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A critical survey on Ahl-e haqq studies in Europe and Iran¹

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A.H. consider Bektashis as the closest members of a large family which includes a few other hyper-Shiite or Imamites² groups of which only the Nosayris and ‘Ali Allâhi are clearly identified. The tradition has it that Soltân Sahâk, the founder of the Ahl-e Haqq *maslak* in Iranian Kurdistan and Lorestan, after a hundred year of spiritual reign in Kurdistan once disappeared, manifested himself in Anatolia under the name of Hâji Bektash³, then reappeared (Suri :47). Providing a clue on the Ahl-e Haqq in a seminar on Bektashi and Alevi, I found more appropriate to make a survey of the A.H. and A.H. studies at large but in a critical eye, and to suggest some research perspectives, rather than to focus on a specific point. At least those who do not know much about this field would have an idea on the present days situation of this religious group and his problems, and perhaps will be able to draw comparisons with the case of the Bektashi and Alevi.

ONE AND HALF CENTURY OF RESEARCHES ON THE A.H.

For a long time, one of the main concerns of Western scholars working on the A.H. was to find out their historical and religious origin and to give an account of their practices and beliefs (Gobineau, Minorsky, Iwanov). Their views were relying more on sacred texts than on field work and personal contacts with the adepts, and when it was the case, it could be only with a few groups among a great number of A.H. communities scattered on a wide territory. After the pioneers, came a new generation of scholars perhaps better equipped to sketch a realistic portrait of this religious group. These were M. Mokri, a Sunni Kurd who published in French and had full access to the original texts and to Kurdish culture, C.J. Edmonds who translated an interesting A.H. doctrinal summary, and S.C.R., Weightman who had contacts with A.H. in Tehran.

¹ I wish to thank Dr Martin van Bruinessen for his kind advices and remarks concerning this article.

² I suggest to avoid the term “extremism shiism” to label Alevi, AH, Nosayris, etc. The terms imamism and imamites, or perhaps hypershiism (for *ghuluw*) are politically, as well as scientifically, more correct.

³ Pir Esmâ'il Kuhlâni, a disciple of Soltân Sehâk, says in a *kalâm* : “Among the Bektashis, among the Bektashis / The receptacle of the essence of my King manifested himself among the Bektashis / My King has gone from Perdivar to his new house / He manifested himself in Hâjji Bektash / He founded the Bektashi path, unveiling his Science / the seven (*haftan*) have had many lives (*yurt*)”. (Safizâde, 1981: 96).

About Hâji Bektash’s hierarchical rank, there are other traditions (see van Bruinessen, 1995 : 119-20, 134, Beik Baghban : 66, 256). Some sources say he was Gabriel or Dâwud, one of the seven Archangels. Other sources consider him as a manifestation of Khân Atesh or Shâh Veys Qoli, that is a *zât mehmân* (“host of the Essence”, but not *zât bashar* “the Essence in a human” like ‘Ali). Edmonds (: 94) relying on Iraki sources, gives the names of Hâji Bektash’s companions, from which there is no doubt that he was the King (*shâh*). Sacred history does not bother with chronology, but strangely, in all the versions, Hâji Bektash comes *after* Soltân (d. probably 1506), though he lived more than two centuries before him. (This anachronism is solved by some traditions according to which he lived three hundred years.) The anteriority of the Bektashis over the “official A.H.” goes along with the fact that all the A.H. know about the existence of their Turk cousins, whereas the Alevis have no idea of the existence of the A.H. in Iran or Irak.

From the 1963 onwards appeared important first hand material : the *Borhân ol Haqq* written by Nur ‘Ali Elâhi, a respected spiritual personality among the A.H. and others. This book was discussed by Weightman (1964) and mentioned by Minorsky in his article of the encyclopaedia of Islam as an essential contribution to the knowledge of the A.H. tradition and practices. It is based on the most reliable traditions ⁴ and uses Islamic theological concepts and coranic references to present the doctrine in such a way that the Islamic censure could not raise any objection against it. After several reprints, a new edition was issued in 1975 with 400 pages of commentaries and replies to questions. All the books published in Iran after the *Borhân ol-Haqq* use extensively this source and mention it generally in first place in their bibliography ⁵.

The same year was published the *Shâhnâme-ye Haqiqat*, from Hâjj Ne’matollâh Jeyhunâbâdi, Nur ‘Ali Elâhi’s father. This is a complete sacred history in 11.000 Persian verses stretching from pre-eternity to modern time. In the new edition (*Haqq ol-haqâyeq*) it includes contemporary events which happened during Hâj Ne’matollâh’s time but are still viewed as part of the same sacred history. This fact is quite rare in such writings which generally do not include the present times. This book may be considered as the main traditional source for the A.H. besides the sacred *kalâms* or *daftar*s, and Hâjj Ne’matollâh as the last great A.H. charismatic saint in the traditional style. Whereas all the *kalâms* were written in Kurdish, he dictated it in Persian, perhaps intending to open A.H. tradition to the large public of non Kurdish speakers among A.H. as well as non affiliated. Although he also innovated in choosing a historical approach instead of the classical paraphrase of the ancient *kalâms*, his work is in the continuity of the tradition of the sacred *kalâm* written in the course of the centuries by great A.H. saints and it is often referred to as the *Kalâm* of Mojrem (his *takhalos*) ⁶.

A few years after the appearance of these two sources, several works were published in Iran, some of them more or less inspired by the *Borhân ol-Haqq*. They can be classified in three main categories, though some works combine several approaches (such as catechism, erudition and descriptions of rites) : —Canonic texts —Erudite presentations (of unequal level), — Insider’s spiritual or catechism approaches (sometimes based on substantial canonic texts or displaying some erudition). To them can be added ethnological descriptions or sociological approaches which are not concerned in priority with the A.H. as a religious group.

1) CANONIC TEXTS

A.H. canonic literature has not been systematically collected nor repertoried. Even the basic text have never been clearly described. In order to open the way for further researches, it may be useful to sketch a general table of the literature of this group. The essential text is the *Kalâm Sarânjâm*, also called *Kalâm Khazâne* or *Daftar-e Perdiwari*.

I could consult a very authentic augmented of many other texts, copied by seyed Nure (d. c. 1970), a Shâh Hayâsi A.H. from Sahne, in a beautiful calligraphy. According to Seyyed

⁴ The author possessed many copies of the sacred *Sarânjâm* collected by his father, and used a copy from the hand of Aqâ Ahmad I, successor of Shâh Hayâs, dated *circa* 1770. It could be the oldest A.H. manuscript.

⁵ Another important reference source of this author is the *Asar ol Haqq* (vol I 1979, vol II 1992, c. 700 pp each) consisting of informal talks transcribed on the spot during *jam*’ sessions. Though it is mainly a spiritual teaching not specifically addressed to Ahl-e Haqq, it provides interesting clues and anecdotes with their commentaries, for an inner approach of the A.H. culture, not to speak of its mystical content.

Scholars can also benefit from the notes taken by some dervishes of this master and published by M. Mokri with his commentaries : *L’Esotérisme kurde* (1966). It contains a lot of material on the A.H. traditions and rituals, but the author (who is actually not the redactor of the book) disapproved its publication, since he could not review it.

⁶ They follow those of Teymur, Zulfaqâr, Darvish Qoli and Nowruz .

H., his son, the most important traditional book is the *Kalâm Sarânjâm* which contains only the old primitive texts related to the time of Soltân and his previous manifestations (Shâh Khoshin (c. Xth century) and Bâbâ Nâ'us). He said that several other chapters (*daftar*, booklet) can be considered as part of the *Saranjâm*, since they report stories and talks from the same period. These texts may have been written later by saints who were themselves reincarnations of the same persons, or who had spiritual access to those time and were supposed to relate what had been said and what happened. The typical example is that of Qoshchi Oghli. These texts use always the formule "Soltân declared" (*maramu*), "Benyâmin declared"...

Of secondary importance are the writings of what can be called the second period (XVII-XVIII c.), such as the predictions of Khân Almâs or Il Begi, the kalâms of Shâh Hayâs, Aqâ Abbâs, etc.. Another category of writings is constituted by mystic poems relying on canonic texts or referring to them, the most appreciated being those of Sheikh Amir. During two to three centuries there has been a considerable production of mystic poetry of this kind, by people who occupied a "rank" (*maqâm*) in the socio-cosmic hierarchy, or at least were acknowledged as enlightened dervishes (*didedar*).

Seyyed H.'s manuscript has 380 pages, the *Sarânjâm* itself extends on 138 pages and contains the following chapters : Shâh Khoshin 20 pp, Bâbâ Nâ'us 10pp, a section on Soltân's time 25 pp, the story of Pire wa Pirali, of Yâdegâr and Shâh Ebrâhimi, of the Haftawâna, the twelve Imâms 33 pp, the Cheltan, the Qawaltâs, the recommendations of Soltân for the performance of the *jam* (ritual). According to him there are no major variations between the different versions available, but some tradition contain additional materiel related to Soltân's period. For instance the *daftar Diwâna Gawra* belongs to the local Guran tradition. All the versions do not clearly separate the different sections by a title, this is why the number of chapters may vary, though the content is the same. For instance his copy had not title for some small sections such as *K. Goru Goru*, *K. Dire Dire*, *K. Kale zarde*.

The rest of Seyyed H. manuscript contained selections of poems *kalâm* by great A.H. saints or poets : from 'Âli Qalandar, Qoli (one of the Qawaltâs), the stories of Shâh Ebrâhim, Zonnur, and 'Âbedin, texts from Seyyed Ahmad, Seyyed Farzi and his disciples Nâder Veys, Nowrus, Zolfaqâr, etc. All this is only a small part of the totality of the texts of second importance.

Publications of canonic texts can be divided into two categories : a) non academic editions (often fac simile of corpus of manuscript text) b) academic with philological, historical, religious anthropological comments.

The first publication of religious text is the Minorsky's russian translation of a *Saranjâm* (1911) which is hardly available. Fifty years later, Ivanow published a collection of persian A.H. texts with extensively commented in the light of history of religions. It must be said that these texts, though interesting for scholars, are totally rejected by the adepts and never quoted in books by Iranian scholars ⁷.

M. Mokri had published with parsimony some fragments of the *Kalâm-e Sarânjâm* (also called *K. Perdivari*, or simply *Kalâm*) in a few articles, presented as rare secret texts and accompanied by abundant linguistic and cultural comments. By doing this instead of publishing at once the whole *Sarânjâm*, he succeeded in preserving the mystery of A.H. studies. This mist of mystery was quickly lifted by the publication in Iran of a Turkish version of the *Sarânjâm* (*Kalâmât-e Torki*, Tehran, 1973, 336 pp). (A fac simile of a dervish's copy, without introduction, comments or table.) Later on, in 1981, J. Afshâr published another version of this

⁷ These texts has been published under the title *Majmu'e rasâ'el-e ahl-e haqq*, Bombay, 1950.

Turkish source, the *Divân-e Qoshchi-oghli*, (230 pp) ⁸. It starts with the story of this saint who was relieved from deafness and mutism by a miracle of Shâh Ebrâhim (16th c.). Acknowledged as a new manifestation of Gabriel after Benyâmin (in Sultân's time), he adapted the *Sarânjâm* into Turkish with his comments and poems. In 1975, Afzali, an A.H. *seyyed* published some important basic Kurdish texts under the title *Daftar-e romuz-e yârestân. Ganjine-ye Soltân Sehâk* ⁹. Two sections of the *Sarânjâm* have been edited separately in a scholarly form by Safizâde : *Dowre-ye haftawâna*, (1982, 900 verses, 191 pp) and *Dowre-ye Bohlul*, (1984, 60 verses, 115pp) ¹⁰. The section *Daftar-e Cheltan* has been issued in the form of a manuscript fac simile by Awrâng and Khâdemi (1978).

In addition to these basic texts, several minor but revered *kalâm* were published in manuscript fac-simile :

— The complete *divân* of Sheykh Amir (born 1713 h.), perhaps the most popular source of this kind among A.H. Kurdish speakers. The book is introduced by ten pages (also in handwriting) by K. Nik-nezhâd (no date).

— *Goftâr-e Khân Almâs* (d. 1725) has been published in the same form (1973, 54pp).

— The *Pishbini-e Il Begi-e Jâf* (1980, 44pp), edited and introduced by Safizâde contains amazing predictions about the modernisation of society (moral decadence, freedom of women, changes in dressing, and even the invention of steam train) ¹¹.

All these are not academic editions, but just the adept's contribution to the diffusion of the canonical texts, generally without comments, introduction nor index. In this process, the Turkish speakers from the Atesh Begi *khânedân* proved to be more active than the Gurân, the most conservative A.H. group.

The old secret books were available at last, though their distribution was limited. Yet strangely enough, no Western scholar paid any attention to them, nor to the numerous

⁸ This story is also found in the *Shahnâme-ye haqiqat*, p. 503. The interesting point is that since he was Benyâmin in his previous life, Qoshchi-oghli could speak in his own name to relate the sacred historical events.

⁹ This book of around 740 pp is not a regular "Kalâm Sarânjâm" but a collection of canonic texts of different epochs and importance set together without chronological concern. These are : —*Daftar-e Sâvâ* (14 pp), —*Daftar-e Gavâhi-e Gholâmân* ("on Shâh Ebrâhim and Yâdegâr, on the creation of the *haftawâna* and the contracts *bayâbas*) (10 pp), —*Daftar-e Diwâne Gawra (dowre-ye Pire va Pirâli)* (10 pp) — *Daftar-e dowre-ye shenderavi (Gelim kul)* (40 pp) —*Dowre-ye Shâh Khoshin*, (24 pp) —*Zalâl zalâl* (67 pp), the *daftar* of 'Abedin-e Jâf (100 pp), the recents *daftar* of Nowruz (n. 1320 Hq) Seyyed Brâke's *guyande* (260 pp). It is followed by the *kalâm* of Teymur (170 pp). One finds also a presentation (40 pp), hagiographic notes on Shâh Ebrâhim and Bâbâ Yâdegâr, as well as a few pages on Zoroastre, since the author had contact with a Zoroastrian from India and tried to relate A.H. belief to Zoroastrism (Beik Baghban : 23). The absence of table, of clear classification, content and index, the incoherent division of the sections and the pagination by chapters (50 pp being omitted) make the consultation of this corpus uncomfortable. In any case it is not a complete *Sarânjâm*, but in adding to it the other *daftar* available, one can reconstitute a good part of the corpus. These are : *Dowre-ye Haftawâne*, *Dowre-ye Bohlul* (Safizâde), *Dowre-ye Cheltan* (Awrang), *Dowre-ye Wazâwar* (Mokri, 1968), *Dowre-ye Dâmyâri* (*idem.*, 1968), *Divân-e Gawra* (*idem.*, 1977). About other later *kalâm* s, see Safizâde, 1982 : 14). Beik Baghban's photocopied manuscript provides some material too. One can identify twelve parts : *Dowre-ye Dâmyâri*, *D. Diwâne Gawra*, *Gelim wa Kul*, *D. Shâh Khoshin*, *D. Cheltan*, *D. Wazâwar*, *K. Goru Goru*, *K. Dire Dire*, *K. Kale zarde* (these three *kalâm* being very short), *K. Khâmush*, *Farmâyesh-e Bâbâ 'Ali Darvish* (not from the *Sarânjâm*), *K. Marnow*. The absence of the *Dowre-ye Haftawâne* may be explained by the fact that they are not liked by some Gurân groups (Van Bruinessen, 1995 : 134).

¹⁰ This scholar follows the method of Mokri, with comments and linguistic analysis. Three other sections of the basic *Kalâm* have been published by M. Mokri (see note 9).

¹¹ This text which constitutes for the adepts a proof of the authenticity of their saints, has been translated into Persian verses by Adib ol-Mamâlek (end of XIX c.) and are often quoted in A.H. studies. Il Begi died in 961 h.

publications which appeared from this period onwards. I won't quote all this material, and will limit myself to a few significative publications.

2) ERUDITE APPROACHES

Here too one can distinguish two subcategories : a) those of a neutral level, b) those which defend an ideology c) those who are concern by connexions with other religious.

Erudite approaches through textual sources are rare, but precious. Beside Mokri who did not published in Persian, Safizâde made a first contribution with his *Bozorgân-e Yârestân* (1964), improved later in his useful *Mashâhir-e Ahle- haqq* (1981, 234pp), with about 150 biographical notices on great A.H. saints and dervishes. This collection of pen portraits and initiatic filiations provides a new view of the A.H. culture, which I shall discuss later. Of the same level are the two synthesis on the A.H. published by Iranian scholars in the *Shii Encyclopaedia (Dâ'yerat ol-ma'âref-e tashayyo*, Tehran, 1993).

Two books deal with the Cheltan (Qirqlar) which are closely related to the A.H. : *Ilkhchi*, a geographical study of an Azerbaijani village, and the *Hamâse-ye por shokuh-e A.H.*, *Cheheltanân*, of Bâbâzâde, 1968.

The *Sarsepordegân* by Khâjeddin, (1970, 188pp) though it presents itself as a neutral approach, seems to emphasise the non islamic aspect of the A.H., perhaps as a reply to the *Borhân ol Haqq* which explicitly attached the A.H. doctrine to Ja'fari Shiism. Considering its lack of erudition, this book does not meet the academic standards.

Of the same kind and same level is the *A'in-e Yâri* of M. Alqâsi (1979, 106 pp) the difference being that the author is a Gurân adept which obviously addresses his book to an A.H. audience. His approach is therefore more prescriptive than descriptive and follows a classical structure used by Afshâr (1977) and perhaps inspired by the *Borhân ol-haqq*, starting from definitions and origins, then dealing with A.H. customs like festival, fasting, *jam*, benedictions, initiation, ablutions, moustache, etc. Among the interesting points are his quotations of many various *kalâms*. He wrote another essay (*Andarz-e Yâri*, 1980, 94 pp) also with many quotations, but no index.

Is the development of A.H. publications in Iran the reason of the loss of interest of Western scholars in this topic ? Not only the field lost its originality but it has become more difficult to deal with all this new material. The Western contributions consists only in three or four articles from van Bruinessen whose approach is limited in scope and ambition, but accurate and relevant, and a short article of H. Halm in the *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, which cannot match Minorsky's articles of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* in spite the fact that they appear a bit outdated. During several years spent in Iran I get close to the A.H. culture, mainly through its ritual songs and music, which led me to write a general presentation of the A.H. with developments on specific issues (During, 1989 : 293-520) ¹². The last Western scholarly work on A.H. are the articles of Mrs Z. Mir Hosseini who collects abundant interesting data on the present day situation, but in a empirical way without much methodological coherence ¹³. This kind of work dealing with sensitive contemporaneous facts without a thorough knowledge of the traditional culture is more akin to a journalistic approach and leads to disputable conclusions. The most significant Western publication of the last decades remains the *Yaresan* of Hamze'ee (1990), a well documented study on the A.H., with a great emphasis on its

¹² This chapter will be soon published in Persian as a separate book.

¹³ Not speaking of the number of contradictions, inaccuracies, mistakes and personal deductions which can't be justified by what she calls an "anthropological or sociological approach".

relations to ancient cults and religions. Though this scholar is an Iranian of A.H. origins he relies on written rather than oral sources.

A survey of the A.H. studies may give to the impression that there are sometimes conducted in a quite non academic way, which is rarely the case of more classical topics. Here are some other examples : Pittman published a very interesting original résumé of the *Kalâm-e Saranjâm*, without even mentioning where this texts came from, in which language, or from which time¹⁴. H. Beik Baghban got a Doctorat d'Etat in France, a part of it being just the photocopy of a manuscript, and even printed excerpts of canonical writings. He did not edit the text nor even took pain to separate the chapters, to numerate the pages or to give an index or a table ¹⁵. Even M. Mokri in his last article on Soltân Sehâk's family (the founder of the A.H. *maslak*) relies on a rare "inedite manuscript" which actually has been already extensively used fifteen years before by Safizâde in an important study that Mokri deliberately ignores as he just ignores any Persian publications directly related to this matter. Although he used his copy of the *Kalâm* for years, he never described the sacred corpus and his general content. There is still no description available of the sacred corpus ¹⁶.

A.H. is a reality which is complex enough in itself to be rendered more obscure by our own approach.

3) WHAT THE A.H. SAY

A way to gain objectivity is to look at what A.H. themselves say , or to be more accurate, what they write, since the written official discourse of the elite may not reflect the unlitterated or oral tradition of the people ¹⁷.

Borhân ol haqiqat (J. Afshâr,1977) is a catechism book for A.H., the originality of which being that it relies mainly on Qoshchi-oghli's Turkish *kalâm*. The book deals with all the spiritual ethical and ritual basis of the A.H. documented by these texts ¹⁸. It was probably as a reply to it that Alqâsi wrote his own book (1979) since he belongs to the trend which rejects the Islamic basis of the sect.

There has been several pious books written in the mystical or catechism style with more quotations of Hâfez or Mowlânâ than from the Kurdish texts such as those of Movâhed and Valâ'i. This genre which tends to present the universal, humanistic and spiritual message of Ahl-e haqqism brings very little original material, but is still useful for those who want to understand how the adepts define themselves, how they want to be known, what they have to say to the world, how they adapt to changes. In itself they deserves a serious study which is not less interesting than the speculations on the origins of the A.H. mythology or ritual, or than the recent history of their political manoeuvres and their inner quarrels (Mir Hosseini). I will

¹⁴ It covers the A.H. history from Shâh Khoshin to Atesh Beg and belongs probably to the Atesh Begi tradition.

¹⁵ There are nevertheless some useful informations in his "enquête de sociologie religieuse", such as the bibliography, the ethnic and geographical repartition of the A.H., and the translation of *kalâms* which document some ritual or dogmatic points, though often without references.

¹⁶ Even Beik Baghban who had access to these texts provides only a list of their titles (: 24).

¹⁷ We can't include in this category the three books published in French (and several western languages) by Bahrâm Elâhi, Nur 'Ali's son. The reason is that they are not anymore representative of A.H. tradition, except perhaps some fundamental dogma such as perfectionment, cosmology, *mazhariat*, successive lives, ethics, etc. which are considered as "universal". Beside this, these books, which express Nur 'Ali's personal spiritual teaching are addressed mainly to a non A.H. audience.

¹⁸ It refers to some inedit late manuscripts from Teymur II, Sheikh Nazar 'Ali Jenâb (his disciple, d. 1915), and 'Ali Ashraf Khân. The author consider the A.H. as Muslims and rejects the label of 'Ali-Allâhi.

expose later the main characteristics of the A.H. world's view, based on this literature and on the attitude of the bulk of the adepts.

THE ISSUE OF ISLAMISM

There is a lot of very interesting issues concerning the A.H. and their doctrine which deserve careful studies, but in the majority of the academic, erudite or catechism writings, from outsiders as well as insiders, the central debate is the relation of Ahl-e haqqism to other religions and specially to Islamism, in historical, dogmatic, as well as sociological terms. The question is particularly sensitive since the settlement of the Islamic Republic, and has found new answers.

Orientalists have taken for granted the hypothesis of first scholars who presented Ahl-e haqqism as a strange crypto-mazdean or mithraic religion covered by an imamite varnish and have taken for granted the definition of their faith as a syncretism. It's of course more fascinating for them to deal with religions like that of the Yezidis or Druzes rather than with popular Sufism. From the early Western studies, appeared also the idea that there is a new trend among the adepts which aims at islamizing or even reform A.H. doctrine. This statement has been taken for granted by almost all the scholars, in a way which deserves a *mise au point*. This bias is also typical of Iranian intellectuals who like to emphasise the endogeneity of their culture and spirituality, and minimise the arabo-islamic lore. It is quite striking that in his well documented study, Hamze'ee uses all the resources of history of religion to find some links between A.H. and pre-Islamic cults and doctrine, but does not even mention its connections with sufism. Beik Baghban who had much contacts among the Gurân takes position in these terms : "La plupart des savants et chercheurs ont rangé les A.H. parmi les sectes islamiques, voire chiïtes, mais, comme nous essayerons de le démontrer, la religion de Vérité est une religion différente de l'Islam." (: 58). Khâjeddin notes that some people define the A.H. path as *â'in-e irâni* an "Iranian religion" (: 92) which has the characters of hyper shiism (*gholov -e shi'e*). I won't of course deny the ancient cultural strata on which flourished Ahl-e haqqism, but I shall, as an antidote to this unidimensional perspective, mention a great number of facts which demonstrate the strong links of the A.H. to a kind of Islam and Sufism. After that, I shall allude to the polemic as it appears in A.H. contemporary writings.

An argument for the tenants of the non Islamicity of the A.H. is the Devil's worshipping. Actually there is no mention of Satan in A.H. texts, except two verses, the authenticity and meaning of which are controversial¹⁹. Van Bruinessen (in an unpublished study) suggests that this belief appeared only at the end of the XIXth century among some Gurân groups in contact with Yezidis. The recent adhesion to this myth may have also psychological basis : Satan (the archangel Dâwud) had been secretly ordered by God not to prostrate in front of Adam and was only banished apparently. This is all the story in a version which is not much far from the paradoxical rehabilitation of Satan in classical Sufi poems such as Attâr's²⁰. It is not necessary to look for mythological or background or even sufi influences to explain the fact that some A.H. adopted this myth. They may feel sympathy to this figure of Satan since they find a

¹⁹ They are found in the *Dowre Bâbâ Jalil* (one of the theophany anterior to Soltân). Bagtar says that his name in the pre eternity was Sheytân and that his evilness (*sharr*) is only for God's enemies (Alqâsi, 1979 : 51, Beik Baghban : 251s). Alqâsi notes that the belief in the holyness of Satan is limited to the south-western Kurdistan (Gurân). There is no mention of this question in Khâjeddin nor in Safizâde's books.

²⁰ See *Elâhi Nâme*, Song VIII, 4, 6. In the *Borhân ol-Haqq* (: 317 s.) N. 'A. Elâhi responds to a question in verses about Sheytân by 300 kurdish verses to demonstrate that according to the Kalâm, the rehabilitation of Sheytan is not acceptable.

doctrinal justification of their own situation : outwardly heretics, but secretly closer to God than any Muslim. They are proud of their position of subversive elite and do not fear to say : “we don’t observe the ramadan but we have our own fast (marnowi and qavaltâsi)²¹, we don’t pray but we give *niâz* ²², we don’t go to the mosque but we take part in the *jam* once a week, etc.

The non observance of Muslim basic duties is however compensated by the respect of Islamic customs, mainly *harâm* ²³ and jurisdiction, by the large majority. But whatever one can object to their beliefs, the fact is that all their sacred history starts with Imâm ‘Ali and his companions. Between the manifestation of Khawândegâr in the pre eternity and that of ‘Ali, it is like if nothing had happened. The Scriptures mention the name of some heroes of the ancient Iranian epic as avatars of the archangels (i.e. Siâvash, Hoseyn and Yâdegâr are the same person), but there is not even a single mention of Zoroastre, Mani or Mazdak. The only few pre-Islamic references belong to the Coranic and the Biblical tradition. ‘Ali is even more present (at least his name) in A.H. talks, praises and devotion than Soltân. Imâm Hoseyn has an eminent place, with all his incarnations (*dun*), and the blessing of the offerings (*niâz*) ends with the mention of the Twelfth Imâm (*Mahdi sâheb zamân*). Even the Prophet Mohammad is highly revered, though more in his later *dun*, when he was Seyyed Mohammad, Soltân’s brother. This is enough to define A.H. as duodeciman imamites.

It is true that some aspects of the doctrine and practice remind us of old culture and religions, but the permanence of these elements does not allow to talk of “borrowing”. Borrowing implies a consciousness, a clear intention and the acknowledgement of the fact with an explicit discourse about it, like when Prophet Mohammad adapted the pagan rituals to Islam. Otherwise anything can be said to be derived from any similar thing ²⁴. In addition, it should keep the same original meaning and context as the borrowed. Without these conditions, any cultural artefact is to a certain extent borrowed and derived from something else, and nothing is really genuine and original. In Islam, religious forms are flexible and the consensus tolerates non regular cults and beliefs such as Sufism. As Ilber Ortayli has pointed, in the Ottoman empire the Alevi had no particular status like the Druzes or Nosayri did have, just because they were seen as Muslims.

An A.H. authority with whom I discussed this question explained that Soltân Sehâk was a mystic of Muslim obedience guardian of the secrets of the prophets and the imams (as all A.H. do say), that is mainly the successive lives (*dunâ dun*), the cyclic manifestation of the divine essence (*mazhariat*) and the Seven angels (*haftan*). The specific colour of the A.H. is due to the fact that Soltân had to adapt his teachings to the specific culture of the people who flocked around him. Had he been in an other environment he had talk another way. To the question :

²¹ Each of one being of three days. Beside that, some dervishes, mainly belonging to the school of Hâj Ne’matollâh, practised an ascetic vegetarian fast of forty days, generally starting ten days before the ramadan and ending with it. Asceticism in the dervish style is found only among A.H. mystics, not among ordinary adepts. Arguments against fasting in general, and specially during the ramadan, are found in Ivanow’s texts, the validity of which is contested by A.H. and scholars. Only Khâjeddin refers much to it in his *Sarspordegân*.

²² Khân Atesh says in a Turkish *kalâm* : *min rakat verdi peyghambar bir âlmâ* : The prophet has given a thousand prayers for an apple (Khâjeddin : 63). Dehkhodâ has also pointed to this fact in his article on the ‘Ali-Allâhi, as well as Hamze’ee (: 165).

²³ They do not drink alcohol nor eat pork, but there are exceptions among some Turks (who do drink) and the Gurân who eat wild boar.

²⁴ On a similar question, J. Paul notes that “L’attitude extrémiste est de voir dans une pensée non musulmane le responsable de tout ce qui constitue la pensée et la pratique du soufisme” (:203) L’histoire du soufisme ne saurait s’écire en énumérant les religions et les idées non musulmanes qui ont pu inspirer les mystiques musulmans (: 204) Jürgen Paul, “Influences indiennes sur la Naqshbandiyya ?” *Cahiers de l’Asie Centrale*, 1996 / 1-2.

“are there Buddhist or Zoroastrian influences in A.H. tradition” ? Alqâsi (1979 : 104) answers : “Taking into account the low cultural level of the rural area during Soltân’s time, this possibility is excluded. A.H. are convinced that the origin of the prescriptions is in revelations (*kashf o shohud*) and mystic awareness, and does not come from researches. Anyhow, the majority of them consider themselves as a branch (*kish*) of Islam.” It is easier to bring arguments for this hypothesis than against it. For instance :

— The lack of any mention of previous religions *per se* in all the *kalâms*, indicates at least that the founders of A.H. doctrine did not want to assume the antique legacy as they assumed Islam and Sufism.

— The majority of early A.H. names show the strict Muslim -or even Sunni- origin of the followers. Many of them were mullâ or *seyyed* : Mollâ Rokneddin (who became manifestation of Michael), Bâbâ Faqi, Seyyed Moh. Zahiroddin ibn Mahmud, known as Seyyed Kheder, who was acknowledged as a manifestation of Gabriel. They were angels in human form and the closest companions of Soltân. Another one, Mostafâ Dâwudan, was a *fiqh* student of Mollâ Elyâs from Shahrezur. ‘Abedin to whom one chapter of the *Kalam* is devoted, was a *talebe* hostile to Soltân before his conversion. The only non Muslim of all the great A.H. is Pir-e Shahryâr Awrâmi II who was a mage and son of a mage before to convert to Islam and become disciple of Soltân ²⁵.

Thanks to Safizâde’s and Mokri’s works, the traditional version of the origin of Soltân is confirmed by some quite objective Sunni sources. Soltân’s father, Sheikh ‘Isi, as well as his brother Sheikh Musâ were indeed important Sufi sheikhs (probably not precisely Qâderi and Naqshbandi as says the tradition, but rather Nurbakhshi). According to some sources there were the sons of the well known Sufi ‘Ali Hamadâni, a statement which may express a spiritual rather than biological filiation. The kind of Sufism they professed could have some affinities with the future A.H. doctrine, since there is a subversive or excessive touch in their claims and behaviour. In a poem, Sheikh ‘Isi says he is Jesus (‘Isâ : ‘Isi), son of Maryam, and the writer, who is a Sunni, feels obliged to explain that this kind of mysterious statements is the expression of a mystical *hâl* (Mokri, 1994) Several miracles or anecdotes attributed by the A.H. tradition to Soltân are credited by this author to Sheikh Isi, which however confirms that Soltân’s was the son of another women than his eleven or twelve brothers. The name of some of these brothers are also found in A.H. sources, mainly Seyyed Mohammad and Mir Sur who was a *hâfez* (he knew the Coran by heart). Both were close dervishes of Soltân and are considered in this text as major mystics. Paradoxically, the text mentions briefly Soltân Sehâk without a single allusion to his achievements, whereas he portraits ‘Abdolqâder as an evil person (who according to the tradition seeked to kill Soltân). As a Sunni, the author may have consciously omitted to elaborate on Soltân and preferred to make a panegyric of ‘Abdolkarim the founder of the spiritual dynasty of the Barzanje *sayyeds* who will be the promoters of the Qâdiriyya in Kurdistan.

Without going more into details, it is obvious that Sufism was a family business in Soltân Sehâk’s environment. In this context, it could naturally happen that Soltân revealed his superiority and attracted to him his two brilliant brothers as well as a great deal of disciples already devoted to his family. Five members of the *haftawâna* (the second group of Seven) come from his father’s followers. Yet his prestige was not restricted to the area where he was living since, according to the *Kalâm*, many people came from far away to meet him. Some of these foreigners, such as Ivvat-e Ardebili, were attributed the highest rank, that of manifestation of archangel (*haftan*), which he (or the tradition) did not even gave to the members of Soltân’s

²⁵ See Safizâde (1981 : 49). The other personalities and their Muslim origin are well known by all the adepts.

own family (except her mother). Actually this spiritual dynasty (if we can say) extinguished with him and his devoted brothers, since they did not marry. The celibacy of all the members of the highest hierarchical level including Soltân himself, and later ‘Âli Qalandar and Zonnur Qalandar, may account for *qalandari* elements (see Van Bruinessen 1991 : 69). In the same way, except ‘Ali himself, the seven manifestations of the divine essence (from ‘Ali to Shâh Hayâs, 18th century) had no progeniture. It is only at the second level, that of the *haftawâna*, that some dervishes had children and constitute dynasties of *seyyed*. This is why, in the absence of descendants, Soltân organised the posterity of his religious movement in seven hereditary clans *xânedân* or *ojâq*, to which four others were added later when great charismatic figures such as ‘Âli, Zonnur or Âtesh Beg (17-18th century) appeared among the A.H. community.

In the light of this data, it is difficult to see Ahl-e haqqism as a syncretism of Islam, old religions and heresies, but rather as an offshoot of a kind of Sufism which adapted itself to Kurdish customs. One can’t deny that the Kurdish ground was favourable to the development of non Muslim elements, some of them being even attested by the canonical sources. But it is unlikely that representatives of Sufism trained in Islamic sciences could have converted regular dervishes to a new religion or a new mysticism cut off from any Islamic roots but nevertheless able to attract foreigners from Samarqand, Chinese Turkestan (Mâchin), Istanbul, Syria, Sistan, Ardebil, Basra, Fars, Esfahan, India, Mâzânderân, etc.

How then Ahl-e haqqism became so specific as to have been considered a separate religion (although most of the adepts do not agree with this statement) and on which basis can we consider it as such ? Beside the absence of important Muslim practices which makes the A.H. at most *bi shar*’ mystics, there is the strange archaic tonality of the *Kalâm-e Sarânjam*, revered as a Coran, with its myths and stories written in a rare incantatory style much remote from the Sufi poetic style. This style and structure in itself deserves a separate literary and stylistic study. It was probably shaped to help memorisation, and it could be that it was first orally transmitted by religious minstrels (*kalâmkhwân*) like any epic, or transmitted both by memorisation and writing, since there are not so much divergences in the different available versions. It is remarkable that the great sheikhs of Soltân’s family and surrounding did not committed themselves into any classical doctrinal Persian prose and preferred to rely on oral transmission and Kurdish poetry. The wisdom in that may be that the esoteric teaching could not been uttered in a clear tongue or in academic treatises without risk to rise persecutions. In addition, for the provincial Kurdish culture, a poetic text in incantatory style was the best chance for the doctrine to propagate itself among people. Chanting them with the lute *tanbur* in regular socio-religious events helped its diffusion. Soltân used the Kurds ethnicity and culture to propagate his ideas, and he did not only reached them, but soon Iraki Kurds and Iranian Turks.

A part from the style of the *Kalâm*, the strong emphasis made on the spiritual kingship has also archaic overtones. It gives the picture of a royal court hierarchically organised in rank and functions, with vizir (Pir Musi is the *vazir*) scribes, khalife, chiefs, servants, all totally submitted and devoted to a king (*shâh*) being not only God’s representant, but divine manifestation (or for some, God himself). This antique image of a double absolute power (spiritual and temporal), found perhaps its last historical actualisations in Iran, among the A.H. on one hand and with Shâh ‘Esmâil the Safavi king on the other hand. It is not an accident that Shâh ‘Esmâil was a direct descendant of Sheikh Safieddin Ardebili, initiated by Soltân ²⁶ and

²⁶ He was in charge to collect wood (*hizum kesh*) and obtained from Soltân a spiritual rank as well as the political kingship for his ascendants up to seven generations (Elâhi, 1979, n° 1765).

supporter of the Qizilbash who are closely related to the A.H. This kind of connections shows that instead to trace back A.H. customs and beliefs to antique religious background, it is perhaps more relevant to look at its Sufi and Shii roots which of course may also include some antique elements. I shall give some examples.

Like many others, Khâjeddin put forth arguments for the syncretism aspects of A.H. belief, but his demonstration is not convincing. For instance he sees in the moustache (*shâreb*) a vestige of Zoroastrism, and bypasses the fact that it is common to all Shii Sufi order²⁷. He considers the common meal as derived from the Christian communion, though it is also found in many dervish groups and attested by old customs. He finds a connection between the Jewish fast and the three A.H. days, but the A.H. themselves argue that the Muslim tradition establishes the *ayyâm ol biz*, three days of fast every month. (They mention also the three days of Adam expelled from the Paradise, the three days of Jonas in the whale, of Hoseyn in Kerbela, etc. and eventually of Soltân in the cave, to argue that it always existed.) Is the belt that the adepts wear during the *jam* borrowed from the Zoroastrian *zonnar*, and reduced to a simple string ? It could be also the biblical belt of the prophets. In any case it is said to express the idea to be ready to serve God. Is it legitimate to trace back the custom to sit “on the knees” (*do zânu*) to Zoroastrism when it is prescribes in the Islamic *namâz* as well as in the Oriental *bonnes manières* as a mark of respect ? Following this author, one gets to the conclusion that A.H. is a syncretism of Zoroastrian, Jewish and Christian elements.

Hamze'ee work, to which the former one can't be compared, goes much further in the comparative approach and discovers some convincing similarities. In spite of the many parallels he draws between Ahl-e haqqism and ancient religious trends, he is often not convincing or at least fails to establish any historical link. For instance he considers the divinisation of 'Ali as a survivance of ancient Iranian religions while Khâjeddin relates it to Hinduism. Considering that it could also be viewed as borrowed from the divinisation of Jesus in Christianity, how can we therefore speak of borrowings or influences when three different religions or more could be “ at the origin of a belief ” ?

In such a situation it is much more rational to adopt the A.H. point of view, that is : 'Ali was known as a manifestation by some initiated. This belief is so natural to Shii mysticism that Miller could express it in terms which apply perfectly to the A.H. : “one is inclined to suspect that the real God of Sufis is 'Ali. He it is that performs the functions of the Divinity for them, him they know and love and through him they hope to attain to some knowledge of the Unknown God whom he reveals” (1923 : 363). Anyhow, there is an important detail which establishes a clear-cut between Christians and 'Ali-Allâhi or Nosayri²⁸ : for them the Divinity revealed itself only once, whereas for the A.H. it manifested at least seven times (Khâjeddin : 94, Elâhi, 1975 : 635.)

In usual A.H. devotion, the figure of 'Ali is so present that it overshadows even that of Soltân (though it is not a problem since they are both the same). This is why some A.H. groups are not reluctant to claim themselves 'Ali-Allâhi. The veneration of a human being as a *qotb*, *vali* or *mazharollâh* is actually not a common attitude in classical Sufism. The veneration or quasi divinisation of the sheikh is rarely found among Arabs, but is typical of Iranian culture in the broad sense. Hamze'ee (: 47 s) developed this point by referring to the early Islamic heretic movement of Khorramdini. For the same reasons, Khâjeddin, whose culture is limited, puts forth Hindu influences on A.H. : 'Ali and Soltân are like incarnations of Brahma, and the

²⁷ A Ne'matollâhi told me that according to his sheikh, if a dervish cuts a single hair of his moustache, he should sacrifice a cow as a matter of compensation.

²⁸ And even Alevis who recognise only two manifestations : 'Ali and Hâji Bektash.

haftan similar to Krishna, Sarasvati, Kâli, etc.²⁹ Actually, it seems to me that the veneration of the dervishes for the sheikh is much stronger in Kurdistan than elsewhere in Inner Asia, as far as I witnessed myself among the Qâderi. Only their strict loyalty to Islamic doctrine retain them to talk of *zât* and incarnation (*dun*).

If the first pillar of A.H. faith is the knowledge of the cosmic hierarchy and its manifestation among human, the second one is the doctrine of successive lives (*dunâ dun*), considered in the old time as a secret the unveiling of which could lead to death ³⁰. It is tempting to see the *haftan* as avatars of the Zoroastrian *ameshâspands* ³¹ (one of them being also of feminine gender), but the other side of the doctrine (that is their transmigrations into human existences) is totally absent of the ancient Iranian religions. On this matter again Ahl-e haqqism must be related to its own origins, that is, Islamic heterodoxies which in their majority shared these beliefs. There is no need to look for Buddhist or Hindu influences. In early shii gnosis, the imâms are preeternal entities emanating from God's light, there are superior to the prophets but were present in each of them (Amir Moezzi : 41, 82). Beside this "the belief in some forms of reincarnation is found in trouve in germs in the ancient corpus of the Imâms" (ibid. : 110). In any case, in the primitive shiism "one always feels the continuity with the christian, jew, and even mazdean tradition" (ibid. : 232). If one has the same impression with the A.H., it is just because they are Shii and Sufis (the sufism bearing also the influence of early shiism).

HOW THE A.H. DEFINE THEMSELVES

I said in the introduction that one of the aim of this paper was to put forth arguments for a balanced evaluation of Ahl-e haqqism, since its non Islamic aspects has been too much emphasised by scholars. For their defence, one must admit that their opinion have been shaped up to a point by the way some adepts define themselves. Yet the issue of auto-definition is far to be clear, since there are many groups belonging to many different cultures or social strata, and in addition, times are changing and force them to modify their image.

There are a lot of expressions or concepts which apply to the A.H. : *tâyefesân*, *yâresân*, 'Ali-Allâhi, Kâkâ'i (in Irak), (Sheytânparast and Dâwudi being labels given by non A.H.). A.H. call their faith a *din* or *mazhab* (faith, religion), a *maslak* or *râh* (path), *reshte* (branch), *ferqe* (community), *â'in* (tradition-rite), thus covering a wide spectrum extending from a separated religion to an Islamic spiritual path or a branch. This split or divergences reflects the contrast between rural and urban culture, a structure which accounts in similar ways for the differences between Alevi and Bektashi. Rural environment has favoured the preservation of ancients elements, the resistance to Islamic influences and the development of folkloric elements, not to speak of deviations, whereas in urban and learned environment open to various religious expressions, the Sufi or Islamic dimension has prevailed. Up to a point, the self-definition is conditioned by the religious surrouding : in Kurdistan, A.H. live among Sunnis who are hostile to them, and only in a few large cities like Kermânshâh they can meet other dervishes (of the

²⁹ Once a A.H. *pir* asked me about Hinduism, (a religion he did not recognized), then after a few explanations on the gods and their incarnation, he said, "so they say the same as us".)

³⁰ It is said that Nasimi (the famous *horufi*) was sent to martyrdom by his *pir* because he had publicaly revealed it and debated with a mullâ. The importance of this dogma is attested by the considerable place it occupies as a narrative device in the Kalâm.

³¹ Safizâde, 1982 : 23, Hamze'ee : 113.

Qâderi branch) with whom they may feel some affinities ³². Outside Kurdistan, they live in a Shii environment where the figure of ‘Ali is omnipresent, and they can meet with all kind of dervishes, some of them being close to them, like the Khâksar. It is therefore more natural for them to feel to be a part of the Muslim society than in villages.

The claim of being a totally separate religion is rarely found in our days, and were it the case, one should be cautious about the meaning involved in the concept of religion : *din* or *mazhab* have other overtones than the Western concept of religion ³³. The problem for the A.H. who claim to belong to a separate religion would be that Islam does not recognise any religions after Mohammad. On the other hand, with all the Islamic elements it contains, it is impossible for them to pretend to be an antique religion, even though in their homeland (Dâlâhu) they are often called Zoroastrians by Sunni neighbours. The term Gurân which designates a A.H. group is considered as derived from *gabrân* : the Zoroastrians.

At the opposite of this position, some adepts consider themselves totally Muslim. Khâjeddin quotes some of this claims collected during interviews. This position could be that of some converted Muslims (*chaspide*) or just cautious dissimulation (*taqie*). A.H. by filiation (*chekide*) never respect the ramadan nor perform the *namâz*, two characteristics which repel them to the margins of islamism. Probably the majority of the adepts consider Ahl-e haqqism as a branch of Shii Islam, with some nuances. The term ‘Ali-Allâhi as we have said does not account for the A.H. belief in the divine successive manifestations, yet it is still much used by outsiders with pejorative connotations. Anyway, the A.H. feel themselves close to the ‘Ali-Allâhi, Nosayri ³⁴, and particularly to the Cheltan (Qirqlar) and Bektashis. In all A.H. recent books it is said that the followers of this branch can be found in India, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Perhaps the Isma’ilis who are numerous in these countries were considered as A.H. All what we know is that Bâbâ Yâdegâr was sent to these countries to propagate his faith. These connections have never been documented, except by Alqâsi who mentions the Baluchi Zikri-s as a variety of A.H. This should be check more carefully, but if there are similarities in form, it does not mean that there is any connexion between those two groups.

In the recent article of the Shii Encyclopaedia the A.H. are divided into three groups : Muslim A.H., ‘Ali Allâhi and Sheytânparast (“devil’s worshipers”). This quite provocative

³² In all my researches I never came across any expression of hostility, disapproval or scorn between A.H. and Qâderi in spite of their essential differences. The fact that the Qâderis invoke ‘Ali and the Imâms during their *zikr* is appreciated by the A.H.

³³ Alqâsi uses also the expression *mazhab-e A.H* (or *haqiqat*) as well as *din-e Gurân*.; other terms are *â’in-e yâri* (*â’in* : tradition, liturgy ; *yâr* : the beloved, God). While *din* can have the meaning of “religion” (Islam, Judaism), *mazhab* rather covers the concept of “confession” inside a “religion” : *mazhab-e sonni*, *mazhab-e shii esnâ ‘ashari*.

³⁴ A.H. know almost nothing about the Nosayri community, but the figure of Nosayr is part of their mythology. He manifested later during Shâh Khoshin under the name of ‘Abedin (as the *Kalâm* says). Nosayr proclaimed the divinity of ‘Ali, a blasphem for which ‘Ali himself had to kill him. Yet in his mercifulness, ‘Ali resuscitated him. Another time Nosayr proclaimed his faith and another time ‘Ali executed him. This repeated four times. The A.H. quote this story to distinguish themselves from ‘Ali Allâhi, saying that Nosayr’s mistake was *holul*. Khâjeddin points to the fact that *shii gholov* is probably the only religion in which the leader himself rejects the belief of his followers (:95). A more subtle interpretation would be that this was the first lesson of *taqie*.

In any case, Nosayri’s spiritual life and religious style are much far from that of the A.H. In comparative religious studies, an anthropological approach tells much more than a doctrinal one. Thus, comparing A.H. and Alevi, the general impression is that they share the same sensibility and religious experience, the same values and the same images of sainthood. There is no doubt that any A.H. would feel at ease among Alevis, and vice versa. The main difference between both groups is the Alevi emphasis on the Twelve Imams and the place devoted to Muhammad, which compare to the A.H. world’s view, is much more Islamic. On the other hand, what could appear exotic to the Alevis is the constant reference to the cosmic hierarchy and the cyclicity of holy history.

paper was based on the claims of the Gurân A.H. before the Revolution³⁵. Still recently several groups revindicated their devotion to Satan and wrote a manifest signed by numerous *seyyed*. At the last moment they understood that they were tying the rope with which to hang themselves, and stop the diffusion of this pamphlet before it reached the libraries. Some “regular” A.H. told me that it is really a piece of anthology³⁶. But the most interesting is that they replied to the authors of the Encyclopaedia article by another one who was published at the same time as an addendum³⁷, and by a whole book entitled *A.H. chi miguyad (What says the A.H. ?)* in the preface of which the author, M. Valâ’i, addresses himself to the writers of the article and gives all the arguments he can to prove that the A.H. are nothing but good Muslims who even gave many martyr to the Islamic revolution³⁸.

We may object that this is just *taqie* or diplomacy, but it can also be the expression of the Islamic trend which, despite some scholar’s opinion, has always existed within Ahl-e haqqism. There is no reasons to accept the statement of some scholars that a “reformism Islamic movement” was initiated by H. Ne’matollâh Jeyhunâbâdi (d. 1921), an author quoted in all the studies about A.H.³⁹. A simple glance on the treatise published by Edmonds shows that a Kâkâ’i from Iraq born around 1870 shares the auto-definition and the views expressed in 1963 in the *Borhân ol-haqq* of Ostâd Elâhi. Nevertheless, this book viewed by some orientalist (such as Mir Hosseini) as a manifest of A.H. reformism, although the majority of the A.H. and scholars (including the mentioned author) always refer to it when they need clear data on A.H. doctrines and practices. Half of the references of Hamze’ee are taken from this author’s and his father’s work.

A.H. AND SUFISM

The most common definition is that Ahl-e haqqism comes *after* Islam, in two senses : horizontally and vertically. Historically, Ahl-e haqqism is the last step of the unveiling of religion, which commenced with the cycle of the *shari’at* represented by Muhammad, developed during ‘Ali as the *tariqat* cycle, was followed by the *ma’refat* cycle (Bohlul and the great Sufis) and culminated with the era of *haqiqat* proclaimed by Soltân Sehâk⁴⁰. All the messengers of God adapted the law to the necessity of their time, and the Muhammadian law (*shar’*) has been amended by other divine apostles. In the same way the divine manifestations following Soltân could modify some points of the ritual or clarify the doctrine. This is why even between the A.H. *khânedân*, there are some ritual divergences. These levels of gnosis have also a vertical or philogenetic interpretation : that is, *shari’at* is compared to the shell and *haqiqat* to the fruit. The level of *haqq* is the ultimate one to which has access only the elite who reached the station of God’s proximity. The adepts say that at this level the law and prescriptions are different. For instance the aim of fasting is to get closer to God, so the one

³⁵ In those times, many A.H. defined themselves openly as ‘Ali-Allâhi (Khâjeddin : 97) and had their own “propaganda centres” in Kermânshâh. With the Islamic regime, this label has become highly suspect.

³⁶ Arguments for the rehabilitation of Satan are given by Alqâsi (1979 : 51).

³⁷ This article is not defensive, and only presents the dogmatic and ritual basis of Ahl-e haqqism.

³⁸ He says that this encyclopaedia article is a historical attack to the A.H. and equals to racism and concludes that any book who is contrary to the Koran and the rules of Islam is rejected by the true A.H. (:13).

³⁹ In the same vein is the claim that Hâj Ne’matollâh “broke the seal” (Mir Hosseini) by writing a Persian *Kalâm* accessible to the non initiated. Not only this work was not even published or diffused during his life, but it was accepted later as a canonical text in many A.H. circles, though himself did not presented it as a *Kalâm*.

⁴⁰ There is an absolute unanimity on the fact that A.H. faith is the ultimate step of Islamic mysticism (*‘erfân*). See Alqâsi, 1979 (: 12), Valâ’i (: 19) who discusses also the different levels of *shari’at*, *tariqat*, etc. (: 82s). This point is documented by the *Kalâm* (see Elâhi, 1975 : 188 and Afshar, 1977 : 45).

who is in His presence does not need to fast anymore. These kind of statements may sound very pretentious, but they reflect the idea that the Muslims belong to the *shari'at* step, and the Sufis only to the *tariqat* or at best to the *ma'refat* step, and if they want to go further they must become A.H. (*sarseporde*). An adept quoted by Khâjeddin (:100) expresses this idea in a concrete way : “The Sufi must first observe the ramazan and pray five times a day, during two or three years, sometimes twelve ; then when he is steady in his faith, his *pir* allows him to be initiated in our path”. This is theoretically the rule among Khâksâr Shii dervishes ⁴¹.

Were the A.H. heretics or non Muslim, the Qâderi or Ne'matollâhi would never open to them the doors of their *khânegâh*. Yet according to the hierarchical steps of mysticism, this mark of hospitality is not reciprocal. The same dervish says : “we never allow a Sufi to take part in our *jam* if he is not at the step of Truth, but we can go to their meetings”. He adds : “we respect the Coran [...] our religion is Islam, Twelve Imâm branch, but our ideas differ from yours [...] We are not a branch of *tasawwuf*, but the Sufis would like to be a branch of us”. J. Afshâr (1977 :111), a Turkish dervish is even more explicit : “The A.H. are Muslims and Twelve Imâmists, respectful of all the principles (*osul*) of Islam and with their heart and soul they assume the *Sunni* of Mohammad and the Islamic prescriptions such as circumcision, marriage, ablutions, funeral prayers, etc.”

SOME PERSPECTIVES OF RESEARCH

According to the encyclopedist Dehkhodâ A.H. are Duodeciman Shiis and one of the seventeen (?) Sufi paths. This opinion is shared by many scholars and literate people in Iran. Very much has been said about Ahl-e haqqism as a religious and mythological system, yet despite its profound Sufi or '*erfâni* roots, there has been almost no researches on this topic in the perspective of *tasawwuf* or mystical style. This is due to the fact that Sufi studies are generally based on classical texts, on official discourses and doctrines which almost do not exist among the A.H. An anthropological or phenomenological approach such as the one which is therefore required for the A.H. may modify the Western academic point of view which has been elaborated through written sources, since the most essential part of Sufi transmission and tradition is never written, discussed or even uttered : it is guessed from facts and anecdotes and implicitly expressed in behaviours. I'll shall only evoke some peculiarities of A.H. way that I found original and interesting to investigate.

The cycle of manifestations : zât and dun

One of the pillar of A.H. system is the notion of *zât*, of essence or souls of a high level who manifest themselves in successive human lives. A close examination of this system shows that the seven archangels (*haftan*) and their different manifestations through history correspond to mystical types : Gabriel-Benyâmin is generally the founder of a spiritual movement (not necessarily a prophet), like Plato, Zoroastre, Buddha, Jesus, Ja'far Sâdeq. If Gabriel is the *pir* (the Alevi would say the *morshed*), Dâwud is the *dalil* (Alevi : *rahbar*), the guide who indicates the way. He manifests the total Mercifulness and has the function of succour and intercession, like Khezr, Imâm Rezâ, Shams-i Tabriz. Another typical figure is Yaqiq whose destiny is generally to be martyr. He was 'Esmâ'il, Siâvash, John the Baptist, Imâm Hoseyn, and several A.H. saints who died for the cause like Yâdegâr, 'Âli Qalandar or Teymur I. The idea of essence *zât* leads to strange paradoxes among which the fact that the hierarchical rank is more important than the function and the achievements. Thus Moses or even Mohammad have

⁴¹ See also Alqâsi, 1979 : 7, and Chahârdehi (1990).

a lower status than Qanbar or Salmân Fârs who were the archangels Michaël and Gabriel, even if the intensity of their manifestations looks very pale compared to those prophets. (Alqâsi (1979 : 13) admit that the intensity may vary considerably, yet it does not seem to be taken into account by the adepts).

How these ranks were attributed is another question : who decides who is who ? The person himself or a consensus ? The A.H. religious society relies on a category of clear-sighted dervishes, the *didedâr*, those who have inner sight and who can identify the spiritual nature of beings. They may have played a role in this, at least to prevent any illuminated to pretend to be such or such angel. We know nothing about the way these ranks were testified or acknowledged, and the question is too important to be eluded ironically. These ideas are still strong among A.H. but since almost one century nobody has been officially and unanimously recognised as a manifestation of an “essence”⁴².

If the attribution of *zât* remains a mystery, particularly when it is not authenticated by facts, the question of the divine mission is sometimes put forth through very concrete events. The divine parcel (*zarre-ye zât*) which can inhabit ⁴³ a saint and make of him a supreme *vali* above all human beings is really “something” which comes and goes under the form of a bird (a white falcon) or a spark, in a way which is obvious for the initiates. This reminds us of the Zoroastrian *farr-e izadi* (Hamze’ee notes it), and to a lower degree to the Jewish patriarch’s blessing or the Sufi *baraka*. Some people get this parcel for all their life, other loose it. This was the case of king Jamshid since he had disobey, and according to the tradition, of Shâh Fathollâh (c. 1900) who “was illuminated for a certain time”, but once thrown into jail he just denied his spiritual ambitions and became back a normal man ⁴⁴. Aqâ Seyyed Ahmad (c. 1800), another *zât mehmân*, in moments of exaltation proclaimed he was the Truth, like Hallâj did. As a punishment for his pride he was not allowed to transmit his *zarre* to one of his forty sons, who were perfect dervishes, and had to give it to the son of his servant.

Manifestation and History

In the same line is the notion of *zohur* which means manifestation or even parousia ⁴⁵. Many saints claimed that the times were close and that they will soon accomplish the *zohur*. But reality is not that simple since there are different levels of *zohur* : universal and apparent, or restricted and esoteric (*khâs*). Thus a great saint achieves the parousia for his disciples, but this does not mean that he will put an end to History and establish God’s realm on Earth. There are several stories of *zohur*, in which one has the impression that the saint plays with its two levels ⁴⁶. The last of these messiah was the Seyyed Mohammad Kelârdashti (Alamgir) who entertained the image of a king, with royal clothes, flags and so on (pictures are found in

⁴² The last were Seyyed Brâke, Teymur and Hâjj Ne’matollâh. It seems that in the Sahne-Kermânshâh tradition, another concept prevailed, that of illumination (see below).

⁴³ That is a *zât mehmân* (see note 1) or *shâh mehmân* ; one uses also the expression *tajalli-e zât* (or *haqq*) “illuminated by the essence (or the divine).

⁴⁴ According to some oral traditions he was condemned to death by the mollâs of Kermânshâh. Beik Baghban (: 216) reports a short hagiography of him, without references.

⁴⁵ Another term is *dowrân-e bâqi*, the cycle of resurrection, a formula which can be understood also as the mystic state of surexistence (*baqâ*) coming after the stage of annihilation (*fanâ*).

⁴⁶ Perhaps like Jesus-Christ who cultivate the ambiguity when he entered in Jerusalem acclaimed as a King of this world. The double meaning of *zohur* is clearly explained by Jesus addressing to the Pharisians : “God’s realm does not occurs as a fact one can observe. One cannot say : here it is or there it is, since God’s realm is in you”.

Chahârdehi, c. 1978) ⁴⁷. The shâh arrested him, fearing a popular upheaval, but released him after he understood that his ambitions were only mystical. Teymur had not this chance and was executed in Kermânshâh in 1865 (Hamze'ee : 140-1). His movement, like all the others, is interpreted by contemporary A.H. as purely spiritual, even if he presents himself in his poems like an agitator, but it is much probable that many followers did believe that the Times were at hand. Here too the easy explanation would be that all these charismatic figures were just exalted millenarists, but if so, why does this story and its tragic "failure" repeats from generation to generation ? The millenarism expectation could be only the misunderstanding of common people, or the best way for the saints to motivate people, a spiritual pedagogy or a literary motive ⁴⁸. An A.H. wise dervish draw my attention to the fact that the great *bâtendâr*, (the A.H. seers) always commence their career with a great show up, noise, demonstration or agitation (*shuluq*) generally as a theatre play, in order to proclaim their mission, to settle their authority and to give a warning and a chance to the people. This goes along with a dualist perception of the world in which there is no progress without resistance and trials, no saints without enemies, no light without darkness ⁴⁹, no grace without a price. The archetypal example is that of Imâm Hoseyn, though martyrdom is not the rule. This principle produces saints of a totally different style than the official Sufi sheikhs.

Power

Another of their characteristic is the integration of violence at the highest mystical level of A.H. thought. The absolute saint can even kill and destroy, like Shâh Khoshin when he was awoken from his sleep. Bâbâ Nâ'us who was a manifestation of the Essence is said to have represented the divine attribute of wrath : he could sweep out entire villages for a simple pretext. Of course, there is always a wisdom in that, like in the story of Khezr who kills the innocent child. The violence is present in the figure of Imâm 'Ali who killed many enemies of Islam, as well as in Biblical prophet like Elyas, but there is nothing of this sort in the Sufi traditions. It could be that in their past of persecutions, A.H. developed the idea of divine destruction as a reply to their enemies. In the beginning of this century there were still dervishes who asked their *pir* Hâjj Ne'matollâh the permission to sing "mortal songs" in the direction of their enemies ⁵⁰.

On a softer level, rivalry or competition is an important factor totally integrated to the spiritual progress as a dynamic element. The story of Hâjji Bektash transforming himself into a dove attacked by Karaca Ahmet, and then into a lion indicates that the power belong to the strongest one and must be taken by force, by ruse, by merit, all these means being of course only the expression of God's will. The *haftan* (the seven archangels) are hunters "equipped with bows and nets" who by they spiritual "conspiracy" ⁵¹ succeed in capturing the divine Essence, that is, forced to manifest itself. In the light of this principle of struggle for spiritual

⁴⁷ Apart from the pictures, this book, like all the publications of this author, must be taken very cautiously.

⁴⁸ It is found in the poems of Sheykh Amir and Nowruz (Alqâsi, 1980 : 46). Another theme which goes together is that of the end of the times announcing the *zohur*.

⁴⁹ The *Shahnâme* speaks about seven chiefs of the darkness (*sardâr-e zolmâni*) as the negative reflect of the chiefs of light. The cosmic dualism of light and darkness could be a vestige of Zoroastrian philosophy, but there is no opposition among A.H. between spirit and the body as it is found in Iranian dualism. In primitive shiism, God created 75 armies of Light, but Ignorance wanted its armies too, and God created 75 armies for it.

⁵⁰ This song, *Donyâ fânian*, was sung for funerals, but outside this context it had mortal effects (see During, 1989 : 349). Their leader did not allowed them to use it for this purpose.

⁵¹ See the story of the *haftan* arranging the weddings of Sheykh Isi and Khâtun Razbar in order to allow the birth (though supernatural) of Soltân (Safizâde, 1981 : 51s).

life (even between mystics) one must understand some apparent rivalry between respectable saints : the initiated say that it is competition not animosity ⁵².

Thus the power is completely part of the A.H. religious view. Although it is not temporal and political, it has to be taken, kept and transmitted, if possible within the family. After Soltân, the spiritual authority was delegated to seven persons who more or less kept it through their descendants, in a way which frozen the mystical A.H. stream despite the effort of some charismatic saints ⁵³. The system of *seyyed* and representatives of the original *pir* and *dalil* harmed A.H. spiritual life and ended in generating clashes, animosity and persecutions. In the beginning, the *khânedân* system did not prevent mystics who were not *seyyed* to display their charisma and to have disciples, like Teymur I and Teymur II. Some of them could even open new *khânedân* like ‘Ali Qalandar or Shâh Ayyâz.

The first to suffer from the power of the *seyyeds* was probably Hâjj Ne’matollâh, though he was so respectful to the religious authority of the place that he left his village for several years in order not to shadow him. The *seyyeds* of the country and their partisans planned to kill him, but they feared him and renounced. After his death (1921) they threatened his son Nur ‘Ali Elâhi who was only 26, but failed to kill him (*Asar ol-haqq*, n° 1889). At the end of his life, he had perhaps a thousand of disciples and supporters, many of them from non A.H. origins. He was not a leader as some scholar present him, but he was respected if not accepted by all the adepts during his life. Nevertheless, A.H. *seyyeds* managed to destroy his shrine ⁵⁴ with the help of some local authorities, a gesture which upraised even the public protestations of one of the most revolutionary âyâtollâh.

Long time ago Elâhi had foretold the decline of the A.H. socio-religious system and the betraying of the clerics. During the last 20-30 years, many things have changed : the secrets, once revealed became not anymore secret nor sacred, the archetypes have lost their power, the celestial hierarchy withdraw in the other world, the *tâyfesân* has blood on his hands, the dervishes look for political supports.

In these conditions, the legacy of dozen of A.H. spirituals, masters, sages and poets, now handed on by learned adepts is not anymore mystic, but cultural, if we can separate the two. The essence has maybe evaporate, but in the bottom of the alchemical pot remains the substance of an original humanism which is also the achievement of the elite of this religious community.

THE A.H. LEGACY : TOWARDS AN ORIGINAL HUMANISM

This humanism is very similar to the Alevi ideology and perhaps to that of other imamite communities. It relies on several characteristics rooted in the original religious practices and doctrines.

⁵² According to oral traditions, a great saint robs the light of the clear-sighted (*didedâr*), that is, when he meets these people, their spiritual light vanished and they loose their influence. Common people think that they are “light robbers” ; the truth is that those lights could be seen only during the night, like candles, but when the sun is there, their light is no more perceptible.

⁵³ Since the *haftan* had no descendant, the *khânedân* were given or transmitted to the members of the second hierarchy, the *haftawâna*.. Some say that the *haftawâna* were only thinking to attract the adepts in order to reinforce their power. This may be the reason why among the Gurân, the *haftawâna* are considered as tenebrous being, opposed to the *haftan*, although this view is in contradiction with the dogma.

⁵⁴ The shrine is rebuilt, and since no corpse could be found, it is now revered as a holy place even by the non A.H. population of the region. Nearly ten years after these events, all the A.H. followers of what has sometimes been called “Hâji Ne’mat’s *khânedân*” cut their moustaches in order to dissociate themselves from the A.H. community. This fact are reported by Mir Hosseini but should not be interpreted as reformism but session.

- *Social link and solidarity*. In A.H. devotion, the offering (of food *niâz*) is more important than ritual individual prayers. This fact implies the valorisation of conviviality, charity, and equality since all the *niâz* are distributed in a perfectly equal way.

- *Promotion of endogenic culture vs formal exogenic ritual*. The adepts do not pray in arabic, since, they say “God does not speak Arabic”. Their devotion is that of the heart and of emotion and sentiments.

- This goes along with their *artistic taste* expressed by poetry and music. Like the Ali, A.H. play the sacred lute during the *jam* ⁵⁵.

- *Tolerance and openness* to other religions. Several religions are integrated in A.H. world views, thanks to the system of manifestations (*dunâ dun*) : Benyâmin was the Mahdi, Ja’far Sâdeq, Jesus, Zoroastre, Abraham and Bouddha. Even the Greek philosophers are manifestations of these essences.

- *This tolerance extends to culture* : Women occupy a high position in society compare to the purely Muslim culture. Many of them are mentioned in the holy books, and one among the seven angels and of the *haftawâna* appear always in a woman cloth (*dun*) ⁵⁶.

Ahl-e haqism is not restricted to remote Kurdish populations, but has an universal dimension : therefore the Kalâm was adapted in Turkish and inspired the Persian *Shâhnâme-ye haqiqat*. The links with other communities in other countries is part of the A.H. myth. It is perfectly in the story of the Cheltan who come from very strange places including France (*farang*) and bear strange names Concretely this manifests in the openness to foreigners who are actually better accepted than Iranian Muslims.

-*Progressivism*. Perfectionnement (*takamol*) is the key word of all the A.H. literature and dogmas. Each being (mineral, vegetal, etc.) is carried upwards in the a cosmic stream which culminates (for man only) to God. This philosophy echoes that of the great safavi theosophes of the Mollâ Sadrâ school who professed the pre-eminence of existence over essence and the trans-substantial movement (*harekat-e jowhari*). It provides a dynamic vision of the world (balanced by the static structures of the sacred history which repeats from era to era, from *dawr* to *dawr*). A.H. do not feel bound to their past like integrist Muslim are, since the sacred “beginning” can always re actualise itself in new manifestations and with new personalities.

- *Elitism* is part of the A.H. culture : they have the conviction to stand above standard Islam, and to belong to a kind of avant-garde. They possess the key of understanding of the historical events, which orientates them to interpret all contemporary events in a sometimes paradoxical way. For them, there is always an hidden meaning below the appearances.

-This lead them to *subversion* : they never fear the law and the blame : “support people blame, to support the blame is good” (*tana kish khâsa, bekishu ta’ne*) says Sheykh Amir in famous verses chanted in the opening the *jam*. They often like to show themselves provocative, revendicating shocking beliefs or non-conformist practices. However this subversion is never really politic or mundane, even if they are persecuted. In spite of an “anti-establishment” tendency (van Bruinessen, 1995 : 132) who raised their enthusiasm for the Revolution, unlike the Alevis, the A.H. never rebel against the power, even if the Qâjâr Government feared some upheavals. In modern Iran the A.H. have not taken political positions like the Alevi did. They just endeavour to keep good relations with the Islamic Republic.

⁵⁵ The *tanbur* has two strings, the highest being generally doubled. It is played by all the fingers of the right hand, not with a plectrum. These characteristics are also those of the west Anatolian ancient Alevi *sâz*, a similarity which attests cultural links between the A.H. and the Alevis, perhaps due to their Kurdish roots.

⁵⁶ Nevertheless, there is no mention of women essence among the other levels of the hierarchy.

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