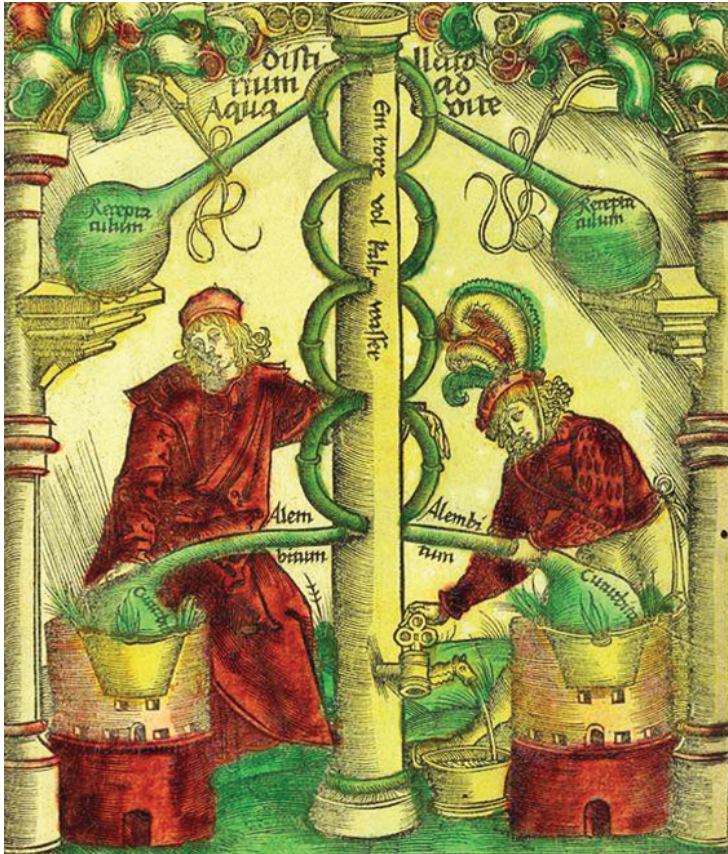


Islamic Alchemy and Moorish Science

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The Straight Balance

Islamic Alchemy and Moorish Science

Prologue: Alchemy as Moorish Science

We are told that alchemy arrived in ‘Latin Europe’ on Friday, the 11th February 1144, when Robert of Chester completed his translation of *De Compositione Alchemiae*. This manuscript allegedly consists of the teachings of the monk ‘Morienus’, as given to the Umayyid Prince Khalid ibn Yazid. According to legend, this shadowy figure assists Khalid in deciphering a cryptic manuscript describing the making of the philosopher’s stone, and then disappears into the desert.¹

As the inhabitants of Western Christendom came into contact with Islamic civilisation from the C 10th CE, they found libraries full of works by Ptolemy, Galen and Aristotle, as well as manuscripts describing entirely new sciences—including alchemy. Scholars travelled to Sicily and Jerusalem in search of new knowledge, and manuscripts to translate. But most of all, as in the case of Robert of Chester and his colleague Herman the Dalmatian, they travelled to the Moorish Kingdom of *Al Andalus*.² According to Sharif Anaël-Bey, the Caliphate of Cordoba was established in the C 8th by Moors from Mauritania, who ‘were the recipients and custodians of the ancient... mysteries of Egypt.’³

The *Holy Moorish Koran*, ‘divinely edited’ by Prophet Noble Drew Ali, declares that Moorish Americans were enslaved for forsaking their true nationality and must return to Islam, the religion of their forefathers. The text also contains a number of explicit alchemical references, to transmutation, sublimation and alchemical Sulphur (the ‘seed’ representing the human spirit). However, whilst the Caliphs of Cordoba may have been the inheritors of the mysteries of Egypt, Drew Ali derived

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1. Eberley (2004:10)
 2. Principe (2013: 51-2)
 3. Anaël-Bey (2013: 52)

most of the alchemical portions of the *Holy Moorish Koran* from the *Aquarian Gospel*, a New-Age Christian text from the turn of the C 20th.⁴ The *Gospel's* author may have been inspired by Victorian occultist writers, themselves drawing on Paracelsus or Agrippa. By the late Renaissance, any influence on European alchemy from Islamic Spain had been thoroughly 'occulted'.⁵ So there is no direct chain of transmission from *Al-Andalus* to Moorish Science, at least if we stick with the realm of historical evidence, rather than that of mythology and 'poetic facts'.

What follows is therefore not an attempt to uncover non-existent historical evidence, but rather a search for resonances and parallels between Moorish Teaching and Islamic alchemy. This is a modest attempt at 'returning' Moorish Science to its original sources of inspiration, however broken and fragmented the actual lines of historical transmission. The Arabic root meaning 'return,' gives us the terms for both 'repentance' (*tawba*) and 'hermeneutics' (*ta'wil*). Perhaps what follows is a very modest venture in hermeneutical interpretation in the guise of repentance for the appropriation of alchemical knowledge by the Fallen Europeans, from its original Moorish, Islamic, and ultimately Egyptian sources.

4. Wilson (1993:19)

5. Principe (2013:75)

The Wise Balance

Islamic Alchemy and Hermeneutics

Ibn 'Arabi defines alchemy as 'the science having as its object the measures and proportions bestowed upon... physical bodies and metaphysical concepts in the sensible and intelligible worlds'.¹ The emphasis on *measure* shows the influence of the mysterious Jâbir ibn Hayyân and their 'Science of the Balance' ('*ilm al-mizan*'). Jâbir may have been born in Kufa (modern Iraq) in 721 CE, may have moved in early proto-Ismâ'ili circles, may have been a disciple of Imam Ja'far al-Sâdiq before subsequently being forced into exile, or may never have existed at all, serving as a *nom-de-plume* or 'collective identity' for circles of Shi'a alchemists a century or so later.² Whoever Jâbir may or may not have been, we owe to them the beautiful metaphysical concept of a series of 'balances', oscillating between motion and rest, governing the whole of the created world.

In Jâbir's cosmology, there is a triad of hypostases or Divine emanations – First Cause, Intelligence and World Soul – lying above the Supreme Sphere, from which all substance originates, and which lies at the boundary of the intelligible world and the world of the senses. It is in this Sphere that the World Soul imparts geometric form to substance, and attaches to it the four fundamental *natures* – akin to the Aristotelean 'qualities' of hot, cold, wet and dry. So 'at the root of the generation of the corporeal world lay *the desire... of the Soul*'.³

Below the Supreme Sphere, the movement of the seven heavens and seven planets follows a strict mathematical ratio, which produces the 'music of the spheres.' This harmonious celestial motion affects all physical growth and development in the 'sublunar' realm, where all created things are governed by one overarching ratio, or

1. Ibn 'Arabi (2017: 31)

2. See Haq (1994: 3–32) for an extended discussion of the controversy surrounding Jâbir. See also Pierre Lory's Introduction to Corbin (2003: 9–22)

3. Haq (1994: 58), my emphasis.

proportion–1: 3: 5: 8.⁴ This ratio adds up to 17, which in ‘Jabirian’ alchemy serves as a fundamental number, performing a function similar to Planck’s constant in modern subatomic physics.⁵

This number governs the form taken by physical bodies and their equilibrium–bodies which do not conform to this ratio will simply dissolve or explode. There are many potential explanations for the origin of this particular number. In the encyclopaedia of the Ismaïli ‘Brethren of Purity’ (C 10th CE), there are 17 ‘epistles’ devoted to Physics–corresponding to seventeen adepts who are to be resurrected at the return of the Mahdi at the End of Time, each of whom will be given a letter of the Supreme Name of God.⁶ However, the most likely explanation relates to the ‘magic square’ of 15, which contains the numbers 1, 3, 5 and 8 (see fig.1 below). Jâbir actually makes an elliptical reference to this square in his *Book of the Balance*, in the context of magical talismans for assisting childbirth. This an example of Jâbir’s (in)famous technique of the ‘dispersal of knowledge’–the pieces of the puzzle are carefully scattered across many texts, and have to be pieced together by the would-be adept.⁷

4	9	2
3	5	7
8	1	6

Fig. 1: Magic Square of 15

4. Jâbir actually sees the 1: 3: 5: 8 ‘balance’ as a distorted form of a more perfect ratio governing the celestial world, 6: 8: 9: 12, the calculation of which was derived from Plato’s *Timaeus*. See Lory (2003: 144).

5. Principe (2013: 42)

6. Corbin (1986A:195)

7. For Jâbir’s discussion of the magic square see Berthelot (1893: 150). For the ancient Chinese antecedents of the magic square design, see Haq (1994: 205).

In the *Holy Moorish Koran* we also find a Balance governing God's relationship to creation. This follows the proportion 1: 3: 7. Noble Drew Ali teaches that God is 'one yet more than one'; an indivisible Unity manifesting as three eternal principles of Wisdom, Will and Love, and as seven creative spirits, or 'eyes of Allah'.⁸ So God is One, yet Three, yet Seven.

'One' could be interpreted as the *Prima Materia* or 'one thing' which alchemists sought as the starting material for the transmutation process—depending on the texts, this could be animal, vegetable, mineral or a purely ideal construct (pure 'substance'). The 'Three' could be interpreted as the three alchemical 'states' or principles; Sulphur (masculine, associated with fire and the Sun), Mercury (feminine, associated with water/the moon), and Salt (the neutral principle, associated with earth). The Seven could then be associated with the transformative operations carried out by the alchemist on the *Prima Materia*, by which they separated out and recombined the three 'states' which were understood as latent within it.⁹

In Moorish Science, creation unfolds on three successive planes—Spirit, or the Divine Mind, Soul, or the world of Archetypes, and Manifest (the physical plane).¹⁰ Accordingly, we can say that God is One in essence, Three in the realm of Ideas, and Seven in the material world. So, as the unitary Divine Principle descends toward the created world, it unfolds according to the proportion 1: 3: 7. This recalls the Noble Qur'an; 'We hold the store of every blessing and send it down in appropriate measure' (15: 21).

For Jâbir, the most perfect balance of all was the balance of the letters (*al 'ilm al-huruf*). The first use of letter-number correspondences to uncover layers of meaning within the Holy Qu'ran is associated with Jâbir's alleged spiritual master, Imam Ja'far al-Sâdiq, to whom is attributed the exegetical system known as *Jafr*. According to the Imam, '[t]he angels are peripheral, knowing only some of God's names, while man is central, knowing all His names.'¹¹ Jâbir constructs a logical argument to demonstrate that, because speech is part of the essential nature of human creatures, human language is therefore an 'intention of the soul.'

8. Najee-Ullah El (2014: 24–7)

9. Carl Jung gives an account of the alchemical operations in Jung (1968A:228–232).

10. Najee-Ullah El (2014: 4–5)

11. Eberley (2004: 14)

Because all acts of the soul are substantial, so *language is substance*. This implies that morphology, which studies the structure of words, resonates with physics, which studies the structure of things. Thus letter-number correspondences can reveal ‘an understanding of the real characteristics of natural objects.’¹² Just as there are 28 letters in the Arabic alphabet, so the four alchemical ‘natures’ (or qualities) can be divided into seven grades of intensity; degrees, grades, minutes, seconds, thirds, fourths and fifths. So each letter of the alphabet refers to an alchemical ‘nature’ at a specific level of intensity; for example *alif* is a ‘degree’ of hot, whilst *sîn* is a ‘second’ of dry. The grades in Jâbir’s system, and the way they are linked via a sextuagesimal progression (each unit is worth sixty units of the preceding one) are both derived from ancient astronomy. Jâbir wishes to give alchemy the infallibility of an exact science.¹³ However, we have seen above that it is the desire of the Soul which imparts form and nature to substance, leading to the creation of the corporeal, sensible world. So in attaching numbers to letters and natures, which are both ‘intentions of the soul’, the purpose of the Science of the Balance is to ‘measure the desire of the World Soul *as it is incorporated into each substance*.’¹⁴

Jâbir lays out the mathematical correspondences between the letters and the alchemical natures in his ‘Table of the Hidden Pearl’ in *The Book of the Balance*. He tells us ‘if you wish to know what nature a thing contains... you refer to the name which the conjunction of stars bestowed to it on the day of its birth... you will then know what heat, cold, dryness and humidity this thing contains.’¹⁵ The name is broken down into its root letters which are then assigned the appropriate numerical values—each grade of a nature is assigned a specific *weight*. However, the letter / number table only reveals the manifest (*zahîr*) nature of a substance, but not its hidden (*batîn*) inner nature. Every metal ‘contains within itself another metal of opposite constitution.’¹⁶ So lead (cold and dry) contains gold (hot and moist). The ‘Table of the Hidden Pearl’ shows the alchemist how much of each ‘nature’ must be added or removed from a metal to yield its (hidden) opposite. Thus

12. Haq (1994: 81)

13. Haq (1994: 67)

14. Corbin (2003: 180)

15. Berthelot (1893: 159)

16. Haq (1994: 96)

the task of the alchemist is to *make manifest what is latent*—this is the essence of alchemical transmutation. As such, alchemy is akin to Qur’anic hermeneutics or *ta’wil*, which shares its Arabic root with *tawba* or repentance—both signify *returning* to an original meaning or nature. Therefore, the balance not only governs the proportions of substances within bodies, but also reveals the relationships between visible and invisible worlds. A central principle of Ismaïli gnosis is that, ‘the visible aspect of a being presupposes its equilibration by an invisible and celestial counterpart.’¹⁷

This connection between alchemy and hermeneutics explains why it is the prophet Joseph who watches over the balances governing the four elements (Fire, Air, Water, Earth) which, along with the four natures, are the keystone of the Great Work. Joseph is the Prophet most closely associated with *active imagination*, as he is ‘past master in the art of interpreting dreams.’ Through oneric visions, as related in *Genesis*, Joseph has revealed to him the balance between inner meanings and outward appearances; ‘years [of famine and of plenty] under the appearance of cattle’ (*Genesis* 41: 2–3). Ibn ‘Arabi assigns Joseph to the rulership of the Third Heaven, associated with the planet Venus.¹⁸

Perhaps coincidentally, the ‘Third Heaven’ also refers to the Adept Chamber of the Moorish Science Temple of America, which is alone entrusted with the name of the First Physical Man.¹⁹ In Moorish Science, *ta’wil* can be related to the concept of ‘everlasting Gospel.’ This refers to underlying cosmic patterns or archetypes, which reveal themselves through historical events—such as the Egyptian Famine—related in holy texts such as the Torah or Qu’ran. These archetypes connect ‘the farthest reaches of the cosmos and the deepest and most primordial levels of human consciousness,’ meeting in real-time experience. As cosmic patterns can be represented by number, so letter-number systems can allow us to see words as ‘cosmic/psychic energetic process[es]’ and letters as components of those processes.²⁰

17. Corbin, Henry (1986: 56)

18. Ibn ‘Arabi (2017: 43)

19. ‘Koran Questions for Moorish-Americans’ (Questions: 55–56) in Najee Ullah-El (2014: 143)

20. Anaël-Bey, Sharif (2013: 11–12)

The Sister of Prophecy

The C 13th Iranian alchemist Aydamor Jaldakî reports the reply of the First Imam, ‘Alî ibn ‘Abî Tâlib, when he was asked whether alchemy really existed or was mere conjecture. ‘Alî is said to have closed his eyes and lowered his head for a moment, and then replied; ‘you are in fact asking me about the sister of prophecy, and that which accounts for the whole of human nobility... there is no tree, nor clump of earth, nor any other thing that does not originate [from Alchemy].’¹ The Imam’s reply is reminiscent of Paracelsus many centuries later, for whom the formation of plants and minerals and the cycle of rain through air, land and sea, were inherently ‘chymical’ processes.² Jâldakî traces the root of the term ‘prophecy’ (*nobowwa*) to the terms for ‘announcing’ (*al-naba*) and ‘informing’ (*al-inbâ*). He cites God instructing Adam; ‘O announce to them [the Angels] the names [of these beings]’ (Qur’an 2: 31). This suggests not simply a naming, but a *bringing into being*—in Henry Corbin’s words, a passage from the ‘interior logos’ (potentiality) to the ‘exterior logos’ (actuality).³ Both alchemy and prophecy are forms of *thaumaturgy* (‘miracle working’) involving ‘Signs, and things which break the [ordinary] course of events.’⁴

For Jâbir ibn Hayyan, alchemy is Divine wisdom transmitted to the prophets by direct contact with the intelligible world. Lost by the children of Adam, the ‘Divine Science’ was rediscovered by Moses and Abraham, to whom Jâbir attributes the elliptical phrase ‘the Work is contained in an Egg which is not an Egg.’ This is a reference to the ‘Philosopher’s Egg’ or alchemical vessel, which Jung understood as a symbol for the *anima mundi*, as transparent glass represents solidified

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1. Corbin (2003: 31)
 2. Principe (2013: 128)
 3. Corbin (2003: 57, n.12)
 4. Corbin (2003: 37)

air, synonymous with spirit.⁵ In Imam ‘Ālī’s reported remarks on alchemy, he speaks of an ‘unmoving’ air likewise associated with *rûh* (spirit) and *nafs* (soul).⁶

Jâldakî describes alchemy as Prophecy’s ‘companion’, in the same way that burning embers accompany a lit flame—this is a reference to the Qur’an; ‘God is the light of the Heavens and the Earth! His light can be compared to a niche in which is found a lamp’ (24: 35).⁷ This verse is usually taken to refer to the Prophet Muhammad, and to his ‘spirit’ or ‘logos’ (*rûh muhammadi*) from which all historical prophets drew inspiration—as his spirit existed from before creation, when Adam was ‘between water and clay.’ For Jâbir, the inheritors of the ‘lighted niche’ include a number of (real or supposed) Ancient alchemists, including Zosimos, Pythagoras and Socrates. Bestowing the rank of prophet on these Hellenic and Egyptian ancestors serves ‘to ensure the spiritual and scriptural legitimacy of ancient alchemy and to make it into a fully Islamic science.’⁸ In his commentary on *The Book of Seven Statues*, Jaldakî reinforces this sense of continuity by referring to its author, Apollonius of Tyana, as the *râwî* of the ‘Prophet Socrates.’ This is a term used to refer to named individuals who act as ‘links’ in a chain of transmission (*isnad*) which certifies the authenticity of a *hadith* of the prophet Muhammad.⁹ The prophets transmit Hermetic Wisdom through a chain of initiates, consisting of ‘Gates’ (*abwâb*) ‘Proofs’ (*hujaj*) and ‘Scientists’ (*‘ulamâ*). For a would-be alchemist, obtaining knowledge of the Great Work requires not only prayer, ritual purification, fasting and retreats into the desert. It also requires initiation from an authentic master who has received instruction from the tradition of the Imams. However, through a dream or vision, the apprentice may also seek initiation directly from the Imam of the Time in person. In this latter case, the alchemist’s

5. For Alchemical phrases attributed to Abraham and Jesus, see Lory (2003: 54). For the alchemical vessel as symbolising the World Soul, see Jung (1968B:197–8)

6. Corbin (2003: 46)

7. Corbin (2003: 57)

8. Lory (2003: 59)

9. Corbin (2003: 88)

earthly teacher simply serves as a guide, leading the adept towards ‘one of those initiatory experiences in the “space” of the *mundus imaginalis* of which the history of Islamic theosophy... gives us many examples.’¹⁰

Haydar Amoli (1320–1385) a student of Ibn ‘Arabi,¹¹ places the seven great prophets of Islamic tradition—from Abraham to Muhammad—at the centre of a great cosmic ‘balance’ of astronomical, theosophical and psychogeographic correspondences. Each cycle of prophecy begins with a prophet and their revelation—a *Book*—the esoteric sense of which is then revealed by the prophet’s ‘spiritual heir’ or *Imam*; ‘the Book is a silent Imam, the Imam is the Book speaking, because he proclaims its *ta’wil*, its hermeneutic.’¹² Twelve Imams then succeed each other before the coming of the next prophet. In the final cycle, inaugurated by Muhammad, these correspond to the twelve Imams of ‘orthodox’ Shi’ism, culminating in the hidden Imam, who went into occultation in AH 329 / 941 CE. The prophets and Imams can be seen as the ‘invisible pillars’ of the spiritual universe, as the cosmic *Anthropos* is the ‘pillar’ of the physical universe.¹³

The seven historical prophets are related to the seven ‘wandering stars’ (the planets) and the Imams are related to the twelve ‘castles’ of the ninth celestial sphere—the signs of the Zodiac. As the signs of the Zodiac ‘house’ the planets; ‘[so] each prophet had his twelve Imams, spiritual dwelling of the religion revealed by him.’¹⁴ The Imams of each historical prophet mark the ‘stages’ of unfolding, of interpretation, of the revealed religion—of the Book the prophet has brought.

It is important to understand that the seven Epochs of prophecy are not connected in a linear historical sequence—the prophets and Imams of one cycle are not the ‘causes’ of those in the later cycles. Rather the figures in each cycle are ‘homologues’ of those in the other cycles, instantiations or personifications of the same cosmic

10. Lory (2003: 80)

11. Again in an imaginal sense, as the Sheikh ul-Akhbar died in 1240 CE.

12. Corbin (1986: 73)

13. Corbin (1986: 86)

14. Corbin, (1986: 55–116)

archetypes. Thus what appears as a temporal succession is in fact *spatial simultaneity*—each epoch is a circle, cycle or ‘cupola’; a term which Amoli derives from the *hadith*, ‘*my friends are beneath my tabernacles*.’¹⁵

Amoli illustrates his commentary of Ibn ‘Arabi’s *Bezels of Wisdom* with a series of diagrams in which the Imams and prophets of each epoch are represented within concentric circles, demonstrating their correspondences with each other, with the planets, the Zodiac and the intelligible and archetypal worlds (*Jabarut* and *Malakut*). These ‘hieroglyphs’, insofar as they reveal hidden correspondences cutting across historical time, ‘illustrate an application of the Science of the Balance to sacred history.’¹⁶ The earlier cycles of prophecy can be seen as the ‘occulted’ (*batîn*) counterparts of the last cycle, in which the Muhammadan spirit immanent in all of them is made manifest (*zahîr*).

THE SEVEN HEAVENS	THE SEVEN PROPHETS (IBN ‘ARABI)	THE SEVEN PROPHETS (AMOLI)	THE SEVEN SUPREME NAMES (AMOLI)
Moon	Adam	Muhammad	The Knowing (<i>al-Alim</i>)
Mercury	Jesus	Jesus	The Seeing (<i>al-Basir</i>)
Venus	Joseph	David	The Hearing (<i>as-Sami</i>)
Sun	Idris	Moses	The Speaking (<i>al-Mutakallim</i>)
Mars	Aaron	Abraham	The Powerful (<i>al-Qadir</i>)
Jupiter	Moses	Noah	The Willing (<i>al-Murid</i>)
Saturn	Abraham	Adam	The Living (<i>al-Hayy</i>)

Figure 2: Adapted from Henry Corbin, *Temple and Contemplation* (1986) p 70

For Amoli, as for his teacher Ibn ‘Arabi, the seven great prophets can be seen as the forms of manifestation of the ‘seven angels ecstatic with love’, who are the theophanic forms of the divine names. This Angelic Heptad is crowned by the Angel *Nun*, who dictates the Divine Knowledge to the Angel holding the Divine Quill (*Kalam*), who inscribes it on a celestial table patterned after the 360-degree course of the heavens. The angels

15. Corbin (1986: 61)

16. Corbin (1986: 59)

and prophets can then be associated with a series of other 'heptads' – the seven planets, but also the seven climates, the seven earths, the seven degrees of hell, and the seven days of the week.¹⁷

The association of the seven prophets and seven angels with the seven 'leading names' of God, suggests an evocative parallel with Moorish Science. In Moorish tradition, the seven names have been associated with the seven Elohim or 'Seven Eyes of Allah', who are the source of all manifest creation.¹⁸ As each of the Elohim is related to the creation of a different etheric plane, so are they each associated with a different sound and colour related to that plane's specific level of vibration. And as with Amoli's prophets and angels, each of the Elohim is associated with a specific planet.

In the hundred and sixty-seventh chapter of his 'Meccan Revelations' (*Kitâb al-Fotûhât al-Makkiyâ*), Ibn 'Arabi also assigns seven prophets to the seven celestial heavens, although his attributions are slightly different from those given by Amoli (see fig. 2 above). In Ibn 'Arabi's account, the seven planets and the prophets associated with each of them mark the stages of a mystical ascent through the heavens. At each level, the prophets guide the inner 'alchemical' transformation of the adept as, in Moorish tradition, the Elohim can be understood as guides in the spiritual ascent towards the higher planes of existence.¹⁹ The Shaikh's account of the journey of two 'pilgrims' through the Seven Heavens evokes the 'Night Journey' of the Prophet Muhammad when he ascended from Jerusalem borne by the Divine winged mule Buraq. This journey is alluded to by the verse; 'Glory be to Him who made His servant go by night from the Sacred Temple to the farther Temple... that we might show him some of our signs' (Qur'an 16: 1).

17. Corbin (1986: 69)

18. Anaël Bey (2013: 18)

19. Anaël Bey (2013: 30)

The Straight Balance and the Resurrection Body

The ultimate inspiration for the entire Science of the Balance is the Qu'ranic verse '*we will establish the balances on the Day of the Resurrection*' (21: 47). Underlying the correspondences between manifest and latent, visible and invisible, form and essence, is the balance of *light and darkness*—in other words, of Good and Evil—to be reckoned and weighed on the Last Day.¹ It is written, 'weigh with even scales and do not cheat others of what is rightly theirs, nor corrupt the land with evil' (Qur'an 17: 181–2). For the Ismaili Brethren of Purity, this was the 'Straight Balance' associated with Divine Justice—the work of the Imam of the Resurrection (*Qa'im*) for whom they were faithfully waiting.²

Jaldakî says that alchemical gnosis contains both the secret of the 'return'—in the sense of the Day of Judgement—and the secret of the 'return of spirits to bodies.' This is a reference to the process of sublimation and coagulation, whereby the 'spirit' and 'body' of a metal are separated and then reunited at a higher level—creating a 'spiritualised body.'³ Jâbir observes in the *Book of Mercy* that this process produces a substance intermediate between body and spirit, with the fixity, 'eternal duration' and resistance to fire of the former, but the subtlety, lightness and ability to penetrate physical substances of the latter. This spiritualised body truly combines the spiritual and material, rather than simply juxtaposing them—therefore it is indivisible and cannot be destroyed. As such, the spiritual body can be compared 'to the dead, who God will resuscitate on the day of the last judgement.'⁴ As the body which has undergone sublimation is intermediate between matter and spirit, so Ahmad Ahsa'i—C 18th founder of the Sheikhi School—attributes the 'resurrection body' to the 'world of *Hûrqalyā*' which is intermediate

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1. Corbin (1986: 78)
 2. Corbin (1986A: 196)
 3. Corbin (2003: 58)
 4. Berthelot (1893: 183)

between this world and the world of the Angels (*Malakut*). This purified physical body will clothe the 'I-spirit' on the Day of Judgement, and is the form in which human souls will enter either Hell or Paradise.

In a sense, this 'essential' body is latent within the coarser, 'elemental' body which serves as our 'garment' in the everyday physical world, in the same way that diamond can be said to be latent within glass. In another sense, just like diamonds compared to non-precious stones, it is of another order of being entirely. The physical body disappears upon death, and the 'I-spirit' first enters the afterlife in a temporary 'astral body'. On the first sounding of the Trumpet by the Angel Seraphiel on the Last Day, the astral body disappears, and the Spirit is dissolved into its component parts—*prima materia*, soul, perfect nature, *pneuma* (breath) and intellect. After a period of 'four hundred years', a second blast of the Trumpet—the Breath of the Great Awakening—'propels' the parts of the I-spirit back together with the essential body which arises from its 'tomb' in the world of *Hūrqlyā* 'like a mushroom from its humus'.⁵

Implicit in the writings of Jābir ibn Hayyān is the idea that the adept need not await either death or the Last Judgement to inhabit a 'spiritual body' with which to journey to the 'land of *Hūrqlayā*'. In a number of places in his work, he makes reference to the science of the artificial generation of human beings.⁶ This could be interpreted as a reference to 'spiritual death' or 'second birth'—the use of the 'Supreme Elixir' as a means of creating the perfect balance between the soul and its 'subtle body'. The soul then becomes independent of the physical, 'gross' body, and acquires 'a supernatural capacity for perception at all levels'.⁷ In the *Holy Moorish Koran*, Jesus teaches that 'man is not the body, not the soul, he is spirit and part of Allah'. Sharif Anaël Bey interprets this to mean that we are beings of light not bound by time and space. This echoes Shaikh Ahsa'i's famous observation that spirits and bodies are simply different states of 'light-being', and the difference between them is the same as the difference between 'water and snow'.⁸ If matter and energy are simply different phases of the same process, Anaël-Bey

5. Ahsa'i (1977: 218)

6. Haq (1994: 68)

7. Lory (2003: 162)

8. Anaël-Bey (2013: 19); Ahsa'i (1977: 203)

continues, then it is possible to transform the physical substance of the body, creating an energetic, 'noble' body, which can survive outside it and explore other 'realms' of consciousness. This 'body of light' can then continue its existence after physical death.

Depending on the level of 'energetic charge' created through this transformation, the adept might be able to choose their next physical incarnation 'or leave the cycle of incarnation altogether'.⁹

Jābir's 'extremist' Shi'a cosmology also makes reference to a cycle of reincarnation, necessary to purify human souls from the corruption of the physical world—the world of 'mixture'. As matter in the alchemist's laboratory must go through repeated calcination and distillation, so the soul must go through life death and rebirth; in some alchemical manuscripts, the terms 'reincarnation' and 'distillation' are in fact synonymous. Eventually the soul will recover its pure, 'prelapsarian' form—from this point it is spared the need for further physical reincarnation, and no longer risks 'descending' into plants or animals. However, the soul has then only begun its journey, as it must go through further multiple transformations, before it can acquire a rank corresponding to the lowest level of the spiritual hierarchy of Shi'a Islam.¹⁰

Deliverance from the physical world requires encountering the Imam, contemplating him and following his commands. This encounter is *imaginal*—taking place in the 'world of *Hūrqalyā*' rather than the material realm. In the *Book of Royalty*, Jābir directly equates the alchemical *elixir*, which is 'easily fusible' and 'penetrates all bodies', with the person of the Imam.¹¹ The Elixir is a perfectly balanced substance, whose elements are 'spiritualised', it is not only incorruptible, but capable of healing 'corrupt'

9. Anaël-Bey (2013: 21)

10. Lory (2003: 69)

11. Berthelot (1893: 127)

metals, and transforming them into gold and silver—‘as is the Imam amongst men.’¹² Thus the Imam can affect the adept’s ‘transmutation’, bringing about the ‘second birth’ into a new ‘spiritualised body’.

Jâbir sees the essence of both the Imam and the alchemical Elixir as lying in the combination of ‘cold and humid’ with ‘hot and dry’ natures—that is, of water with fire.¹³ Fire and water symbolically function as *mediators* between the physical and spiritual worlds—in the same way, the Imam takes human form but cannot be considered to be an ordinary human being.¹⁴ This is borne out by Jâbir’s Imamology, where the salvific function of the Imam is in fact undertaken collectively by a ‘*pleroma*’ of fifty-five ‘celestial persons’ or *ashkhâs*. This number corresponds to the total number of celestial spheres in ancient Greek astronomy.¹⁵ As we have seen, astronomical measurement also inspired Jâbir’s grading of the intensity of the four qualities, or ‘natures’. As the *ashkhâs* are ‘subtle entities’, so each ‘person’ in the hierarchy can take on a multiplicity of forms across time and space, each rank or ‘station’ can be assumed by multiple individuals at the same time, or all fifty-five *ashkhâs* can form one ‘person’.¹⁶

Once an adept has broken the cycle of reincarnation, then they can begin to ascend the fifty-five ‘stations’ of the *pleroma*—although this occurs after death, how far the adept ascends depends on their spiritual progress whilst they were still in the material world.¹⁷ In the sensible world, the fifty-five ‘persons’ guide human souls out of the cycle of reincarnation and towards the ‘degree of entry’ to the *pleroma*. They also guide those in ‘stations’ beneath them in the celestial hierarchy so that they can arise to higher grades.¹⁸

12. Lory (2003: 84)

13. Berthelot (1893: 137)

14. Lory (2003: 67)

15. Lory (2003: 73)

16. *ibid.*

17. Lory (2003: 80)

18. Lory (2003: 81)

All of the persons in different 'stations' in the *pleroma* 'point towards' the Imam of the Resurrection (*Qa'im*) in the sense that they aspire to the condition of Perfect Human Being. In Isma'ili eschatology, the *Qa'im* closes seven cycles of prophecy, each with seven Imams—these are intended to enact the 'return' of the Cosmic Adam' to the rank of Third Intelligence, after his 'fall' to the tenth rank of emanation, in an epic cosmic drama which the whole of human history serves to 'correct' or redeem.¹⁹ We have seen above the potential connections between the seven Prophets, seven Divine Names, and the 'Seven Eyes of Allah' of Moorish Science. Here, the succession of cycles patterned by the number seven suggests the 'Circle Seven' which adorns the *Holy Moorish Koran*, and which is evoked at the opening and closing of all Temple meetings, according to the *Divine Constitution and By-Laws*.²⁰



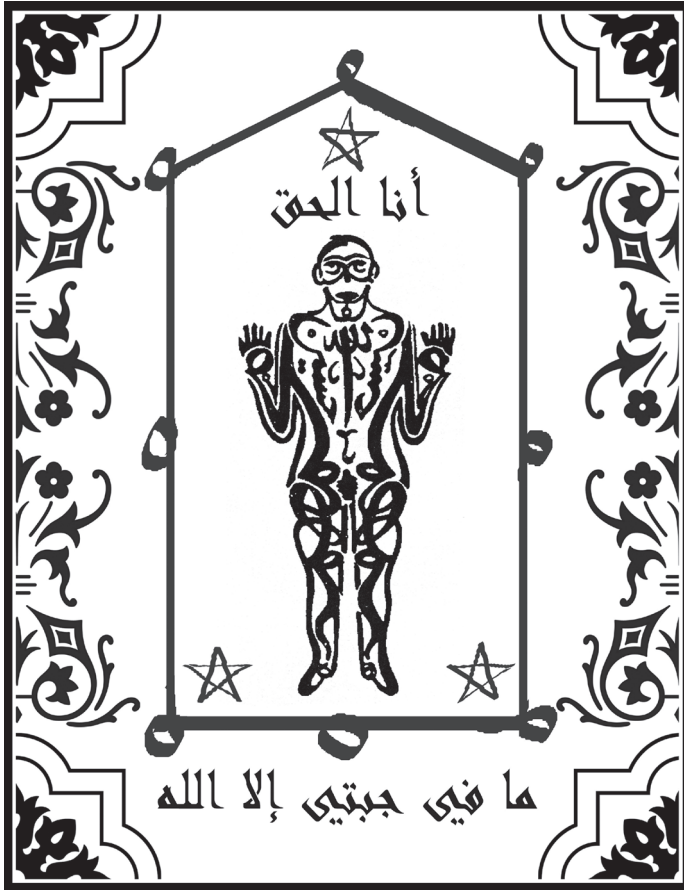
As to the identity of the *Qa'im* or 'Resurrector', who closes the seven cycles of seven, Jâbir gives us no direct indication. He was aiming at a fundamental transformation of humanity in which the disputes over dynastic succession which had divided the different branches of Shi'a Islam played only a secondary role. So the *Qa'im* may not be a specific individual in one of the lines of hereditary descent from 'Ali.²¹ And as we have seen, the *pleroma* consists of 'subtle entities' who, under certain

19. Corbin (1986A: 132–6)

20. Najee-Ullah El (2014: 154). For an extensive discussion of the symbolism of 'Circle Seven' in Moorish Science, see Anaël-Bey (2013: 32–4)

21. Lory (2003: 87)

conditions, can *take on the form of one single person*. This suggests that, at the end of a long process of cosmic evolution, when all the souls capable of making the ascent have assumed their stations in the *pleroma*, they will collectively form the Imam of the Resurrection, in the form of ‘Universal man, and Omega Point of all creation.’²²



²² Lory (2003: 120)

Epilogue

The Orphan, the Glorious One and the Uplifting of Fallen Humanity

Jâbir's hierarchy of fifty-five *ashkhâs* includes the rank of Orphan (*Yatîm*).¹ This mysterious figure has no leadership role, and no public function; Jâbir states that s/he is 'veiled, out of the sight of everyone except the Imam.' The Orphan is listed as occupying the twentieth 'station' in the pleroma—however, this apparently low rank may be a matter of 'appearance', rather than 'essence'. The Orphan would appear to be the same 'person' as Jâbir's 'Glorious One' (*Majid*), who he associates with Salmân the Persian, one of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad.

Salmân is, according to tradition, the son of a Persian Knight, who wanders from town to town in search of a spiritual guide, before encountering the Prophet Muhammad at Mecca and converting to Islam. As Salmân, with roots in both Zoroastrianism and Christianity, helped show the Prophet the scriptural antecedents of his revelations, so he is closely associated with spiritual hermeneutics (*ta'wil*). However, whilst Salmân is a figure of 'spiritual exile', he nonetheless has a physical, historical connection to the Prophet's House.

In contrast, the Glorious One is a self-initiate, a 'spiritual adoptee' whose connection with the Imam is beyond the physical plane, taking place in the 'imaginal space' of the Pleroma and the land of *Hûrqalyâ*. Thus, Henry Corbin associates the figure of the Majid with a 'personal spiritual hermeneutic' (*ta'wil shakhsî*). The figure of the Glorious symbolises all those who wish to undertake Salmân's spiritual journey, yet live it in their own way, as 'an Event which... is every time *something more*.'² To establish the symbolic importance of the Glorious One, Jâbir undertakes a complex analysis of the name *Majid*, by means of the 'balance of the

1. The reference to orphans may be intended to evoke the Qur'anic verse; 'Did he not find you [O Muhammad] an orphan and gave you shelter...' (93: 6). However, for Jâbir, Âli actually has precedence over the Prophet, as he represents the inner, esoteric meaning of the Law which Muhammad enunciates (Lory, 2003: 93)

2. Corbin (2003: 201)

letters.' As the Arabic letters of the name give equal weight to dryness (the letter *Jim*) and moisture (the letter *Dāl*), so the Glorious One thus represents the alchemical 'co-incidence of opposites'; 'darkness and light, humidity and dryness, *aqua* and *ignis*.'³ The Orphan is a mediating 'fourth term', completing the triad of archetypal figures of mystical Shi'a Islam; 'Ali, Muhammad and Salmân. Such a 'quaternity' might have a number of symbolic associations, including the four alchemical elements.

The Orphan / Glorious is not only a symbol of self-enlightenment, but also a teacher, a 'substitute' (*na'ib*) who has reached 'such a degree in gnosis' that they can teach in the place of the Imam.⁴ The critical role of the Orphan's teaching lies in the fact that, for Jâbir, freeing all the souls capable of initiation from the cycle of reincarnation requires a 'restoration and diffusion of the sciences', a goal shared by the writers of the Rosicrucian Manifestoes nearly six-hundred years later.⁵ This underlines the importance of Jâbir's own Corpus of writings, which he often presents as a form of 'miracle', which is 'itself possessed of a prophetic character.'⁶ Whilst Jâbir does not explicitly hold up his personal role in the 'diffusion of the sciences' as proof that *he himself* is the Orphan, it is not hard to draw such a conclusion. This is especially true if we accept traditional accounts of his life, in which he is forced into a clandestine underground existence, due to religious and political persecution.

However, Jâbir does explicitly insist that if the reader of his famously impenetrable writings can piece together the alchemical secrets deliberately 'dispersed' through hundreds of separate manuscripts; 'then you would be as *Jâbir 'ibn Hayyân himself*.'⁷ This might 'solve' the mystery of the identity of Jâbir ibn Hayyân, by suggesting there is no mystery to be solved. Whether there was a historical 'person' named Jâbir is unimportant. Rather, the figure of Jâbir / Orphan / Glorious One is an *archetype* to be reinvented and re-enacted by a succession of adepts

3. Corbin (2003: 182)

4. Lory (2003: 88)

5. Lory (2003: 106)

6. Lory (2003: 111)

7. Corbin (2003: 184)

working out their personal gnosis. Corbin comments; 'there may have been a College, or a succession of authors, as many as one wishes; *the list may not even be closed*.'⁸

Sometime between 1912 and 1913, the Prophet Noble Drew Ali is said to have had a dream in which he was ordered to found a religion for the 'uplifting of fallen humanity.' In Chapter 1 of the *Holy Moorish Koran*, this 'uplifting' is equated with the human spirit, or 'seed', overcoming its body of flesh and the temptations of the material world, to ascend through the soul plane and finally 'attain unto the blessedness of perfectness and be at one with Allah.'⁹

According to tradition, Noble Drew Ali was born on the 8th January 1886, a 'child of ex-slaves, among the Cherokee Indians—*who are said to have adopted him*.'¹⁰ He is said to have worked as a merchant seaman, as a magician in a travelling circus, and as a railway expressman, before journeying to the Orient—possibly the land of *Hūrqalyā*? Here he was initiated in the Pyramid of Cheops, before encountering Sultan Abdelaziz in Mecca—holy site of the Ka'ba, whose Black Stone is, on some accounts, the alchemical Red Sulphur, tarnished from its sojourn in the material world.¹¹

In this short, possibly legendary, biography, the attentive reader will recognise the 'tell-tale signs'; adoption as a symbol of spiritual election, the journey (possibly between worlds) in search of gnosis, and the mission to free souls from the material plane, bestowed in a dream. Is the story of Noble Drew Ali, that 'Event which is every time something more', the reappearance of the Orphan archetype on the earthly plane? And if so, is it to be the last, or is 'the list not yet closed'? Jābir stressed that his writings had emerged in a time of decadence, when the ancient alchemical wisdom was no longer clearly understood. This was not just a 'difficult period', but rather 'one of those moments of cosmic disorder preceding a millenarian shift.'¹² Could the same be said about our current epoch of

8. Corbin (2003: 207), my emphasis.

9. Najee Ullah El (2014: 6)

10. Wilson, (1993: 15)

11. For Noble Drew Ali's itinerary, see Wilson (1993: 16). For traditional accounts of the Black Stone of the Ka'ba as the Red Sulphur, see Eberley (2004: 54–55)

12. Lory (2003: 114)

global pandemics, climate emergency and rising authoritarianism? What does it mean, in these times, to embody the archetypes of the Orphan and Glorious One—seeking to uplift fallen humanity and to ‘mend the broken wires and... connect them with the higher powers’?¹³

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17th May 6733



13. Najee Ullah El (2014: 197)

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