The Islamic revolution of Iran, however, is still firmly rooted in Shi'i piety, eschatology, and messianic hope. Hence, in a very real sense for Shi'ites, the final and real conclusion of Shi'i tafsir, as indeed, of Shi'i history altogether, lies not in the writing of commentaries, but rather in the appearance of the hidden Imam, for whose return they pray daily.

Ismā'īlī ta'wil of the Qur'ān

Ismā'īlīs make a fundamental distinction between aspects of religion, the zāhir (exterior) and the bāṭin (interior). The former aspect consists of exterior aspects, such as knowing the apparent meaning of the Qur'ān and performing the obligatory acts as laid down in the shari'a, the religious law. The latter aspect is comprised of knowing the hidden, inner, true meaning of the Qur'ān and the shari'a. They further maintain that it is the nāṭiq (lawgiver-prophet)1 who receives revelation (tanzil) and promulgates the shari'a, while it is his associate and deputy, the waṣī (pleni-potentiary),2 who expounds the bāṭin through the science of ta'wil.3 The zāhir, therefore, varies from prophet to prophet in accordance with each epoch, whereas the bāṭin remains unchanged and is universally valid. Despite this twofold division of religion into exoteric and esoteric aspects, Ismā'īlis stress that both are not only complementary to each other, but that they are also interwined with each other like body and soul. One without the other, therefore, cannot exist.4

1 A term used for the lawgiver-prophet. According to the Ismā'īli doctrine there are seven nabiqa': Adam, Nūh, Ibrāhīm, Mūsā, 'Īsā, Muḥammad, and the Qā'īm. See Zāhid 'Ali, Hamārī Ismā'īli madhhab ki haqqat aur uskā nīqām (Hyderabad, 1954), 129; Abu Ya'qūb al-Sijistani, Kitāb al-īfīkhar (a critical edition has been prepared by Ismail K. Poonawala and will be published soon), ch. 6.
2 The waṣī is also called al-asās (foundation). According to the Ismā'īli doctrine, every nāṭiq appoints his waṣī, or asās, who succeeds him and is, in turn, succeeded by the imām. See Al-Sijistani, Kitāb al-īfīkhar, ch. 7; also al-Kulīnī, al-Uṣūl min al-kāfī, ed. A. al-Ghaffārī, (Tehran, 1388/1968), i. 224.
3 The literal meaning of ta'wil is 'to cause something to return to its original state'. In the beginning it was synonymous with tafsir, but in the course of time it became a technical term for the interpretation of the subject-matter, or for the exposition of the covert meaning. In this latter sense it formed a supplement to tafsir, which meant expounding the narrative by making known the significations of the strange words or expressions and explaining the occasions on which the verses were revealed. Most of the sectarian groups, especially the Shi'is and the Šūfiṣ use ta'wil on which to hang their own doctrines. See Lane, Lexicon, s.v. a-wa'il, El1, 'tawil'.
4 In his al-Shawāhid wa'l-bayan (MS: see M. Goriawala, A Descriptive Catalogue
The Ismā'īlī classification of religious sciences into two categories, the ẓāhirī sciences and the bāṭinī sciences, also reflects the above distinction. Accordingly, all branches of knowledge from philological to physical sciences and historical to juridical fall in the first category, while the other is comprised only of the ta'wil and haqqa'īq. 5 Conceivably absent from Ismā'īlī literature is the science of tafsīr (exegesis), classified as a branch of the ẓāhirī sciences. Its absence implies that any tafsīr could be used for the external philological exposition of the Qur'ān and to explain the occasions on which the verses were revealed, but its inner, true meaning could be obtained only through the ta'wil derived from the legitimate Imām. For this reason, the Imām is often called Qur'ān-i nāṭiq (the speaking Qur'ān), while the Book, since it needs an interpreter, is called Qur'ān-i sāmit (the silent Qur'ān). 7

of the Fyzee Collection of Isma'ili Manuscripts (Bombay, 1965), 15, 209-10, Ja'far ibn Mansūr al-Yaman states:

The bāṭin does not stand up without the ẓāhir. The former is like the soul while the latter is like the body. Both taken together are the two roots, but one is not used without the other. Each bears witness to the other. [The body] helps the soul in realizing its [potential] and thereby brings it back to life [i.e., the spiritual life with the acquisition of knowledge]. . . . The ẓāhir consists of performing the obligatory acts while the bāṭin is comprised of knowledge. Neither performing the obligatory acts without knowledge, nor the acquisition of knowledge without [performing] the obligatory acts, is useful. For example, body without soul is unfit for life, similarly [the existence of] soul cannot be proven without body.

See also al-Qādi al-Nu'mān, Asās al-ta'wil, ed. A. Tāmir (Beirut, 1960), 28; Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī, Kitāb al-maṣājid, MS Hamdani Collection, 63rd qālid; Hamid al-Dīn al-Kirmānī, Rāhī al-qāl, ed. M. Kamīl Husayn and M. Hīmī, (Cairo, 1952), 16, 22, 27, 30-2. See also n. 31, below.

5 The literal meaning of haqqa'iq is truth, reality. It represents the ultimate cosmological and eschatological system of the Ismā'īlī doctrine. 'Ali ibn Muhammad ibn al-Walid's book dealing with the Ismā'īlī doctrine is entitled Kitāb al-dhakhira fi-l-haqqiya, ed. M. al-A'zamī (Beirut, 1971). See also Zāhid al-'Ali, Ismā'īlī madhhab, 395; and n. 6, below. In Kitāb al-ṣīḥākh, al-Sijistānī refers to himself and his group as ahl al-haqq.

6 R. Strothmann's edition of Mizāj al-tasnīm by Diyyāl-Dīn Ismā'īl ibn Hibat Allāh (d. 1184/1770) (Gottingen, 1944-55), under the title Ismai litischer Koran-Kommentar, is misleading. The word tafsīr is not mentioned by the author either in the title or in the introduction. The book deals with the ta'wil of certain suras and it is in the form of maṣālī (pl. of maṣāla, meaning 'gathering'—see M. Kamīl Husayn, Fi ādab Miṣr al-Fātimiyah (Cairo, 1950), 33-41), selective audience, or students. Those tracts are collected and entitled by the prefix haqqa'iq added to the appellation of each sura, such as haqqa'iq āṣrāf al-naml.

Al-Kulīnī, al-Usūl, i, 246, reports a similar tradition which states: innā al-Qur'ān laya laya b-nāṭiq 5 ya'muru wa yaniḥa, wa lākin il-l-Qur'ān abī 5 ya'murana wa yaniḥanaa.

Ismā'īlī ta'wil of the Qur'ān

The following study deals with Ismā'īlī ta'wil and its place within their overall system of thought. It also attempts to delineate general hermeneutical principles whereby the Qur'ān is interpreted. The research is based primarily on published and unpublished works of three major authors: al-Qādi al-Nu'mān (d. 363/974) 8 and his two lesser-known contemporaries, Ja'far ibn Mansūr al-Yaman 9 and Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī. 10 Their works, which exemplify three different trends of thought within the Ismā'īlī system, represent the earliest extant sources on the subject.

1

In his Kitāb al-iftikhār, al-Sijistānī, elucidating the source of ta'wil from the Qur'ān, states:

The relationship of the [human] soul to the world of knowledge is more intimate than its [relationship] to the world of sensory perception. Indeed, the nāṭiq's soul attains a high status of knowledge which his peers and likes are incapable of [reaching]. Hence, [the fact that] the nāṭiq's revelations are expressions of the incorporeal world and its spiritual, luminous forms, cannot be denied. [This being the case], how could it be correct to translate

8 For his life and works see Ismail K. Poonawala, Biobibliography of Ismā'īlī Literature (Malibu, 1977), 48-49.

9 Ibid., 70-5. Al-Qādi al-Nu'mān faithfully served the first four Fatimid caliphs for half a century, and his sons and grandsons held the office of chief judge in the Fatimid empire for almost another half century. In addition to his pioneering works on jurisprudence and history, al-Nu'mān wrote some seminal works on the ta'wil. Yet he is regarded mainly as an exponent of the ẓāhirī sciences. Ja'far ibn Mansūr al-Yaman, representing the Yemenite school, on the other hand, is considered one of the leading exponents of the ta'wil.

An interesting story narrated by the Yamani dā'ī, Idris 'Imad al-Dīn ('Uyun al-akhbār, MS Hamdani Collection, vi, 39-40), states that on a certain occasion, after al-Qādi al-Nu'mān had recovered from illness, he waited upon the Fatimid caliph, al-Mu'izz l-Dīn Allāh. The caliph inquired about the various dignitaries who had visited him during the illness. Al-Nu'mān replied that everyone came except Ja'far ibn Mansūr al-Yaman. Al-Mu'izz, therefore, ordered certain books to be brought, gave them to al-Nu'mān for perusal, and asked for his opinion. After examining one of the books, al-Nu'mān replied: 'How can I comment on a work composed by you?' This is the work of your master Ja'far,' replied al-Mu'izz. Al-Nu'mān, on hearing this, realized Ja'far's higher rank in the da'wah and went straight to him to pay his respects. Whether the story is authentic or not is another question, but it poignantly illustrates the lofty position of bāṭinī sciences over ẓāhirī sciences.

10 Poonawala, Biobibliography, 82-9. Al-Sijistānī, who represents the Iranian school, was an original thinker and a distinguished author. He formulated a new synthesis of reason and revelation by adapting Ismā'īlī doctrine to Neoplatonic cosmology.
everything he transmitted to his umma [community] into physical, corporeal objects? . . . We affirm that the nāṭiq comes from [the spiritual] world; he is connected to it and derives [his knowledge] therefrom.\(^{11}\)

The points made by al-Sijistānī are: (i) the prophet communicates with the higher, spiritual world, the fountain-head of his inspiration; (ii) the prophet's soul attains the highest attainable status of knowledge; (iii) revelations, being representations of the spiritual world in human language, cannot be taken literally.

In order to grasp the full purport of the author's statement, a brief outline of al-Sijistānī's theory of prophethood and the nature of revelation within the framework of his philosophical system is called for. According to al-Sijistānī, God is absolutely transcendent, beyond all thought and all being. His true being is neither conceivable nor knowable. All that is known about Him is His Command (amr) and His Munificence (jūd) as something united with the Intellect ('aql) originated (abda'a) by Him. The superstructure of the hierarchy of beings, thus, begins with the Intellect, the second hypostasis of the Neoplatonists. The descending order of al-Sijistānī's Neoplatonic cosmology consists of the Intellect, the Soul, Nature, the Spheres, the Elements (that is, fire, air, water, and earth), and the three Kingdoms of mineral, vegetable, and animal. Since all the species in the physical world are created in ascending order, man is the noblest of all creation. Man, by virtue of his position, is the central link in the long chain of being; below him is the animal kingdom and above him is the world of angels (or the spiritual world), and he is connected to both. Prophethood, therefore, is the highest spiritual rank a man can aspire to attain in this world.\(^{12}\)

The basic notion in al-Sijistānī's theory of prophecy is that the prophet is the messenger of God to mankind, who brings with him revelation (or a scripture). He is called both a nābi (a prophet, that is, one who informs mankind or who is informed, respecting God and things unseen),\(^{13}\) and a rasūl (a messenger, an apostle of God, that is, the relater, by consecutive progressions, of the tidings from God).\(^{14}\) Both of the aforementioned terms not only stress his role as

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\(^{11}\) Al-Sijistānī, Kitāb al-iftikhr, ch. 12.

\(^{12}\) See the following works of al-Sijistānī: Kitāb al-iftikhr; Kitāb al-maṣḥūla; Kitāb al-yanābī, ed. H. Corbin, in Trilogie Ismaélienne (Tehran, 1961); Iḥbah al-nubū'a, ed. A. Tahri (Beirut, 1966).

\(^{13}\) Lane, Lexicon, s.v. n-b-.

\(^{14}\) Ibid., s.v. r-s-l.

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God's messenger to mankind, but they also imply that he is the knower of the 'unseen' and 'hidden'.

The prophet is further characterized as 'a pure man who is inspired (al-mu'āyyad) by the spirit of holiness'.\(^{15}\) The key to the unravelling of the mystery of divine inspiration, or illumination, is the word ta'yīd. This term is derived from the Quranic usage of its verbal form ayyada.\(^{16}\) Al-Sijistānī defines al-mu'āyyad as the one who attains full quiescence and one who receives benefits from the Intellect in a perfect way without mutation and interruption.\(^{17}\) At another place he states that the prophet, by virtue of his pure soul, rises to the subtle, spiritual world and takes from it spiritual subtleties and luminous delights and conveys them to the world below.\(^{18}\) The prophet is, therefore, an intermediary between the higher and the lower worlds, and it is through him that God bestows His bounties on the latter. Hence, he is described as 'the deputy of the Intellect in the physical world'.\(^{19}\)

The soul, according to al-Sijistānī, is ordinarily divided into three parts: vegetative, animal, and rational. But the prophet has the fourth category called 'the sacred (al-qudsiyya)', and because of it he is inspired and rises above the ordinary man.\(^{20}\) In his Kitāb al-yanābī', in the fourtieth yamb'a entitled 'The modality of receiving inspiration by the inspired ones in the physical world', al-Sijistānī explains the modality of inspiration as follows:

The promptings of inspiration are experienced when the inspired one is able to discover things without [passing through] sense perception, which is the normal way of inference from known to unknown things. Conversely, [the inspired one] finds himself abstemious to sensible things and desirous of abstract, intellectual things. The difference between the learned (al-ūlīm) and the inspired (al-mu'āyyad) is that the former is obliged to remember his learning and pronouncements on things perceptible through the senses, while the latter is able to dispense with it. The mu'āyyad conceives in his mind what the 'ūlīm would have been unable even to deduce by way of perceptible arguments. Probably the one who is

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\(^{15}\) Al-Sijistānī, Iḥbah al-nubū'a, 139.

\(^{16}\) The verb ayyada with ruḥ al-qud in regard to Jesus occurs three times in the Qur'ān; 2:87, 2:533, and 5:110. It means to strengthen, to aid, or to render victorious. Lane, Lexicon, s.v. a-y-a-d; al-Sijistānī, Kitāb al-iftikhr, ch. 5.

\(^{17}\) Al-Sijistānī, Kitāb al-yanābī', 36.

\(^{18}\) Al-Sijistānī, Iḥbah al-nubū'a, 144.

\(^{19}\) Al-Sijistānī, Kitāb al-yanābī', 72; id., Iḥbah al-nubū'a, 137; Paul Walker, 'Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī and the Development of Isma'īli Neoplatonism', Ph.D. dissertation (Univ. of Chicago, 1974), 166–79.

\(^{20}\) Al-Sijistānī, Iḥbah al-nubū'a, 13–48, 128, 152.
inspired conceives spiritual things without constructing syllogisms and expresses them in a perceptible language so that the people can perceive them.\textsuperscript{21}

In his Ithbāt al-nubūʿāt, al-Sijistānī suggests two possible modes through which the prophet receives inspiration: auditory or mental perception.\textsuperscript{22} The former is ruled out because it involves intermediaries and is also corruptible. Mental perception, therefore, is the only mode of revelatory experience and is supported by the Qurʾān itself, wherein it is stated: ‘The heart lied not [in seeing] what it saw’ (Q. 53/11). Now, the question about the veracity of the prophet’s mental perception as compared with that of others arises. The prophet’s veracity, al-Sijistānī contends, is assured by the temperateness of his physical constitution and the purity of his soul. The Qurʾān states: ‘It belongs not to any mortal that God should speak [that is, through an auditory mode] to him, except by revelation [that is, through mental/idea inspiration], or from behind a veil, or that He should send a messenger who reveals by God’s permission whatever He wills’ (Q. 42/51). In his Ithbāt al-nubūʿāt, in a section entitled ‘The modality of God’s speech’, al-Sijistānī, commenting on the three modes of revelation as stated in the above verse, states:

\textit{Wahy\textsuperscript{m}} (by revelation) means \textit{ta’yīd} from the Intellect; \textit{min wara’i ḥijāb\textsuperscript{m}} [from behind a veil] means \textit{ta’yīd} from the Intellect through the Soul, the latter being a veil between the Intellect and the Nature; and \textit{aw yrursila rasiā\textsuperscript{m}} [or that He should send a messenger] means that, when the nātiq attains his rank [i.e., receives the call], he is obliged to translate what has been brought down to his heart by the Trusted Spirit into his own tongue in order to convey it to his people.\textsuperscript{23}

Thus the individual’s mental perception is closely connected with his own speech pattern, and each prophet expresses his revelation in his own language. This is attested to by the Qurʾān wherein it is stated: ‘We have made it [the Qurʾān] easy in thy tongue that thou mayest bear good tidings thereby to the godfearing, and warn a contentious people’ (Q. 19/97).

Further elaborating on the various types of speech, al-Sijistānī states:

As for the speech [word] of God, when it became united with the first being

\textsuperscript{21} Al-Sijistānī, \textit{Kitāb al-yamābī}, 95.
\textsuperscript{22} pp. 147–9.
\textsuperscript{23} Al-Sijistānī, Ithbāt al-nubūʿāt, 149.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid. 152–3.
\textsuperscript{25} Al-Sijistānī, \textit{Kitāb al-iftikhār}, ch. 4; al-Sijistānī, \textit{Kitāb al-yamābī}, 92.
\textsuperscript{27} According to the Rasa‘il Ikhwān al-Sāfa’ (Beirut, 1957), i. 76–8; ii. 210; iii. 344–5, the \textit{ta’wil} of the Qurʾān is indispensable. The Ikhwān’s position is very similar to that of al-Sijistānī, see Ismail K. Poonawala, “The Qurʾān in the Rasa‘il Ikhwān al-Sāfa’”, \textit{International Congress for the Study of the Qurʾān} (Canberra, 1980), 57–67; also Yves Marquet, ‘La Pensée d’Abbà Ya‘qūb as-Sijistānī’, \textit{SF} 54 (1981), 95–138—Marquet has also pointed out some similarities between al-Sijistānī and the Rasa‘il’.

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\textit{Ismā‘īli ta’wil of the Qurʾān}
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[i.e., the Intellect] it did not have any sound (sawt) or print (naqṣ), but this [knowledge] was shared by the Intellect and the Soul through the former’s benefaction upon the latter. . . . As for the inspired speech (\textit{al-kalām al-ta’yīdī}) emanating from the Intellect and connected with the nātiq, it is like spiritual dying of the nātiq’s soul. Each dye consists of an intellectual form which combines many psychic things and spiritual formations radiating into the receiver’s soul with the knowledge of many things . . . As for the compound speech (\textit{al-kalām al-tarkībī}) emanating from the Soul and connected with the nātiq, it consists of psychic movements which manifest [in the movements of] the stars and the planets . . . Only the nātiq, because he is inspired, is able to decipher this [compound speech] and how it is expressed in each epoch . . . As for the nātiq’s own speech [sound-words], it possesses the forcefulness, elegance, and loftiness that those who speak the same language are unable to produce like unto it.\textsuperscript{24}

Three spiritual forces, namely, \textit{al-jād}, \textit{al-fath}, and \textit{al-khayāl}, emanating from the Intellect and the Soul are described as special prophetic gifts which form part of the prophet’s \textit{ta’yīd}.\textsuperscript{25} Thus it is obvious that al-Sijistānī’s theory of prophecy, like those of other Muslim thinkers such as al-Fārābī and Ibn Sinā, is based upon Greek and Neoplatonic theories of the soul and its power of cognition.\textsuperscript{26} To sum up the foregoing discussion, the following salient features should be noted. The prophet, unlike ordinary man, is endowed with a pure soul and extraordinary intellectual gifts. He does not need an external instructor, but his intellect develops by itself with the help of divine power prior to its final prophetic illumination (revelation) and, thereby, attains contact with the Intellect. The intelligibles thus bestowed upon the prophet by the Intellect are translated and expressed by him in symbolical and metaphorical language, since the commonality cannot grasp purely spiritual things.\textsuperscript{27}
II

In keeping with their basic distinction between the ṣâḥir and the bâṭin, Ismâ‘îlis maintain the same distinction between the tanzîl (the divine message delivered by the Prophet in its literal form) and the ta‘wil (the hidden, spiritual meaning of the scripture explained by the Imâms). In his Kitâb al-maqašîd, al-Sijistâni has devoted a separate iqlîd to elucidating the difference between the two. He states:

The tanzîl is similar to the raw materials, while the ta‘wil resembles the manufactured goods. For example, nature produces various types of woods, but unless a craftsman works on them and gives them a specific shape, such as a door, a chest or a chair, the wood is not worth more than fuel [to be consumed] by the fire. The wood’s worth and benefit become manifest only after it receives the craftsman’s craftsmanship. The craftsmanship is an art which puts everything in its proper place. Likewise is the case of other raw materials, such as iron, gold, copper, and silver. Unless a craftsman works on them, their worth and utility remain hidden. . . . Similarly, the tanzîl consists of putting things together in words. Beneath those words lie the treasured meanings. It is the practitioner of the ta‘wil who extracts the intended meaning from each word and puts everything in its proper place. This is, then, the difference between the tanzîl and the ta‘wil.28

As the craftsman cannot practise his art without the raw materials, the function of ta‘wil comes after the tanzîl. Similarly, the rank of the practitioner of ta‘wil in the Ismâ‘îli hierarchy assigned to the waṣî, the deputy and successor of the prophet, comes after that of the nāṭiq. It is the nāṭiq who receives the tanzîl and promulgates the shari‘a, while it is the waṣî who imparts the ta‘wil. It is worth noting that in the da‘wa organization, which corresponds to the spiritual hierarchy of the higher world, the religious offices of the nāṭiq and waṣî correspond to the Two Roots: the Intellect and the Soul. This correspondence between the two highest ranks of both the hierarchies is very revealing for the understanding of what follows. After his prophetic revelation, the prophet makes the waṣî privy to his illumination of the spiritual world so that the divine inspiration continues after his death. The waṣî, thus, is inspired from the heaven (mu‘ayyad min al-samâ‘),

28 Al-Sijistâni, Kitâb al-maqašîd, 52 and iqlîd.

and it is this role of imparting the ta‘wil which he passes on to his progeny, the Imâms.

It is repeatedly stressed that the waṣî is not only divinely inspired, but he is also divinely commissioned to impart the ta‘wil. In his Kitâb al-iftikâh, al-Sijistâni gives three reasons as to why it was incumbent on Muḥammad to appoint ‘Ali as his waṣî:29
(i) People who accepted Islam during the lifetime of Muḥammad consisted of two groups: those who embraced Islam willingly and those who submitted out of fear, or for furthering their worldly interests. The latter group was waiting for Muḥammad’s death to revert back to their old practices and declare their hostility to Islam. What prevented them from doing so was that they were awe-stricken by the prophet, as he was divinely inspired. Muḥammad, therefore, was instructed to select the most virtuous, the most noble, and the most learned person of his community and to make him privy to his illumination of the spiritual world so that the ta‘wil would continue after his death through the waṣî. This, in turn, would keep the insincere group awe-stricken and the nascent religion would take roots.
(ii) Muḥammad was sent to the Arabs who were surrounded by the Persians and the Greeks (Byzantines). Both these peoples were known for their shrewdness, discernment, acumen, and their mastery of fine sciences (al-‘ulûm al-latîfâ). As long as Muḥammad lived, they were unable to deceive the Muslims. The prophet, therefore, was instructed to designate his waṣî, who was divinely inspired (mu‘ayyad min al-samâ‘), and to entrust him with the teaching of fine sciences and noble secrets (al-āsrâr al-latîfâ) which would inspire awe among the Persians and the Greeks.
(iii) Had Muḥammad died suddenly without appointing his waṣî and entrusting him with the secrets of prophecy and teaching him the subtleties of wisdom and the intricacies of hermeneutics, the people would have thought that the prophethood was a temporary phenomenon which would cease with his death.

Such, then, is the importance of hermeneutics, according to al-Sijistâni. In another work entitled Sullam al-naqîṣ, after stressing the importance of the ta‘wil, he poses a hypothetical question and states:

If it is said: Why did the prophet then not take upon himself to impart the

29 Ch. 7.
ta'wil? It should be said to him: Had the prophet done it himself, it would have weakened his call to follow the Qur'an and the shari'a. Because, if he would have said that his [real] intention in performing the ritual purification by water was to purge the soul from doubt and perplexity and to purify it by knowledge, his community would have said: Since we have known the truth there was no need to perform the ritual purification. But the prophet's silence about the ta'wil was to make the shari'a incumbent on the faithful and that they should seek the ta'wil of the mutashabihat.30 Thus, the faithful would obtain goodness [success] both in this world and the hereafter.31

Both al-Qâdi al-Nu'mân and Ja'far ibn Mansûr al-Yaman establish the necessity of ta'wil by deducing evidence from the Qur'an, the sunna (prophetic sayings and deeds in general), and the sayings of the Imams.32 Al-Nu'mân states that God, the Creator, alone is One and unique, while every created thing in this universe consists of pairs. The Qur'an states: 'And of everything We have created pairs, that you may reflect' (Q. 51:49). Although the individual is seemingly one person, he is composed of body and soul. Body is the external aspect, while soul is the internal aspect. The former is apparent, whereas the latter is hidden.33

Next, al-Nu'mân justifies the usage of the term bâtin by stating that it is mentioned several times in the Qur'an. For example, the Qur'an states: 'He has bestowed his favours upon you, both outwardly (zâhiratîn) and inwardly (bâtinatîn)' (Q. 31:20), and,

30 See Q. 3/7. Mutashabihat verses mean those that are equivocal, or ambiguous. These verses are susceptible to different interpretations, see Lane, Lexicon, s.v. sh-b-h.
31 Al-Sijistâni, Sullam al-najât, MS (M. Goraiwala, p. 17). This passage clearly indicates that the gâbir and the bâtin are two complementary aspects of religion. The former, which consists of following the injunctions of the shari'a, is aptly called al-'ibâda al-'amaliya (worship by performing prescribed acts of devotion), while the latter, which consists of seeking the ta'wil, is called al-'ibâda al-'imâniya (worship through knowledge).
32 Al-Qâdi al-Nu'mân, Asâs al-ta'wil, 23–32. Except for a brief introduction, the rest of the book deals with the ta'wil of the tales of the prophets. In this introduction, the author states that he has dealt with the principles of ta'wil in greater detail in another work entitled Fiadad al-mawâifa. A. Tamir, the editor of Asâs al-ta'wil, states that several copies of the latter are to be found in Masyâf, Syria, but I have not come across a copy of it in the private collections of Ismâ'îl MSS accessible to me.

There is no systematic exposé of the necessity of ta'wil by Ja'far ibn Mansûr al-Yaman in his extant works, but his al-Shawâhid wa'al-bayan is very useful in this respect. He has collected in it all the typical evidences from the Qur'an and the sunna generally cited by the Shi'is to support their claim that 'Ali was nominated by the Prophet as his waṣī and that he was also commissioned to impart the ta'wil.

33 See also Ja'far ibn Mansûr al-Yaman, al-Shawâhid wa'al-bayan, 13–14.

34 See n. 30. above.
35 See also al-Kulî, al-Ušûl, i. 213, 221, 263, who reports a tradition which states:

Gabriel brought two pomegranates to the Prophet. The Prophet ate one while the other he split into two halves; he ate half and gave 'Ali the other half. Thet he said to 'Ali: 'Do you know what these two pomegranates mean?' 'No,' replied 'Ali. He said, 'As for the first, it is the prophethood in which you do not have any share, but the other is knowledge and you are my associate in it.'

36 See also Ja'far ibn Mansûr al-Yaman, al-Shawâhid wa'al-bayan, 17–19.
37 Zâhir and bâtin are found as variant readings in some MSS of Asâs al-ta'wil. Zâhir, the outer dimension of the Qur'an is its apparent meaning, while bâtin, its inner dimension, is the meaning known to the elect few. The Qur'an must be understood on both levels, exoteric and esoteric, and ta'wil includes both. See also Muhammad Husayn al-Tabâtabâi, al-Mizân fi taṣfîr al-Qur'an (Beirut, 1975), i. 40; Muḥsin al-Amin, A'yân al-Shi'a (Beirut, 1960), iii. 22, 55, 65.
are the possessor of [its] hermeneutics. You will have to fight for the hermeneutics as I fought for the revelation." Yet another tradition states: 'I am leaving among you the two important things. If you will hold fast to them you will never be led astray. They are: the book of God and my family, and they will never be separated from each other until they arrive at the pond [in the hereafter].’

Referring to the ta’wil of the Qur’an, Ja’far al-Ṣādiq is reported to have stated: 'We can speak about a word in seven [different] ways.' It is also well known in Arabic that a word might have one meaning outwardly and quite another inwardly. As the Quranic style and diction are celebrated for their jāz (inimitability, uniqueness), it is not surprising that the Qur’an encompasses all those linguistic beauties, Its outward style and diction are Muḥammad’s miracle, while the explication of its inner meaning is the Imām’s miracle.

III

Since revelation is a symbolic expression in human language of the spiritual realities, it contains profounder spiritual meaning than that which lies on the surface. It is the ta’wil which extracts this spiritual meaning. According to al-Sijistānī, two categories of verses stand in obvious need of the ta’wil: (i) verses with physical objects, such as heaven, earth, mountains, rivers, animals, trees, and fruits; (ii) the mutashābihāt verses. The first category should be treated figuratively, especially when the literal meaning appears dubious. The second category, as mentioned in the Qur’an itself, is defined by al-Sijistānī as follows:

When the listener hears the mutashābihāt verses, his intelligence disapproves of [their obvious meaning], and he becomes confused, because [their meaning] departs from [the accepted] norms and customs, such as the ant’s speech to Solomon, the hoopoe’s bringing the news about the personal religious beliefs of the Queen of Sheba, the cooling off of fire for Abraham,

38 Ja’far ibn Mansūr al-Yaman, al-Shawāhid wa’t-bayān, 74. See also al-A’mīn, A’yan al-Shī’ā, iii. 102; this tradition is transmitted both by al-Nisā’ī and al-Ḥākim in their Al-Khāṣa’īs and Al-Mustadrak respectively.

39 Ibid. 91. For a slightly different version see al-Ṭabarī, Mishkat al-masābiḥ, ed. M. al-Albānī (Damascus, 1962), iii. 255, English trans., James Rhobson, Mishkat al-Masābih (Lahore, 1975), ii. 1350. It is also reported in the Saḥīḥ of Muslim.

40 On this see further n. 69, below.

the gushing forth of twelve fountains when Moses struck his staff on a rock etc., in the stories of the apostles (qisas al-anbiyā’). . . . When an intelligent person is presented with those mutashābihāt verses, his faith is not reassured, because he finds [those stories] surrounded by an element of impossibility.

After a lengthy discussion of the problems involved in those mutashābihāt verses, al-Sijistānī raises some philosophical questions: why should one seek the ta’wil of uncommon phenomena mentioned in those verses? Does not the seeking of the ta’wil imply the denial of those occurrences and consequently infringe upon the Almighty God’s omnipotence? Al-Sijistānī defends the use of the ta’wil by stating that the literal interpretation of those unusual phenomena violates the law of nature. It further implies that God, who has willed the universe to function according to the laws of nature, could annul His own wisdom. Once this wisdom is nullified, then the whole creation is invalidated, which leads to ta’til al-khāliq (denuding God of all content). Miracles that break the law of nature are therefore possible, but occur rarely.

The second argument advanced by al-Sijistānī in defence of the ta’wil is based on ‘the principle of disparity (tafāwūt),’ which is also his principal argument in defence of prophecy. The basic postulate in this theory is that except for God and the Intellect, disparity prevails over everything in the universe. It is because of this disparity that the affairs of the two realms, the intelligible and the sensible, sustain their order. Creation (that is, emanation), according to al-Sijistānī, is in itself the principle and the order of Being. Accordingly, the higher is simpler, more subtle, and nobler than the lower. It is always the lower which receives the influence of the higher. The key to universal order, therefore, is the knowledge of each particular thing’s proper place in the hierarchy to which it belongs. This is precisely what the ta’wil accomplishes.

Next, al-Sijistānī outlines some general principles of hermeneutics, whereby the above-mentioned two categories of verses are to be interpreted:

(i) Words could be interchanged when they resemble each other in
meaning, for example, earth (aqr) could be interchanged for knowledge (‘ilm), as explained below.

(ii) Some words are used figuratively in order to achieve special meaning and effect, for example, Muhammad’s saying to Anjasha, the camel-driver: ‘Gently, do not break the qawwārīr.’ 44 Qawwārīr means glass vessels, or bottles. Muhammad used this word figuratively to indicate the delicate nature of women. Anjasha had a sweet singing voice. His singing, therefore, would make the camels go quickly. As the women were riding the camels, Muhammad told Anjasha not to make those beasts run so quickly. Certain verses of the Qurʾān, therefore, should be treated figuratively.

(iii) The stories of the apostles are to be interpreted allegorically, because the recitation of past stories does not benefit the reader if there is no moral to be learned and applied to a similar situation (either in the present or the future).

Whether interpreting an allegorical story, or words used metaphorically, Ismāʿīlīs use special terms for the expounding of taʾwil: mathal (likeness, example, model) and mamthul (one who is exemplified). 45 In fact, hermeneutic principles are tied to this theory of al-mathal waʾl-mamthul, which is based on establishing parallelism between the spiritual, physical, and religious hierarchies. For example, the noon prayer is al-mathal for Muhammad, or, in other words, Muhammad is the mamthul of the noon prayer. Similarly, ‘the blessed olive tree’ stands for the Imam ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭalīb; or, in other words, the Imam is exemplified by that tree. 46

IV

Let us now turn to some examples. First, we will deal with the verses wherein a certain physical object is mentioned. All of the following examples, unless stated otherwise, are taken from al-Sijistānī’s Kitāb al-iftikhār, chapter 12.

44 Al-Bukhārī, al-Ṣaḥīh (Beirut, 1978), iv. 82–3; Muslim, al-Ṣaḥīh (Cairo, 1334/1916), vii. 79; al-Tabarzī, Mishkât al-masābīḥ, ii. 576, English trans., James Rizqun, Mishkat al-Masabih, ii. 1004.
45 These terms are borrowed from the Qurʾān (see q. 29/43, 39/27).
Thus, the setting up of the asās and [his] promulgation of the ta’wil is analogous with the earth’s stretching, while the casting of firm mountains is similar to appointing religious dignitaries to disseminate knowledge among the deserving. ‘Cauising of every lovely pair to grow thereon,’ means the growth of twofold knowledge, exoteric and esoteric.  

The following verses are interpreted likewise. ‘Know that God revives the earth after its death’ (Q. 57:17) means that God will revive knowledge after it has become extinct and that the asās will revive his authority by returning the power to his son. ‘The she-camel of God’, in the story of the prophet Šālīh (Q. 11:64) stands for the asās; obedience to him is obligatory on the faithful. ‘Leave her that she may eat in God’s earth’ means that he should be left alone so that he will derive benefit from the divine knowledge and will confer it upon them. ‘Touch her not with evil’ means that they should neither deceive him nor conspire against him. ‘Lest you be seized by a nigh chastisement’, means that they would miss their good fortune, whereby their souls will perish. Also of interest is Q. 21:105: ‘And verily We have written in the Psalms, after the reminder: My righteous servants shall inherit the earth.’ The literal meaning of earth in this verse does not make any sense, because it is always inherited by the oppressors and seized by the tyrants. The true meaning reads: ‘My righteous servants shall inherit the knowledge.’

### ii. The Heavens

The word samā’ (sky) is applied to a fine, rotating body studded with the stars. It is analogous with the nātiq, who forms ‘the sky of religion’. For example, the verse, ‘He sends down water from the sky, so that valleys flow each in its measure’ (Q. 13:17) means that God revealed the Qur’ān to Mūḥammad’s heart (literally, brought it out from the prophet’s heart) so that the people would carry it, each according to his capacity and the purity of his soul. ‘And the flood carries a swelling foam’ means the differences and disputes that surfaced among the Muslim community with regard to the Quranic exegesis and hermeneutics. In the same verse, ‘Then, as for the foam, it vanishes as jetsam, while, as for that which profits mankind, it remains in the earth’ means that the differences and disputes vanish, but that which is useful to mankind remains with the asās.

In its secondary meaning, the sky is applied to the shari‘a, promulgated by the nātiq. The verse, ‘On the day when We shall roll up heaven as a scroll rolled up with the writings’ (Q. 21:105), means the cancellation of the shari‘a and its abrogation.

Commenting on Q. 41:11–12, ‘Then He lifted Himself to heaven when it was smoke, and said to it and to the earth: Come willingly, or unwillingly. They said: We come willingly. So, He ordained them as seven heavens in two days, and revealed its mandate in every heaven’, al-Sijistānī states that God’s address to the dead body (that is, the heaven and earth) can be understood either in the sense of an inspiration, or in the sense of (the) Creation. He then adds, how could a dead body, which does not have intelligence, be inspired? The second option, that is, discourse in the sense of their creation, is also impossible. The real meaning of the above verse is that the Soul looked at the administration of da‘wah al-satr (the epoch of concealment)\(^{50}\) and the state of the leaders in that epoch. At first, it looked as if it were smoke. The furnishing of inspiration did not kindle any (human) soul who would rectify the situation. The Soul, therefore, realized that the remedy, that is, the administration of laws, could be provided by depositing the hidden, inner meaning underneath the outward meaning. ‘And said to the heaven and to the earth: Come willingly, or unwillingly’ means that the soul enjoined on the nātiq and the asās the necessity of setting up two da‘was, voluntary and obligatory, where the former is for the bātīn and the latter for the zāhir. ‘They said: We come willingly’ means that both the nātiq and the asās willingly accepted the call. ‘He ordained them as seven heavens in two days’ means that the Soul ordained seven leaders from the epoch of concealment in two distinct hierarchies: exterior and interior. ‘Revealed its mandate in every heaven’ means that each leader’s share of God’s Word was inspired to him individually. The words ‘sky’ and ‘earth’ in Q. 11:44 and 54:11–14 are to be interpreted similarly.

### iii. Mountains

Firmly established mountains in the land serve as signposts whereby the travellers are guided and wherefrom streams gush

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\(^{48}\) Al-Sijistānī, Kitāb al-ifkāh, ch. 12.

\(^{49}\) See also Ja‘far ibn Manṣūr al-Yaman, al-Shawābid wa‘l-bayān, 39–40, 60, 82.

\(^{50}\) Ismā‘īl’s view history as a progressive cycle which develops through various epochs; see Poonawala, Bibliography, 21–2.
forth. In ta'wil they stand for the ḥujaj, who are established in every region of the earth to guide the faithful with their knowledge. Streams gushing forth from the mountains are analogous with the fountains of wisdom and knowledge radiating from the ḥujaj. An example of this is David’s subjection of the mountains and their singing God’s glory with him in the following verse, ‘And with David We subjected the mountains to give glory’ (Q. 2:179). Taken literally, this verse does not make any sense. David was an imām, obedience to whom was obligatory. The mountains in the above verse, therefore, mean the ḥujaj and various da’wa dignitaries. The passage Q. 34:10 is to be interpreted similarly.

The Qur’ān also states: ‘And when Moses came to Our appointed time and his Lord spoke with him, he said: My Lord, show me that I may behold Thee! He said: Thou shalt not see Me, but behold the mountain, if it stays fast in its place, then thou shalt see Me’ (Q. 7:143). Commenting on the above verse, al-Sijistānī states that it is in obvious need of interpretation. How could God manifest Himself through an inanimate object, such as the mountain? How could a major lawgiver—prophet like Moses ask such an impossible question? The real meaning is that Moses thought that his intellect would be able to perceive the Creator’s quiddity (‘immāya) and that he would be able to dispense, via negation, with affirming the tawḥīd (unity of God). When he realized that it was not possible, he repented and glorified His Lord by asserting tanzih (dislodging all association from God). The mountain in the above verse means the Soul.

Similarly, the mountain is mentioned in Q. 59:21, ‘If We had sent down this Qur’ān upon a mountain, thou wouldst have seen it humbled, split asunder out of the fear of God.’ The mountain here represents a learned, pious, and godfearing mu’min (faithful). Al-Sijistānī cites the following two verses to support this interpretation: ‘Is it not time that the hearts of those who believe should

be humbled to the remembrance of God?’ (Q. 57:16), and, ‘Only those of His servants fear God who have knowledge’ (Q. 35:28).

iv. Trees

Goody trees mentioned in the Qur’ān are the righteous, godfearing, and virtuous people, while the corrupt trees, or those uprooted from the earth, are the debauched ones. ‘The blessed olive tree’ in Q. 24:35, therefore, stands for the Imām ‘Ali Zayn al-’Abidin ibn al-Ḥusayn,54 while ‘the accursed tree’ in Q. 17:60 stands for the second Umayyad caliph, Yazid ibn Mu’awiya, who was responsible for Imām al-Ḥusayn’s massacre at Karbalā.55

These were, then, some examples of Ismā’ili ta’wil of certain physical objects mentioned in the Qur’ān. Interpretation of the tales of the prophets is one of the major themes in Ismā’ili ta’wil literature, especially with Ja’far ibn Mansūr al-Yaman. The main purpose of those stories, as stated earlier, is to drive home a moral lesson; hence, they are interpreted allegorically. Even a cursory survey of all those stories is beyond the scope of the present study. As an illustration, I will confine myself to the story of Jonah, which is also selected by al-Sijistānī, because, according to him, it is in greater need of ta’wil than any other story. Jonah was an imām and was entrusted with the task of upholding the shari‘a of his epoch’s nāṭiq. He lived under difficult circumstances and did not measure up to his task. Consequently, he was demoted, his knowledge faded away, and he was overwhelmed by a younger rival who was accomplished in exoteric knowledge. Jonah being swallowed by the whale (Q. 37:142) represents his falling into the abyss of ignorance and doubt. Then, his being thrown on a desert shore while he was sick (Q. 37:145) means that, when he confessed his wrongdoing, God flung him from the depth of ignorance to the spaciousness of knowledge. God’s causing a tree of gourds to grow over him (Q. 37:146) signifies that God appointed a trustworthy, knowledgeable, and gentle person to treat the affliction into which Jonah had fallen so that he might be completely cured.56 Most of the stories of

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51 The ḥujaj (pl. ḥujaj) is a particular figure in the da’wa hierarchy who serves at a given time as an evidence, or a proof, among mankind, of God’s will; it also means a rank following that of the Imām. Ismā’ili doctrine divides the inhabited earth into twelve regions; each region’s da’wa hierarchy is headed by a ḥujaj. Zāhid ‘Ali, Ismā’ili madhhab, 305. See also al-Kullī, Kitāb al-ḥujaj, in his al-Uṣūl, i, 168–74.
52 See also al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, Aṣās al-ta’wil, 253.
53 See also Ja’far ibn Mansūr al-Yaman, al-Fārā’īd wa ḥudūd al-dīn, MS (Goriawala, p. 14), 229–30; his ta’wil is different.
54 See n. 46, above.
55 Ja’far ibn Mansūr al-Yaman, al-Shawāhīd wa’l-bayān, 310; he states that the accursed tree stands for the Umayyads, in general, as well as the adherents of Mazdaism.
56 See also al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, Aṣās al-ta’wil, 285–90; Ja’far ibn Mansūr al-Yaman, al-Shawāhīd wa’l-bayān, 569–74. There are some differences in their ta’wil.
the prophets narrated in the Qurʾān are similarly interpreted.\(^{57}\)

All of the aforementioned three authors, especially al-Sijistānī, use taʿwil on which to hang the Neoplatonic cosmology and eschatology.\(^{58}\) God’s Command, described in the Qurʾān,\(^{59}\) fits well into the Ismāʿīlī scheme of creation, especially al-Sijistānī’s doctrine of the Command (amr), or the Word (al-kalima),\(^{60}\) namely, that there is one intermediary between the Originator/Innovator (mubdiʾ, that is, God) and the First Originated/Innovated (al-mubdaʾ al-awall, that is, the Intellect), and that is the Command, or the Word of the Originator.\(^{61}\) The Quranic pairs of words, such as al-kursī waʾl-ʿarsh (royal seat and throne) (Q. 2/255, 39/75), al-qalam waʾl-lawh (pen and tablet) (Q. 96/4, 85/22), al-shams waʾl-qamar (sun and moon) (Q. passim), al-qaḍāʾ waʾl-qadar (fate and divine decree),\(^{62}\) are equated with the Two Roots (aṣlān), that is, the Intellect and the Soul, in turn, corresponding to the nāṭiq and the asās. Al-Sijistānī even takes great pains to interpret Q. 13/4, 13/28, 5/116, 39/21, 67/10, and 89/5 to establish that both the Intellect (al-aqīl) and the Soul (al-naqs) are mentioned in the Qurʾān.\(^{63}\)

The concept of the Last Judgement held by the commonalty, that it will be accompanied with complete upset of the cosmos, dislocation of the earth and the heaven, such as the splitting of the heavens, scattering of the stars, swarming over of the seas, etc., is ridiculed by al-Sijistānī. How could God, he argues, gather mankind and call them to account when the cosmos, which sustains

human existence, is dislocated? Reward and punishment are similarly interpreted spiritually.\(^{64}\)

Interpretation of the sharʿa is another celebrated theme in Ismāʿīlī taʿwil. Al-Sijistānī has devoted the last five chapters of his Kitāb al-ifṭikhār to expound the taʿwil of the five pillars of Islam. A brief summary is in order. Ablution (waḍūʿ), the minor ritual purification performed before prayer, implies disavowal of the imamate from those who claimed it unjustly. Water used for purification represents knowledge which purifies the soul from doubt and uncertainty. Prayers signify walāya (devotion) of the awliyāʾ (plural of wali, meaning saint, man close to God, that is, the Imāms). The five obligatory prayers correspond to the five ḥudūd: the Intellect, the Soul, the nāṭiq, the asās, and the Imām. The poor tax (zakāt) in taʿwil means that those individuals who are rooted in knowledge should set up trustworthy mentors to guide the people. By so doing, that is, by setting up a hierarchy, the lower rank would become zakāt for the higher. Fasting (ṣawm) means observing silence and not revealing the secret to the uninformed. Pilgrimage to Mecca, that is the house of God, symbolizes having an audience with the Imām, because he is the house wherein knowledge of God resides.\(^{65}\)

Another interesting aspect of taʿwil found in the works of al-Sijistānī is the technique of transposing the letters of certain verses to vindicate a particular Shiʿi tenet. Sūra 108, accordingly, is employed to demonstrate ʿAlī’s waṣāya (the rank of plenipotentiary). First, al-Sijistānī explains the occasion of its revelation and states that when Muhammad was informed about the future events which would take place in his community, especially that his grandsons would be persecuted by the Umayyads, he was overcome by grief. Subsequently, the sūra entitled ‘Abundance’ (that is, Q. 108) was revealed, giving him the good tidings concerning his offspring through his daughter Fāṭima and ‘Ali:

\[
\text{‘Surely we have given thee abundance; so pray unto thy Lord and sacrifice. Surely he that hates thee, he is the one cut off.’ This}
\]

\(^{57}\) For the tales of the prophets see al-Qādī al-Nuʾmān, Asās al-ṭarīq; Jaʿfar ibn Mansūr al-Yaman, Aṣrār al-nuṭaqāʿ, MS Hamdani Collection; id., Sarāʾir al-nuṭaqāʿ, MS in the possession of the late A. A. A. Fysse; id., al-Farāʾid wa ʿuṣūd al-dīn.

\(^{58}\) The terminology used by al-Sijistānī to describe creation is of Quranic origin, e.g., God is described as al-khāliq, al-bāriʾ, al-muṣawwar, bādiʾ al-samawāt waʾl-ard. Thus, those terms imply both temporal creation (in the religious sense) and real creation (in the philosophical sense of emanation). Q. 59/24; 2/117; Al-Sijistānī, Kitāb al-maqālid, 14th iṣlah; P. Walker, pp. 133 ff.

\(^{59}\) His command, when He desires a thing, is to say it “Be,” and it is, Q. 36/82.

\(^{60}\) The Command is also called Will (irāda).

\(^{61}\) Al-Sijistānī, Kitāb al-ifṭikhār, ch. 2; id., Kitāb al-maqālid, 19th iṣlah.

\(^{62}\) In theology, these words were taken to mean predestination and freewill. See Harry Wolfson, The Philosophy of Kalam (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), 601–24. The Qurʾān uses the word qadar in the sense of both power and measuring, see Fazlur Rahman, Major Themes of the Qurʾān (Chicago, 1980), 12, 65–8.

\(^{63}\) Al-Sijistānī, Kitāb al-ifṭikhār, ch. 3.

\(^{64}\) Ibid., chs. 9–11.

\(^{65}\) Ibid., chs. 13–17. See also al-Qādī al-Nuʾmān, Taʿwil al-daʿāʾim, ed. M. al-Aʿzāmī (Cairo, n.d.); al-Nuʾmān’s details differ from those of al-Sijistānī.
interpretation, al-Sijistānī contends, can be demonstrated by transposing the letters of the sūra to read:

آلا أن الكوثر الطاهر وميثك علي إن تنحر فإن شانك أبو بكر

The absence of letters qāf (indicating ‘ātīq, that is, Abū Bakr)66 and mim (indicating ‘Umar and ‘Uthmān) from the sūra further indicates that the caliphate will not continue in the progeny of those three caliphs.67 Similarly, Q. 17/60 is employed to demonstrate the imamate of al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Ali ibn Abī Ṭalib and the infidelity of the second Umayyad caliph, Yazīd.68

The fact that Ismā‘īlis take great pride in their ta‘wil is obvious from the very title of al-Sijistānī’s polemical work, Kitāb al-ifṭikhār (‘The Book of Pride’). In this book, after refuting his opponents’ arguments, al-Sijistānī expounds his own doctrine and then concludes by stating: ‘What pride is greater than comprehension of the haqa‘iq and pursuing the [right] path?’ This phrase, like a refrain, is repeated after each argument throughout the book.

Despite the Ismā‘īli claim that their ta‘wil is derived from the Imāms, numerous differences in interpretation are found in the works of the aforesaid three authors.69 One example will suffice. The verse relating to light (Q. 24/35), interpreted by al-Sijistānī (= Sīj) and Ja‘far ibn Maḥsan al-Yaman (= Ja‘f), is selected; what follows is a brief summary.70 The verse in question reads: ‘God is the Light of the heavens and the earth, the likeness of His Light is as a niche wherein is a lamp, the lamp in a glass, the glass as if it were a glittering star kindled from a blessed olive, an olive that is neither of the East nor of the West whose oil would almost glow forth, even if no fire touched it; Light upon Light; God guides to His Light whom He will.’

Light

Sīj: Light of knowledge radiating from the Command of God, and from the Intellect and the Soul
Ja‘f: imām

66 ‘Atīq was Abū Bakr’s nickname; see al-Ṭabarī, Ta’rikh (Cairo, 1962), iii, 424–5.
67 Al-Sijistānī, Kitāb al-ifṭikhār, ch. 7.
68 Ibíd., ch. 8.
69 Zāhid ‘Ali, 399 ff.; he has dealt with this question at great length.

Niche

Sīj: nātīq
Ja‘f: Fāṭima (the Prophet’s daughter)
Sīj: asās
Ja‘f: Imām al-Ḥusayn
Sīj: The first mutimm, i.e., the first Imām, al-Ḥasan
Ja‘f: When al-Ḥusayn was in his mother’s womb

A glittering star
Sīj: Imām al-Ḥusayn
Ja‘f: Fāṭima

The Blessed Olive Tree
Sīj: Imām ‘Ali Zayn al-‘Ābidīn
Ja‘f: Abraham

Neither of the East nor of the West
Sīj: It qualifies the tree, i.e., ‘Ali Zayn al-‘Ābidīn
Ja‘f: Abraham’s religion, which was neither Judaism nor Christianity

Oil would almost glow forth
Sīj: Imām Muḥammad al-Baqir
Ja‘f: Al-Ḥusayn might have spoken about his imamate while he was still in his mother’s womb

Even if no fire touched it
Sīj: Fire stands for Imām Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq
Ja‘f: Even though the (previous) Imām had not yet appointed al-Ḥusayn as his successor

Light upon light
Sīj: Al-Qā‘im
Ja‘f: (Text is not clear)

It is obvious, thus, that differences in interpretation of the same verse between the two authors are quite striking. In his Asās al-ta‘wil, al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān quotes a tradition from Imām Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq. It states that one day the Imām, while he was explaining the ta‘wil of a certain verse, was confronted with a question from a listener saying that his ta‘wil on that particular day was different from the one given by him on a previous occasion. The Imām, thereupon, replied: ‘We can speak about a word in seven different ways.’ When the astounded questioner said, ‘Seven!’, the Imām retorted: ‘Yes, even seventy. If you ask us more we can increase it even more.’ Aspects of ta‘wil, that is, explanation and interpretation, therefore, al-Nu‘mān notes, depend on the rank (ḥadd) of its practitioner, the higher the rank, the higher the number of interpretations.71 It is clear from the above tradition that differences in interpretation by various authors are glossed over.

71 Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, Asās al-ta‘wil, 27.
based on Neoplatonism and Shi'i doctrine.

Ibn 'Arabi formulated a new synthesis of reason and revelation. In his treatise on the spatial order of the cosmos, which he calls 'philosophical architecture', he explained the relation between the sphere and the human being in the context of the Platonic and Aristotelian theories of the universe. His works have been influential in the development of Islamic philosophy and theology.

As for the present chapter, it discusses the concept of wisdom, which is central to Ibn 'Arabi's philosophy. Wisdom is seen as the ultimate form of knowledge,超越了理念与知识，是一种内在的智慧。It is a form of knowledge that is not acquired through study or experience, but is revealed to the seeker through a process of contemplation and meditation.