

## **The Sealness of the *Wilayah* of al-Mahdi and the Specification of His Ancestors according to ibn Arabi and Some Commentators of *Futuh al- makkiyyah***

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The sealness of *wilayah* is one of the most important and challenging issues discussed by Muslim mystics, and has been discussed by the likes of Ibn 'Arabi. Like other mystics, Ibn 'Arabi divides *wilayah* into two types: absolute and limited. However, his ideas with regards to instances of absolute *wilayah* and limited *wilayah* diverge from the norm. Sometimes this divergence is so extreme that according to him, it goes away from what is generally accepted by Sunnis and Shi'is. In other places, however, he implies that his opinion is similar to some of theirs and that he shares the same opinion as them. Ibn 'Arabi considers Jesus as an instance of absolute *wilayah* and an Arab man as an instance of limited *wilayah*. Sometimes, he takes the Mahdi as an instance of limited *wilayah* and at other times, he says that the Mahdi of the last days is not the same as "the expected Mahdi." In many places, Ibn 'Arabi introduces himself as the seal of limited *wilayah*. What is clear, however, is that there are serious differences between numerous copies of *Futuh* and its commentaries concerning the names of the ancestors of the Mahdi, and this has so far been neglected. By comparing numerous copies of *Futuh* and its commentaries, the present article aims to study, analyze, and criticize such differences.

**Keywords:** Ibn 'Arabi, seal of *wilayah*, Jesus, Mahdi

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## Introduction

In the spiritual life of Muslims and especially Shi'is, *wilayah* is an important issue that deserves special attention. In its most well-known categorization, *wilayah* has been divided into absolute and limited, or universal and specific. A great part of Ibn 'Arabi's works has been devoted to this point. According to Ibn 'Arabi, the absolute *wilayah* is the principal type and limited *wilayah* refers back to it. In other words, when it is a divine attribute, *wilayah* is absolute; and when it refers to the prophets and friends of God (*awliya'*), it is limited. Limited *wilayah* depends on the absolute, and absolute *wilayah* is for the absolute. Thus, the *wilayah* of the prophets and friends of God is an aspect of absolute *wilayah* (Ibn 'Arabi 1381, 69). Many times where Ibn 'Arabi has discussed the issue of *wilayah*, it is because he is responding to 155 questions that were posed to him by Hakim Tirmidhi, which will be referred to when required.

## Wali according to Ibn 'Arabi

According to Ibn 'Arabi, *wilayah* is the foundation of all human spiritual levels. For the same reason, he considers the perfect man to be the same as the *wali* (Maliki 1388, 42). He says:

Know! *Wilayah* is a universal concept and a great circle; one of its rules is that God takes each of His servants, as He wishes, as His friends and as His prophets. Prophethood is among His rules of *wilayah*. Thus, each and every prophet should inevitably be a messenger and each and every messenger should be a *wali* (Ibn 'Arabi 1431, 2:256, 3:14).

Thus, *wilayah* is universal prophethood and a prophethood with legislation is a specific prophethood (Ibn 'Arabi 1431, 2: 24).

According to Ibn 'Arabi, a *wali* is the perfect guide and supervisor of other beings; the most perfect *wali* is God and His *wilayah* extends to other *awliya'* through a descending course (Maliki 1388, 43). He then divides *wilayah* into three categories: divine *wilayah*, human *wilayah*, and angelic *wilayah*. He further divides human *wilayah* into two classes: universal and specific (Maliki 1388, 2: 249; 1388, 43). In his *Fusus al-hikam*, Ibn 'Arabi says that in terms of religious rules and legislative affairs, the seal of *awliya'* follows the messengers, and this does not harm his lofty status. Further, he mentions the conditions, characteristics, and morals of the seal of the prophets and is of the opinion that only the seal of the *awliya* can attain such a status (Maliki 1388, 44) after fulfilling the conditions of *wilayah* (such as having divine morality, being attributed to moral virtues, and becoming like God). Ibn 'Arabi says:

In each era, the world needs a prophet or a messenger and after them a successor or a *wali* who is his successor so that the divine command may be handed down by a messenger to another prophet to the seal of the prophets and after that, the same command may be handed down to special successors and *awliya'* to the seal of the *awliya'* with whose death the Day of Resurrection will come. The command of the world refers to the other world and the otherworldly aspect will appear to remain stable, permanent, and unchangeable. (Amuli 1375, 1:157)

According to Ibn 'Arabi, prophethood is the outer aspect of *wilayah* and *wilayah* is the inner aspect of prophethood. This is why prophethood is disconnected while *wilayah* is not disconnected (Ibn 'Arabi 1431, 3:285).

### **The Sealing of *Wilayah* and the Seal of the *Awliya'***

The greatest difference between Ibn 'Arabi and others is with regards to his identification of the absolute *wali* and the limited *wali*. An important point to make, however, is that Ibn 'Arabi's views on this are extremely varied. Because of this, commentators of *Futuh al-makkiyyah* and *Fusus al-hikam* have been trying to provide a consistent account of his view. Sadr al-Din Qunawi, 'Abd al-Wahhab Sha'rani, Qaysari, and Shi'i philosophers and mystics like Sayyid Haydar Amuli and Muhammad Rida Qumsha'i are among these commentators (Maliki 1388, 49). Generally, a seal (*khatam*) is one who has attained the ultimate perfection and sacredness; God has sealed prophethood with the Holy Prophet who is the seal of prophethood. In the Holy Qur'an, it has been said: "[B]ut he is the messenger of Allah and the Seal of the Prophets" (33:40). The seal of *wilayah*, however, is one by whom the interests of religion and the otherworld becomes completely perfect, and by whom the system of nature becomes stable, and with whose absence it will become unstable (Kashani 1365, 159).

### **The Seal of Absolute *Wilayah*: Jesus**

Concerning the philosophy of *wilayah* which has been discussed by Tirmidhi in his fifteenth question, Ibn 'Arabi maintains, since the world has a beginning and an end (which is its seal), divine providence necessitates a beginning and an end for all that is in the world, including revealed religions. In this regard, God has put an end to the revelation of religions by the religion of Muhammad (s); He has taken the Prophet as the seal of prophets. The universal *wilayah*, which falls under the scope of this world, is not an exception to this rule; Jesus has been taken as its seal. After him, there is no other prophet and prophethood will be converted to *wilayah* (Ibn 'Arabi 1431, 2:52-54). It should be noted that since Jesus will return to the

world in the last days of the world after the advent of the Mahdi (a), Ibn ‘Arabi considers him to be the seal of universal *wilayah* (Ibn ‘Arabi 1381, 74) as no *wali* will come after him (Ibn ‘Arabi 1381, 186).

In chapter 382 of *Futuh al-makkiyyah*, Ibn ‘Arabi says that Jesus is the seal of greater *wilayah* and the seal of universal *wilayah*. Then, he adds: “At the same time, he (Jesus) is the seal of the Muhammadan *wilayah*” (Ibn ‘Arabi 1381, 3:514). He claims that he has seen and recognized the seal of Muhammadan *wilayah* in the year 595 AH in the city of Fas. However, he refuses to mention his name (Ibn ‘Arabi 1988, 121). He says:

God revealed it for me in the city of Fas and I saw the stamp of *wilayah* on him. He was the seal of the absolute prophethood. Many people do not know him, and they have even undertook it to deny him... In the same way that God, the Exalted, put an end to the prophetic laws by him, He communicated His divine message and put an end through the Muhammadan sealing. This is that which results from the family of Muhammad and no other divine prophet. ( Ibn ‘Arabi 1988, 2:42)

In chapter 73 of this book, he says that Jesus is the seal of universal *wilayah* and not the seal of the specific Muhammadan *wilayah*. He says: “There is one seal, and not in all times; rather, God will put an end to the Muhammadan *wilayah* by it for one time, and there is no greater one among the Muhammadan family than him. Then, God will put an end to universal *wilayah* through it; *wilayah* has begun from Adam and continues to the last *wali* who is Jesus and he is the seal of the *awliya*” (Ibn ‘Arabi 1988, 2:11).

### **The Seal of Limited *Wilayah***

When identifying the seal of the limited *wilayah* or specific Muhammadan *wilayah*, there are various and even conflicting sentences in Ibn ‘Arabi’s writings. In some sentences, he introduces himself as the seal of *wilayah*, and this is more apparent than other points (Ibn ‘Arabi 1431, 63; Amuli 1368, 434). However, in some places, he seems to suggest that the seal of *wilayah* is the awaited Mahdi (Ibn ‘Arabi 1431, 3:327-28). Elsewhere, he has said that the Mahdi is not the same as the Mahdi that is awaited by Shi‘is. And further, in other places, he says that the seal of the specific Muhammadan *wilayah* is an Arab man. The identification of the ancestors of the Mahdi as the seal is one of the issues that will be discussed in what follows.

### Sealness of *Wilayah* with the Mahdi

One of those identified as “the seal of the *awliya*,” mentioned by Ibn ‘Arabi in his works, is a man called the Mahdi. Ibn ‘Arabi attributes the well-known hadith that speaks about a man who “will fill the earth with justice” to the Mahdi. However, we will make reference to what Ibn ‘Arabi says and show that, most likely, the Mahdi that Ibn ‘Arabi has in mind is not the same as the twelfth Imam of the Shi‘ah (Ibn ‘Arabi 1431, 2:50, 3:76; 1373:74). In chapter 366 of *Futuh al-makkiyyah* (On Knowing the Viziers of the Mahdi in the Last Days), he goes on to describe the beliefs that correspond to Shi‘i ones:

- Know! God will help us, for He has a vicegerent who, when the earth is filled with injustice, will appear to fill it with justice. If there remains just a single day of the world, God will prolong that day until His vicegerent, who is from the Holy Prophet’s (s) household, and Fatima’s (a) offspring, and his ancestor is Hasan ibn ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib (a).<sup>3</sup> He will, like the Holy Prophet (s), take an oath of alliance from the people between the *rukn* and the *maqam*. (Ibn ‘Arabi 1431, 3:327)
- In temper, he is completely like the Holy Prophet (s). (Ibn ‘Arabi 1390, 66)
- [A]nd he is ranked lower than Jesus. (Ibn ‘Arabi 1383, 331)
- He will live for five or seven or nine years after his appearance. Of religion, what is true will appear—that which the Holy Prophet would have stated if he were alive. (Ibn ‘Arabi 1390, 68)
- His enemies are the followers of scholars (*mujtahids*) who will go to him reluctantly out of fear from his sword and for the wealth which will be with him. (Ibn ‘Arabi 1390, 69)

Elsewhere, he postulates that there is some sort of difference between Muhammadan *wilayah* and *Mahdawi wilayah* (Maleki 1388, 61): “But, the seal of the Muhammadan *wilayah* has the greatest knowledge of God. Whether in his own time or in the time after him, no one has more knowledge than him of God and the rules issued by Him. He and the Holy Qur’an are brothers in the same way that the Mahdi and the sword are brothers” (Ibn ‘Arabi 1390, 77). By the phrase “in the same way that the Mahdi and the sword are brothers,” he likens the brotherhood between the Mahdi and the sword to the brotherhood between the Muhammadan *wilayah* and the Holy Qur’an; it is as though they are two foundations in similitude. In response to one of the questions posed by Hakim Tirmidhi, he confirms that he

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3. Difference between various copies of *Futuh* concerning the ancestor of Mahdi will be discussed in what follows.

accepts that one whose name and attributes are like those of the Holy Prophet is the seal of *wilayah*. Immediately, however, he mentions that this Mahdi is not the same as the “awaited Mahdi” (Maleki 1388, 63). By mentioning the attribute “awaited,” he rejects the sealness of the Mahdi in whom the Shi‘ah believe. He continues to say that the awaited Mahdi is from the genetic descendants of the Holy Prophet (s), whereas the seal he mentions is from the Prophet’s spiritual descendants (Maleki 1388, 63; Ibn ‘Arabi 1384, 189; 1988, 128). Thus, he makes a distinction between the awaited Mahdi and the Mahdi that is the seal of the *awliya*’. According to Shi‘i commentators, the two Mahdis are one and the same (Maleki 1388, 64). This point of Ibn ‘Arabi is in conflict with the idea of the sealness of *wilayah* which has been adopted by many great figures of mysticism.

Further, Ibn ‘Arabi believes that the Muhammadan *wilayah*, which is specific to the religion sent to Muhammad (s), is a specific seal who is ranked lower than Jesus:

He (the particular seal) has been born in our time and I have seen him and talked with him and I have seen the signs of sealness within him. There is, therefore, no *wali* unless they can be referred back to him; just in the same way that there is no prophet after Muhammad unless they may be referred back to Muhammad (Ibn ‘Arabi 1383, 331).

He is now among us and I knew him in the year 595 and observed the signs of his *wilayah* (Ibn ‘Arabi 1390, 77).

The editor of *Futuhāt*, the late Uthman Yahya writes in a footnote to this chapter:

For the Shi‘ah, the seal of the general Muhammadan *wilayah*, which is the same as the seal of absolute *wilayah*, is ‘Ali Ibn Abi Talib and the seal of the specific Muhammadan *wilayah* is the Mahdi, and they (the Shi‘ah) do not agree with Ibn ‘Arabi’s idea that Jesus is the seal of absolute *wilayah* and that someone other than Mahdi is the seal of the specific Muhammadan *wilayah* (Ibn ‘Arabi 1383, 332).

In chapter 463 of *Futuhāt*, Ibn ‘Arabi says, “I do not mention his name because I am not allowed to do so .... He is the seal of the specific *wilayah*” (Ibn ‘Arabi 1390, 77). With regards to the question as to “who is the seal of the *awliya*’,” however, Tirmidhi keeps silent. He limits himself to his well-known questions (13 questions). For example, he asks, “Who deserves to be the seal of *wilayah* in the same way that Muhammad deserves to be the seal of prophethood?” Ibn ‘Arabi responds to this question on two occasions. In his first text, written in 603 AH (*Jawab al-mustaqim*), he says, “One who deserves this station is a man who looks like his father. He is not Arab... the

circle of the sultanate and *wilayah* will be closed with him” (Ibn ‘Arabi 1418, 74). In *Futuhāt*, however, he is clearer (Chodkiewicz 1389, 193). As claimed by Ibn ‘Arabi, Jesus is the seal of absolute *wilayah*, and is the agent of the law-giving prophethood. The *Muhammadan* seal is an Arab who is one of the noblest, and Ibn ‘Arabi has seen him in 595 AH (Chodkiewicz 1389, 4). To respond to the fifth question, Ibn ‘Arabi explains in *Futuhāt*: “The name of the seal of the second *wilayah* is the same as the name of the Holy Prophet (s). He is not, however, of his genetic descendants, but rather of his spiritual descendants. Thus, he should not be confused with the Mahdi who is among the descendants of Muhammad (Chodkiewicz 1389, 194).

### **The Sealness of *Wilayah* with Ibn ‘Arabi**

In some of his works, Ibn ‘Arabi considers himself to be the seal of the limited *wilayah*. For example, he says, “But no one will come after me; and no one will be the result of my work. When I become absent, the government will be eliminated and the end will come to the beginning” (Nicholson 1358, 79). In a more explicit way, he says, “There is no doubt that I am the seal of *wilayah*, and that is a heritage handed down to me by the Hashimite Prophet and Christ (Ibn ‘Arabi 1431, 1:244, 190, 318; 3:244). He believes that his views are inspired and induced by the ultimate Truth. In some places of *Futuhāt*, he speaks of his own dreams in Mecca and Damascus in which he claims divine emanations were sent down to him (Maleki 1388, 53). He refers to a dream he had in Mecca where he saw the *ka‘bah* built of silver and gold bricks with two bricks missing. He then found himself being put in the place of those two bricks after which the wall becomes completed. He interprets the dream as follows: “I am to those who are of my kind as the Holy Prophet was to the prophets.” He takes this as a piece of evidence to confirm that he is the seal of *wilayah* (Maleki 1388, 53).

In reply to the opponents of Ibn ‘Arabi, it has been said in *al-Janib al-gharbi* that “Ibn ‘Arabi maintains four kinds of sealness for *wilayah*. The greatest seal is none other than Jesus son of Mary, and after him there will be no *wali*; Jesus is the greatest *wali*. The smaller seal is the Shaykh al-Akbar [i.e., Ibn ‘Arabi] himself, the great seal is ‘Ali Ibn Abi Talib, the smallest seal is the lord of age.” Then, he writes, “The Shaykh has assumed another seal for *wilayah*, and I am still pondering on this” (Maleki 1388, 58; Hamid al-Din 1384, 76-77).

Qaysari accepts the sealness of Ibn ‘Arabi and Jesus in some way. At the end of his essay, *Khatm al-Wilayah*, he writes:

Behold! The caliphate will come to an end inevitably, since it is a finite thing ... Of course, *wilayah* is a key which has been divided into absolute and limited. What is meant by absolute *wilayah* is a *wilayah* which covers all types of specific *wilayah* and its individuals. Specific *wilayah* is that of Ibn 'Arabi and universal *wilayah* is that of Jesus (s). (Qaysari 1381, 39-40; Maleki 1388, 58)

### **Study and Critique**

Though mystics, scholars, and philosophers have been greatly influenced by the ideas of Ibn 'Arabi and hold that his observations have revealed profound points, they mention inconsistencies in his ideas about the sealness of *wilayah*. They believe that these have been falsely attributed to him or that his original words have been altered. According to Shaykh Haydar, some scholars have tried to defame him and others have attempted to explain and/or justify his sayings. Some of them believed that the seal of universal *wilayah* is certainly Jesus and others considered the Mahdi as the seal of the specific *wilayah*. Still, others went on to charge Ibn 'Arabi with error and argued for the Mahdi's sealness of *wilayah* (Amuli 1367, 175; Nasiri 1384, 50).

For example, Qaysari and 'Afifi, two Sunni commentators of Ibn 'Arabi, can be classified as parts of one group. Qaysari emphasizes that the Mahdi is the seal of the *awliya*' and says, "It should not be assumed that the Mahdi is meant by the seal of the *awliya*"; for Ibn 'Arabi states explicitly that the seal is Jesus. This is because the seal of the *awliya*' is a non-Arab man, while the Mahdi is an Arab man and one of the descendants of the Holy Prophet (s)" (Nasiri 1384, 51).

Among others in this group who have tried to remove these inconsistencies is Sha'rani (*al-Yawaqit wa'l-jawahir*), 'Abd al-Karim Jili (*Sharh mushkilat al-Futuh al-makkiyyah*), Ahmad 'Abd al-Rahim al-Sayih (*Ajwibat Ibn 'Arabi 'ala as'ilat al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi*), Mahmud Ghurab (*Khatam al-awliya*), a selection of Ibn 'Arabi's works), Shaykh Muhammad Khaki, Jundi, and some Sunni commentators of *Fusus al-hikam*.

Shi'ah commentators have showed extra sensitivity on this point. From among them, we can mention Agha Muhammad Rida Qumsha'i (*Ta'liqat 'ala Fusus al-hikam*), 'Allamah Ashtiyani (*Sharh 'ala Fusus al-hikam* and in particular his commentary upon the introductions written by Qaysari and others), 'Abd al-Razzaq Kashani (*Sharh 'ala Fusus al-hikam*), and Sayyid Haydar Amuli (*al-Muqaddamat min Kitab Nass al-nusus wa jami' al-Asrar wa manba' al-abrar* and his other works) who have done their best to find some type of justification for some of Ibn 'Arabi's expressions (Maleki 1388, 52). For example, to justify Ibn 'Arabi's expressions, Shaykh Muhammad



Khami (a Sunni follower of Ibn 'Arabi) says, "The seal of absolute *wilayah* is Jesus and he is the greatest seal. The first kind of seal of Muhammadan *wilayah* is 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib who is the last of the rightly-guided caliphs and the guided Imams (a) and this is the great seal. The second kind of seal of Muhammadan *wilayah* is the Mahdi who will appear at the end of time and he is the small seal. The third kind of seal of Muhammadan *wilayah* is Ibn 'Arabi" (Jahangiri 1375, 487; Nasiri 1384, 52).

To justify Ibn 'Arabi's sayings, Agha Muhammad Rida Qumsha'i (a Shi'i follower of Ibn 'Arabi, who is undeniably one of the great scholars of the school of Ibn 'Arabi) says: "*Wilayah* is of two kinds: absolute and limited. The seal of absolute Muhammadan *wilayah* is 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib and the promised Mahdi. However, the seal of limited Muhammadan *wilayah* may be Ibn 'Arabi or the Arab man that Ibn 'Arabi saw and recognized in 595 AH" (Ashtiyani 1380, 889). In his commentary on Qaysari's *Fusus al-hikam*, 'Allamah Sayyid Jalal Ashtiyani interprets Ibn 'Arabi's belief that Jesus is the seal of Muhammadan *wilayah* as referring to the universal *wilayah*. He believes that according to Ibn 'Arabi, the Mahdi is the seal of absolute Muhammadan *wilayah* and Jesus will inevitably follow him (Ashtiyani 1380, 891; Nasiri 1384, 59). Also, 'Abd al-Razzaq Kashani says explicitly, "He (this Mahdi) is the same as the promised Mahdi" (Turabiyani 1381, 203).

Though Ibn 'Arabi has composed poems in praise of the Prophet's household, and this has been considered by many commentators as testifying to his Shi'ism, great scholars, like Sayyid Haydar, who respect Ibn 'Arabi greatly, do not maintain that Ibn 'Arabi was Shi'i (Jahangiri 1375, 3:108). In spite of his harsh and respectful critiques of Ibn 'Arabi's ideas about the sealness of *wilayah*, he warns about the replacement of the name of 'Ali with that of Jesus and criticizes Sunni commentators of Ibn 'Arabi like Qaysari. He says that the commentator has misunderstood Ibn 'Arabi's points (Amuli 1367, 338). Sayyid Haydar believes that the points brought forth by Ibn 'Arabi prove that Jesus is the seal of the absolute *wilayah* and he criticizes this belief (Nasiri 1384, 59). Based on several quotes from Ibn 'Arabi's works, Sayyid Haydar proves that the seal of the absolute *wilayah* is 'Ali and the seal of the specific *wilayah* is the Mahdi. He thinks that the second commentator of *Fusus*, 'Abd al-Razzaq Kashani, is of the same opinion as him (Amuli 1367, 338). He believes that the only possible reason behind Qaysari's interpretation is prejudice and to express that he was a Sunni as well as a Sufi so that he could have a lofty status amongst ordinary people (Amuli 1368: 443). Sayyid Haydar introduces two kinds of arguments: transmitted

and rational. In the beginning, he says that transmitted arguments do not confirm what has been claimed by Ibn 'Arabi and his commentators. He narrates many verses and hadiths which prove the *wilayah* for 'Ali ibn Abi Talib either explicitly or implicitly. He connects these narrations to 'Ali and concludes that there are many arguments that prove this status for 'Ali (see Amuli 1375, 188-210). He devotes a great part of his book *al-Muqaddamat min Kitab Nass al-nusus wa jami' al-asrar wa manba' al-abrar* to introducing rational arguments and comes to the conclusion that it is only 'Ali who deserves such a position (Amuli 1375, 221-26). He quotes Ibn 'Arabi's three views concerning the seal of the limited *wilayah* (Ibn 'Arabi himself, an Arab man, and the Mahdi) and then says that he himself thinks that Ibn 'Arabi maintains the sealness of the limited *wilayah* for himself. He says:

He is so aware of the status of the Mahdi and speaks about him very eloquently and explicitly ascribes the sealness of the limited Muhammadan *wilayah* to him. Then, how can he ascribe such a lofty status to himself and what is his reason to accept this? More astonishingly, he proves such a position for himself based on a dream; while it has been proven for others not in dreams, but in the tangible world and based on rational and transmitted arguments and intuitions. How can dreams be compared with the real world? .... Such sayings are like that of Qaysari's prejudices and his arguments which are looser than a spider's web (Amuli 1375, 238, 239).

Inconsistencies in Ibn 'Arabi's sayings about *wilayah* becomes evident in the second part of *Futuhat*, when he describes various kinds of *qutbs* (spiritual “poles”) and those who are eligible to be exoteric and esoteric *awliya*. He says that those who are eligible to be exoteric *awliya* are eligible to be esoteric *awliya* as well. He mentions Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthman, 'Ali, Hasan, Umar b. 'Abdul 'Aziz, Mu'awiyah, and Mutawakkil as examples (Ibn 'Arabi 1405, 2:6). However, as said by Professor Zarrinkub, there seems to be some inclination towards Shi'ism in Ibn 'Arabi's teachings and ideas (Zarrinkub 1362, 25). Some may think that certain sayings of Ibn 'Arabi were due to precautionary concealment (*taqiyyah*) and that his real ideas are in agreement with Shi'ism. According to many others, however, in no Shi'i sources of theology or hadith can one find the belief of the rightful caliphate of the rightly-guided caliphs that includes Mu'awiyah or Mutawakkil or Harun al-Rashid as the successors of the Holy Prophet. Nor can one find in Shi'i sources that the first three caliphs are superior to Ali ibn Abi Talib or that Jesus is a successor of the Holy Prophet or that Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthman, Umar Ibn Abdul 'Aziz, and Mutawakkil enjoyed esoteric caliphate (see Ibn 'Arabi

1405, 2:6). Ayatullah Sayyid 'Izz al-Din Husayni Zanjani, a great scholar of jurisprudence and a teacher of philosophy and mysticism, (in his introduction to *Ashi'ah al-luma'at*) and Imam Khomeini (in his reflections on *Fusus al-hikam*) introduce several note-worthy points about what has been said concerning *wilayah* and Ibn 'Arabi's view of divine or human appointment. The former writes, “Now, we will discuss examples of deviations in the myth of the theoretical mysticism of Muhyi al-Din ibn 'Arabi. Concerning the lord of martyrs, he says: “Yazid was the Imam of his age and the vicegerent of God in the earth and Husayn's uprising was illegitimate. Thus, Husayn was killed in accordance with the religion of his own grandfather” (Qurashi 3:1354, 403; Ibn 'Arabi 1405, 4:280-81; Jami 1383, 13-14). If such expressions are taken into consideration, then perhaps we cannot think of him as a silent Shi'i (Maleki 1388, 179).

It seems that one cannot be certain that Ibn 'Arabi was in *taqiyyah* even though this proposition has been made throughout history. Though at the beginning of his *al-Tanazzulat al-mawsiliyyah*, he writes that his words are based on mysteries and secrets, and that out of his fear of scholars he has adopted such an approach—perhaps this is only true about this specific essay and cannot be extended to his inconsistencies in *al-Futuh al-makkiyyah* (especially about sealness). Another reason for such inconsistencies may be that a long time was taken to write *al-Futuh al-makkiyyah*. We do not know the exact date that the book was completed in Damascus. Some indications suggest that he was writing the third volume in 628 AH and the fourth volume in 638 AH. From the beginning to the end, he wrote the book over a span of 37 years (Fazli 1382, 39). He wrote the book and then rewrote it for a second time. There are 37 volumes that are handwritten by Ibn 'Arabi in the library of Islamic works in Istanbul (no. 81-1845). However, one might postulate that he removed some parts when he rewrote it for the second time (Maleki 1388, 49). In this way, the logical development and the coherence of his points has been disturbed. Or, during this period, he may have changed his mind or been unable to specify an instance, or, because of the conditions of time, he has not attempted to express his own ideas (Maleki 1388, 50).

### **Ancestors of the Mahdi (a)**

In *Futuh*, the identity of the ancestors of the Mahdi (a) has undergone many changes, and not much attention has been paid to this point. In most copies of *al-Futuh al-makkiyyah*, Hasan b. 'Ali has been identified as the ancestor of the Mahdi (a). Included in the copies of *Futuh* are old copies edited by 'Uthman Yahya which are among

the most authentic copies of the book, and in which Hasan b. 'Ali has been introduced as the ancestor of the Mahdi (Ibn 'Arabi n.d., 3:327; Ibn 'Arabi 1405, 3:319). Even in the more recent copies of the book that have been edited by 'Uthman Yahya, Hasan Ibn 'Ali has been introduced as the ancestor of the Mahdi (a) (Ibn 'Arabi 1413, 3: 327). In other copies that have been published with no commentary, and in some editions from Egypt and Lebanon, Hasan b. 'Ali is also introduced as the ancestor of the Mahdi. For example, in a copy of *al-Futuh al-makkiyyah* published in Beirut in 2002 and edited by Dr. Mahmud Muraji, it has been written: “His ancestor is Hasan ibn 'Ali ibn Abi Talib” (Ibn 'Arabi 2002, 63). However, it is important to note that many Sunni and Shi‘i commentators of Ibn 'Arabi's works are of the opinion that he has identified Husayn ibn 'Ali as the ancestor of the Mahdi and that in later copies, Husayn was changed to Hasan. Thus, in their commentaries of Ibn 'Arabi's works, they have corrected this “error.” For example,

- 1) ‘Allamah Ashtiyani has corrected the ancestor of the Mahdi (a) identified in Ibn 'Arabi's extant copies. He writes: “He is among the progeny of the Holy Prophet and one of the offspring of Fatimah. His name is like that of the Holy Prophet and his ancestor is Husayn ibn 'Ali ibn Abi Talib” (Maleki 1388, 60; Torabian Torqabah 1381, 203).
- 2) In his *al-Shajarah al-nu'maniyah*, Sadr al-Din Qunawi has included a chapter entitled “*al-Matlab al-Mahdi*.” Here, he says that the Mahdi is the seal of the *awliya'*, his ancestor is Husayn ibn 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, and his father is Hasan al-'Askari ibn al-Imam al-Naqi (Maleki 1388, 62; Qunawi 1425: 58).
- 3) While discussing signs of the resurrection day and events which will happen before it in *al-Yawaqit wa'l-Jawahir*, 'Abd al-Wahhab Sha‘rani mentions the appearance of the Mahdi and says that he is the son of Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari who was born on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Sha‘ban, 225 AH. Then, he quotes Ibn 'Arabi's introduction of the Mahdi (a) and says that “his ancestor is Husayn Ibn 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib” (Nasiri 1385: 45).
- 4) In newer commentaries, like *Hidayat al-umam* or *Sharh kabir 'ala fusus al-hikam-i Ibn 'Arabi*, it has been said: “In chapter 366 of his *Futuh*, Shaykh says: ‘his ancestor is Husayn Ibn 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib’” (Rezanejad 1380, 2: 171).

Concerning various opinions about the identification of the ancestor of the Mahdi, a few points can be noted. In his introduction to his translation of *Futuh*, Muhammad Khajawi writes: “This

translation is based on all three copies edited by 'Uthman Yahya, a copy edited by Ahmad Shams al-Din published in Beirut, and the copy of Maymaniyah published in 1294 AH" (Ibn 'Arabi 1381, eighteen). Elsewhere he says: "The name of the Mahdi has been mentioned only in the copy of Maymaniyah and not in the copies of *Futuhāt* edited by the late 'Uthman Yahya and others." He says explicitly: "Here, treason made by conspirators may be seen" (Ibn 'Arabi 1383, 408). He refers to three old copies of *Futuhāt* for his translation and says that the ancestor of the Mahdi has been identified as Husayn ibn 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (Ibn 'Arabi 1390, 66). Referring to numerous libraries, the authors of this article came to the conclusion that in the copy edited by Ahmad Shams al-Din, the name of the Mahdi's ancestor, according to what has been said by Khwajawi, was Husayn Ibn 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib (Ibn 'Arabi 1991, 51). However, when referring to a few older and newer copies, edited by 'Uthman Yahya, this could not be confirmed. In the copies referred to, the name of his ancestor was Hasan ibn 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (Ibn 'Arabi n.d., 3: 327; Ibn 'Arabi 1405, 3:327; Ibn 'Arabi 1431, 3:327).

What is certain is that Ibn 'Arabi's works, in particular those concerning the seal of *wilayah*, due to its paramount importance in the Islamic world, have undergone changes and alterations. These have been made by both Sunni and Shi'i commentators and can be seen clearly when comparing various copies of the book. For example, a great scholar like Hasanzadeh Amuli has quoted sentences from *Futuhāt al-makkiyyah* and for example, changed "He is ranked lower than Jesus" into "he is the Mahdi" (Hasanzadeh Amuli 1374: 44). Agha Muhammad Rida Qumsha'i is someone who has noted these alterations. Under the commentary on a section of *Fusus al-hikam* which concerns *wilayah*, he makes a compromise between the five seals introduced by Ibn 'Arabi (Jesus, Ali ibn Abi Talib, the Mahdi, an Arab man, and Ibn 'Arabi) and believes that many alterations have been made in Ibn 'Arabi's sentences, particularly those about *wilayah*. He says that in chapter 366 of *Futuhāt*, Ibn 'Arabi has introduced Husayn Ibn 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib as the ancestor of Mahdi and that this was later changed to Hasan Ibn 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib (Qumsha'i 1379, 90). He is of the opinion that in *Futuhāt*, Ibn 'Arabi has meant "the Mahdi, the promised, whose ancestors are from the Quraysh—the most generous and dearest tribe among Arabs" (Qumsha'i 1354, 17).

With regards to the alteration of the name of Mahdi to that of Jesus, Qumsha'i says, "He (Mahdi) is ranked at the level of the seal of the Muhammadan *wilayah*. In chapter 24 of *Futuhāt*, he [Ibn 'Arabi] says: 'For the specific *Muhammadan wilayah* ... there is a special seal for the messenger-hood of Muhammad who is the same as the Mahdi

and is ranked higher than Jesus.’ In some copies, however, ‘lower’ has been written instead of ‘higher’ and this is an alteration, since *wilayah* is the highest rank” (Qumsha’i 1354, 17).

Qumsha’i refers to Ibn ‘Arabi’s sentences which seem to correspond to Shi‘i beliefs according to which the Mahdi has already been born (Qumsha’i 1354, 17).

As we know, with regards to the identity of al-Mahdi, the promised, Sunnis are not in agreement with Shi‘is. Some scholars have different opinions with regards to his parents and others have different opinions with regards to his ancestors. Others have differences about his date of birth and believe that he will be born during the era of his appearance. More than seventy Sunni scholars, however, are of the opinion that he has been born and is alive. There are more than one hundred books written by well-known Sunni scholars in which hadiths detailing the signs of the appearance of Mahdi have been narrated (Safi Golpayegani 1385, 76-78). According to the Holy Prophet and based on Shi‘i belief, the Mahdi is of the offspring of Husayn (a). This belief is so established among Shi‘is that it has become one of the symbols of the Shi‘i creed. At the same time, many hadiths have been narrated by Shi‘i and Sunni hadith-transmitters in which the Holy Prophet is quoted to have said that the Mahdi is of the offspring of Imam Husayn; such as the following

- 1) Shaykh al-Saduq has narrated 38 hadiths with various chains of transmission. Among them is a long hadith narrated by ‘Abd al-Rahman b. Samarah from the Holy Prophet: “Hasan and Husayn are the two Imams of my *ummah* after their father and are the leaders of the youth of paradise. Thereafter, nine descendants of Husayn, one after the other, are your Imams and my caliphs upon you. The ninth of them is the Qa’im (riser) of my nation, who will fill the earth with justice and equity, as it would be fraught with injustice and oppression” (Shaykh Saduq 1363, 2: 282). He also narrates five hadiths quoted from Imam Husayn in which he has said: “The Imam al-Qa’im is from my progeny.” Among such hadiths, one may mention the hadith in which ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn Hajjaj quotes from Ja’far ibn Muhammad al-Sadiq from his father Muhammad ibn Ali from his father Ali ibn Husayn that he said: “Husayn ibn Ali said: ‘My ninth descendant will have a similarity to the Prophet Yusuf and a similarity to the Prophet Musa ibn Imran. And he is our Qa’im’” (Shaykh Saduq 1363, 2:328).
- 2) Through various chains of transmission, Muhammad Ganji Shafi’i has narrated various hadiths quoted from the Holy Prophet. Among them, we may mention the narration made by Hudhayfa

ibn Yaman, in which he quotes the Holy Prophet as saying: “Even if only one day remains of the life of this world, God will cause a man to appear whose name is my name, and who resembles me in manners. People will pay allegiance to him between the *rukhn* and the *maqam*.” Then Salman stood up and asked: “O Messenger of God! From whose progeny from your offspring will he be?” The Holy Prophet pointed towards Imam Husayn, took his arm, and said: “He is from the progeny of Husayn” (Ganji Shafi’i 1977, 256; Ibn Qayyim Jawziyah 1408, 148; Tabari 1386, 136; al-Juwayni Khurasani 1378, 2:325; al-Haythami al-Shafi’i 1377, 7:37). Thus, it seems that some commentators have tried to remove the Shi’i taint from Ibn ‘Arabi’s beliefs, by changing the name of Imam Husayn to Imam Hasan as the ancestor of the Mahdi.

## Conclusion

Issues regarding the sealness of *wilayah*, the *wilayah* of the Mahdi (a), and the identification of his ancestors should be dealt with comprehensively and without any biases or preconceived notions. Further, it is true that nothing conclusive can be drawn from Ibn ‘Arabi’s sentences in *al-Futuh al-Makkiyyah*, even though there are sentences which seem to suggest that he maintains the Shi’i viewpoint. Many of these sentences have been esoterically interpreted or considered to be the byproducts of precautionary concealment (*taqiyyah*). On the other hand, there are many sentences (perhaps more numerous) which more explicitly suggest that he holds the Sunni viewpoint. To bring these seemingly inconsistent sentences and ideas together, one may say that although he is not a Shi’i, he has some Shi’i inclinations. What is certain is that not all of Ibn ‘Arabi’s declarations about *wilayah* go in the same direction. Shi’i and Sunni commentators of Ibn ‘Arabi’s works have interpreted his ideas and changed them as they saw fit, and this has worsened the confusion. For many reasons, Ibn ‘Arabi’s ideas have been altered. One of the reasons is that wherever the seal of the *awliya*’ or the superiority of one of the four caliphs is spoken of, differences can be seen between various copies of *Futuh* and its commentaries. These changes that have been made with regards to the name of the ancestor of the Mahdi (a) could have been errors made by some copiers, or they could have been intentional changes made to hide his Shi’i inclinations.

The truth may be similar to what ‘Allamah Ashtiyani has said about the fundamental confusion in Ibn ‘Arabi’s ideas about *wilayah*. He says:

Some Shi’i scholars, like Haydar Amuli and among later scholars like

Shaykh Muhammad Rida Qumsha'i, his disciple Agha Mirza Hashimi, and his disciples Mirza Muhammad 'Ali Shahabadi and Agha Mirza Ahmad Ashtiyani, insisted on ascribing the points made by Ibn 'Arabi in his essay concerning *wilayah* to Shi'i principles and rules. His sentences concerning *wilayah* are however confusing and different, and this difference has led to various justifications made by Qaysari (who is Sunni) and other Shi'i scholars (Qumsha'i 1379, 176).

Further, it seems that since a systematic and methodological hermeneutics has not yet been established, the difference of ideas between Shi'i and Sunni commentators of Ibn 'Arabi has increased.

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