (Tehran: ʿAtaʿi, 1982); *Daura-i Haftvāna: Juzvī az Nāma-i Minavi-yi Saranjām* (Heptad Cycle, Part of the Ethereal Letter of Saranjām) (Tehran: Tahuri Press, 1982); *Daura-i Bahlūl: Yakī az kuhantarīn Mutūn-i Yārsān (Ahl-i Haqq)* (Bahlul Cycle: One of the Oldest of Yarsan [Ahl-i Haqq] Texts) (Tehran: Tahuri Press, 1984).

<sup>10</sup>The examination of this new trend and the way it has been received by the various branches of the sect are the main themes of a book in preparation, which also gives a fuller account of recent Ahl-i Haqq history and sociology.

<sup>11</sup>The distinction is ignored in studies of Ahl-i Haqq; these show a kind of “*kalām* bias” that is somehow the extension of the dominant textual bias in studies of Middle Eastern religious beliefs and practices. This is even the case in recent, more sociologically oriented works such as those of H. Beik-Baghban, *Religion de vérité: Enquête de sociologie religieuse chez les Ahl-e Hakk d’Iran* (Thèse de

doctorat d'état, Université des Sciences Humaines de Strasbourg, France, 1975); M. R. Hamzeh<sup>2</sup>ee, *The Yaresan: A Sociological, Historical & Religio-Historical Study of a Kurdish Community* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1990). Exceptions are Martin Van Bruinessen, "Haji Bektash, Sultan Sahak, Shah Mina Sahib and Various Avatars of a Running Wall," *Turcica* 21–23 (1991): 55–73; idem, "Satan's Psalmists: Some Heterodox Beliefs and Practices Among the Ahl-i Haqq of the Guran District" (unpublished manuscript).

<sup>12</sup>Kermanshah (pl., Kermanshahan) is the name by which the province is commonly known and is also the name of the provincial town center. After the Islamic Revolution, the names of the province (Kermanshahan) and its center (Kermanshah) were both changed to Bakhtaran (lit., the West), in line with changes in many other Iranian place names containing the word "shah." The new name never gained currency, however, and its usage remained confined to the official level. During the last parliamentary election (April 1992), the province's name became a campaign issue: one candidate pledged to restore the true identity of the province by reinstating its original name. He was elected, and he was also to fulfill part of his promise: the provincial center has regained its original name, Kermanshah, although the province is still officially referred to as Bakhtaran. Here I follow the popular usage and refer to the province as Kermanshah. (In 1993, the province too was officially renamed Kermanshah.)

<sup>13</sup>The Ahl-i Haqq of Azarbayjan belong to the Turkish tradition of the sect, and a large majority of them are Azari speakers. For a monographic study of an Ahl-i Haqq village there, see G. H. Sa<sup>3</sup>idī, *Ilkhichī* (Tehran: Amir-Kabir Press, 1978; 1st ed., 1964).

<sup>14</sup>Kermanshah used to accommodate substantial Christian and Jewish minorities; a large majority of the latter have migrated to Israel, and the former to the West.

<sup>15</sup>For the list of these *khāndān* and their formation, see Hamzeh<sup>2</sup>ee, *Yaresan*, 205–15. In Kermanshah, the following *khāndān* have the largest number of followers: Shāh Ibrāhīmī, Atashbigī, Yādgarī, Khāmūshī, and Shāh Hayāsī.

<sup>16</sup>*Kalām-khān* these days are also *kalām-nivīs*, or *kalām*-writers. An ambiguous position is that of *dalil* (lit., guide) whose status is hereditary—they come from the seven families chosen among the seventy-two *pīr* by Sultan Suhak. Their presence supposedly is necessary in initiation ceremonies; in practice, they are usually replaced by others—I witnessed this, as did Van Bruinessen ("Satan's Psalmists," 19).

<sup>17</sup>I came across two dervishes who were sayyids—both were women.

<sup>18</sup>Whereas Ahl-i Haqq is the name by which the sect wishes to be known by outsiders, *tāyifa* is the name used among its members, although it does not include sayyids, whose status is always distinguished from the commoners.

<sup>19</sup>For the different cycles of manifestation, see Minorsky, "Ahl-i-Hakk," 10; and for the notion of cyclical time in Ahl-i Haqq tradition, see M. Mokri, *Le chasseur de Dieu et le mythe du roi Aigle (Dawra-ye Dāmyari)* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1967), 47–53.

<sup>20</sup>This notion can be traced to the reformed post-Nazari Isma<sup>3</sup>īlis, when in 1164 Hassan II, the Isma<sup>3</sup>īli leader, proclaimed himself as the deputy of the Hidden Imam and freed his followers from the rules of the Shari<sup>3</sup>a; see M. Moosa, *Extremist Shiites: The Ghulat Sects* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1988), 186–87.

<sup>21</sup>Tutshami is still a sanctuary; its *takiya* provides refuge and offers hospitality to all who go there. During the last stages of the Iran–Iraq War, the *takiya* housed and fed the fleeing Iranian soldiers, although the Ahl-i Haqq at the time were under pressure from the authorities.

<sup>22</sup>This is an abbreviation and amalgamation of accounts given me by two *kalām-khān* of Tutshami: Ka Karim, who is now retired, and his successor Dervish Alimir. The legend, known by all the villagers, is also the founding legend of the village.

<sup>23</sup>This episode is alluded to in an epilogue to the volume containing the *kalām* of Nauruz as an explanation for some omissions. The actual passage, which is dated 1935 and written by a scribe, reads as follows:

As heard from the elders, at the time of Sayyid Baraka a certain dervish came to his house and after a while disappeared, stealing the *kalām* of the following dervishes: Nauruz Surani, Rustam Babajani, Haydar Kuchak-Bali Guran, Ibrahim <sup>3</sup>Abbasvandi and <sup>3</sup>Abbas Kerendi. Despite all efforts neither the above-mentioned dervish nor any of these volumes could be traced. All opinion had it that the dervish had the mission [from the world of *bātin*] to do what he did and the consequences [of the mission] will emerge in due time. Nauruz's *kalām* were rewritten in his presence, the larger part of them are in the blessed handwriting of Sayyid Baraka; from the other volumes only a few *kalām* have survived, memorized by people.

<sup>24</sup>For a selection of these *kalām*, see M. Alqassi, *Majmū<sup>3</sup>a-i Āyīn va-Andarz va-Ramz-i Yārī* (Iran: privately published, 1979). I found his work most valuable; although he himself is an Ahl-i Haqq, he

neither mystifies nor conceals the faith, which is not the case in other works written by those with inside knowledge. Some verses of Taymur's *kalām* were also translated into Persian by a well-known poet, Adib al-Mamalik Farahani, who became a sympathizer after he came into contact with the notables of the sect in Tehran in the 1950s; see V. Dastgirdī, *Divān-i Kāmil-i Adib al-Mamālik-i Farahāni-i Qāy-Immaqāmi* (Complete Collection of Poetry of Adib . . .) (Tehran: Farvardin Press, 1976), 669–83.

<sup>25</sup>For an account of his life and his reforms in Kermanshah, see A. Davānī, *Vahid-i Bihbahāni*, 2nd ed. (Tehran: Amir-Kabir Press, 1983), 274–331.

<sup>26</sup>For further accounts, see the following: a biography of Sardar Kabuli, a learned man of Afghan descent who was the contemporary of Aqa Mamdali, in K. Samī<sup>c</sup>i, *Zindagāni-yi Sardār-i Kābuli* (Life of Sardar of Kabul) (Tehran: Gilan Press, 1983); Malcolm's account of Sufism and Aqa Mamdali's views and his part in the murder of some popular Sufi personalities, in M. H. Court, *Malcolm's History of Persia (Modern)*, ed. and trans. Mirza Hairat (Lahore: Civil and Military Gazette Press, 1881), 150, 152, 158; and the third volume of a well-known book depicting the life of Sufis contains many accounts of Aqa Mamdali's atrocities toward the Sufis: M. M. Shirāzi (Ma<sup>c</sup>ṣūm 'Alī Shāh), *Ṭarā<sup>2</sup>iq al-Ḥaqāyiq* (Paths of Truths), vol. 3 (Tehran: Sanā<sup>2</sup>i Press, n.d.).

<sup>27</sup>Mirzā Muḥammad Taqī Lisān al-Mulk Sipīhr, *Nāsikh al-Tavārikh: Salāṭin-i Qājāriyya* (Chronicle of the Qajar Kings), vol. 3 (Tehran: Islamiyeh Press 1974); also see V. Minorsky, "Notes sur la secte des Ahle-Haqq," *Revue du Monde musulman* 43, 1 (1921): 20–79, 205–302.

<sup>28</sup>There are some parallels between Taymur and the Bab (Mirza 'Alī Muhammad Shirazi). Both sought to change the status quo by the power of *bāṭin*, although Taymur's appeal was confined strictly to the Ahl-i Haqq. My impression is that the parallel drawn by the author of the quoted text, who was an official chronicler, more than anything else explains the vali's hasty decision and the uncertainty surrounding the early years of Nasir al-Din Shah's reign. For an account of the Babi movement, see E. G. Browne, *A Traveller's Narrative Written to Illustrate the Episode of the Bab* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1891), 2:184; on mistaken speculations concerning relations between Taymur and Babism, see Minorsky, "Notes sur la secte," 275–78.

<sup>29</sup>I am grateful to Muhammad Sultani who gave me a copy of this letter. It is from Mirza Nizam Mafi to Sayyid 'Abdul Husayn Sultani who was the director of education in Kermanshah between 1925 and 1927. The letter is dated 1925 and includes a translation of some of Taymur's *kalām*.

<sup>30</sup>There are some *kalām* implicating Shah Ibrahim, a companion of Sultan Suhak who founded the sect, and himself the founding ancestor of the Shah Ibrahimī *khāndān* upon the death of Baba Yadgar, the most revered Ahl-i Haqq character (the incarnation of Husayn, the first Shi<sup>c</sup>i martyr). In this way the rivalry between sayyids of different *khāndān* also found expression in Ahl-i Haqq *kalām*; see also Van Bruinessen, "Satan's Psalmists," 26–27.

<sup>31</sup>There are several versions of the Sahneh account, two of which have been written down by Ahl-i Haqq sayyids. The first is to be found in an introduction to Taymur's *kalām* in S. K. Nik-Nizhād, *Mukhtasari az Sharḥ va-Hāl-i Ḥazrat-i Taymūr* (A Brief Account of Taymur's Life and State) (privately photocopied and distributed, 1970). The second was distributed while I was in the field: see S. A. Shāh-Ibrāhimi, *Sharḥ-i Zindagāni va-Aḥwālāt-i Janāb-i Taymūr-i Bānyārāni va-Āqā Taymūr-i Sāni Mulaqqab bi-Fataḥ* (An Account of Life and State of Taymur of Banyaran and Aqa Taymur the Second Known as Fatah) (privately published, 1985). The latter is a compilation of the stories narrated by those who were among Taymur's close associates.

<sup>32</sup>Remembering one's previous lives is evidence of access to the world of *bāṭin*. This is in some ways a literal understanding of one of the Sufi maxims: self-knowledge is the path to God-knowledge. The Ahl-i Haqq believe that when the soul approaches perfection it then becomes aware of the various stages of its development, that is, it recalls the human forms, or the various garments (*dūn*) it has put on in the course of its journey to the Divine.

<sup>33</sup>There are other versions of this. In one, Taymur is seen to walk away carrying his head under his arm; in another, the Jews take a short nap, and when they wake up they find that Taymur's body has disappeared.

<sup>34</sup>The book was edited and published by M. Mokri, *Shāh-Nāma-ye Ḥaqīqat (Le livre des Rois de Verité: Histoire traditionnelle des Ahl-e Haqq)*, vol. 1, Bibliothèque Iranienne 14 (Tehran/Paris: 1966).

<sup>35</sup>See S. C. R. Weightman, "The Significance of Kitab Burhan Ul-Haqq: Additional Material for the Study of Ahl-i Haqq," *Iran: British Journal of Persian Studies* 2 (1964): 83–103.

<sup>36</sup>The present leader of the reformist group and his recent efforts to introduce further changes have met with a great deal of opposition and resulted in a number of violent clashes between the two groups, starting shortly after the revolution in 1979. I discuss this in "Redefining the Truth: Ahl-i Haqq and the Islamic Republic" (unpublished manuscript).

<sup>37</sup>E. Leach, "Virgin Birth," in his *Genesis as Myth* (London: Cape Editions, 1971), 102.

<sup>38</sup>The pattern described here has parallels in other Muslim societies, particularly outside the Arab world; for some examples, see M. Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Organization of Kurdistan* (London: Zed Press, 1992), 221, 233; O. Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 42; F. Barth, *Political Leadership among Swat Pathans* (London: Athlone Press, 1959), 19, 35–36. The variables involved are obviously many and complex and cannot be explored here. Apart from Sunni versus Shi'ci, they include different configurations of relations between tribal chiefs and various kinds of religious leaders and the state.