

development. The shortcomings of this fine study make us realize to what extent the systematic study of *kalām* texts still is in the early stages of its development.

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MOHAMMAD ALI AMIR-MOEZZI:

*The Spirituality of Shi'i Islam.*

xxii, 585 pp. London: I.B. Tauris in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2011. £39.50. ISBN 978 1 84511 738 2.

doi:10.1017/S0041977X12000158

There is little doubt that Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi is one of the leading figures in the academic study of (Twelver) Shii Islam and the volume under review, which collects together a number of his articles published in the last two decades, cements this reputation. It is a translation, sponsored by the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London (and one hopes they do the same for his newer collection of articles *Le Coran silencieux et le Coran parlant*), of *La religion discrète* published in Paris by Vrin in 2006. Amir-Moezzi's contribution to the field was already clear in his earlier volume *Le guide divin dans le shi'isme original: Aux sources de l'ésoterisme en Islam* (published in Paris in 1992 and translated and published in English in 1994). In that pioneering work, he furthered the insight of the late Henry Corbin who had also taught in Paris that the Shii tradition constitutes the esotericism *par excellence* of Islam. His intervention in the field was founded upon a critique of two types of interest and development within the study of Shii Islam in the wake of the Iranian Revolution of 1979. The first was the insistence of present-minded concern with Shiism (which continues even today with the containment strategies towards Iran and the panic over the "Shii crescent") that understood the faith to be essentially an oppositional religion of protest – and in that sense, the recent contribution of Hamid Dabashi (*Shi'ism: A Religion of Protest*, Harvard University Press, 2011) represents continuity with such a reading. The second was the tendency within twentieth-century and earlier Shii reformist thought that was fundamentally embarrassed by the supra-rational elements of much of the classical Shii tradition and insisted upon a rationalizing reading of the faith. Hence the philosophical and theological notion of reason as a tool for discernment was used to render the *'aql* of the early texts while Amir-Moezzi argued that the term was better rendered as a "hiéro-intelligence", a sacred ability divinely bestowed upon the human better to understand the spiritual leadership of the Imams of the Prophet's household and to recognize God.

Amir-Moezzi's reinterpretation of the study of the classical Twelver Shii tradition systematically turned the prevailing orthodoxy in the field upside down: it was not the rationalizing tendency of the Baghdad theologians such as al-Shaykh al-Mufid (d. 1022) and the subsequent rational (Mu'tazilite) tradition that developed the intellectual disciplines of Shii learned culture in conformity with and convergence to the development of Sunni learning in law and theology that represented the essence of Shiism but rather it was the supra-natural and supra-rational doctrines about the absolute and almost divine qualities of the Imams, often dismissed as theological extremism (*ghulūw*) that was the heart of the tradition as a discipline of arcana, of the marginalized and happy few who kept the difficult faith with the family of the Prophet. At the heart of the debate was the very nature of the Imams: were

they privileged rational jurists and theologians, the pious scholars (*'ulamā' abrār*) of the reformist tradition represented in the modern period by thinkers such as Shaykh Muḥammad al-Khālīṣī, Ḥaydar 'Alī Qalamdārān and more recently 'Abdol-Karim Soroush and Mohsen Kadivar, or were they the face of God on earth, the *deus revelatus*?

Amir-Moezzi's intellectual project has therefore been one of reorienting the study of Shii Islam towards a serious consideration of the esoteric nature of Imamology prevalent in the earliest *ḥadīth* collections such as *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt* of al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī (d. 290/903), which predates the "canonical" four books of al-Kulaynī, al-Ṣadūq and al-Tūsī, and the earliest exegeses such as that attributed to 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī (fl. 307/919), and secondarily tracing this tendency within later traditions of what nowadays is known as *walāya takwīnīya*, the authority and cosmological power that the Imams hold and wield over the creation, associated with Safavid thinkers such as Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī (d. 1635), and the Shaykhīya from the nineteenth century. This concern with the Iranian *ḥikmat* tradition in itself is a continuation of Corbin's esoteric reading of the later Shii tradition. It would have been a useful addition to the volume under review to have included some other articles which make Amir-Moezzi's method clearer, such as his piece in *Studia Islamica* in 1997 on the criteria for studying the authenticity of *ḥadīth* in the Shii tradition and its implications for juristic authority, and his article on al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī in *Journal Asiatique* earlier in the 1990s. The question of method is absolutely central to any assessment of Amir-Moezzi, not least because the reading of the classical Shii tradition that one gauges from Hossein Modarressi's (reformist) *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shi'ite Islam* (Darwin Press, 1993) is quite different. As Robert Gleave has commented in a recent article, the debate between Modarressi and Amir-Moezzi mirrors the perennial internal Shii debate between moderation/shortcoming (*taqṣīr*) and authenticity/extremism (*ghulūw*).

The fourteen chapters (the number itself has significance for the Twelver Shia) of the volume are divided into four sections on: the early emergence of the tradition; the nature of the Imam; the spiritual practice of Shii Islam; and eschatology. Each piece is a wonderfully executed *tour-de-force* based on a careful reading of the relevant texts. As such, they encompass the various aspects of the notion of *walāya* that lies at the heart of Shii thought: the status of the Imams as *walī*, the devotion and intercessionary relationship that believers have with them, and the role of the Imams at the beginning of time and at the folding up of the cosmos at the end of time. It is therefore not insignificant that the pivotal chapter is the one discussing the very notion of *walāya* in Shii thought. Overall, the volume is essential reading for anyone interested in Shii Islam.

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PERSIS BERLEKAMP:

*Wonder, Image, and Cosmos in Medieval Islam.*

xi, 220 pp. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011. £45. ISBN 978 030017060 3.

doi:10.1017/S0041977X1200016X

The research presented in this book is based mainly upon the analysis of five illustrated *'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt wa-gharā'ib al-mawjūdāt* manuscripts made between