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Of love and longing : a study of Ayatollah Khomeini's mystical poetry and its reception in Iran and abroad

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Ayatollah Khomeini, the Shiite Philosopher and his Panegyric Poems (*qasides*)

Ayatollah Khomeini wrote four panegyric poems (*qasides*), each with a specific religious subject, in the early 1920s when he was a student in the city of Qom. The first *qaside* from 1922, is a 44-couplet poem called “Praise on the two bright Lights, Fâteme Zahrâ and Fâteme Ma’sume, may God Bless them”. It is dedicated to Fâteme Ma’sume (d. 816/817), patron of the city of Qom, whose shrine in the city is a major centre of pilgrimage.⁴²¹ The *qaside* is full of theological and mystical themes and motifs referring to gnostic knowledge, mystical perfection, the ‘Mohammadan light’ and other themes central to Islamic mysticism, such as prophethood and sainthood. *Qaside* II also dates from 1922 and is called “The Expected Spring.” It consists of 46 couplets and describes the celebrations surrounding the birthday of the twelfth Shiite Imam, Mohammad Mahdi. *Qaside* III “On the Praise of the Guardian of the Age (*Vali-ye ‘Asr*),” dates from 1923 and is also dedicated to the Mahdi. It consists of 44 couplets. *Qaside* IV, composed in 1924, is called ‘Imam Zamân’ (Imam of the Age) and, like the previous two, celebrates the birthday of the twelfth Shiite Imam. This panegyric is actually a *mosammat* (‘stanzaic poem’), which is a variation on the ‘traditional’ *qaside*, being structured in groups of five hemistichs that rhyme.

The *qasides* which Ayatollah Khomeini wrote are significant as they give insights into the stage of his life when he was a young man in search of knowledge. They reveal Ayatollah Khomeini’s search for a political ideology and personal attitude to life: how he wants to link politics with religion, the central role he accords to the clergy, his views on foreign powers (especially England), and his rejection of monarchy or any political philosophy other than a Shiite political structure. The poems reveal that these and many other subjects which he elaborated in his works some fifty years later were already present in Ayatollah Khomeini’s mind in the 1920s.

The form that Ayatollah Khomeini chose is the classical Persian panegyric. One of the first questions that arises is why he chose poetry to express his thoughts? How familiar was he with the conventions of the *qaside*? Had he mastered the classical rules and forms of this genre so well that he preferred to write poetry instead of prose? Was he a ‘non-poet,’ as he described himself later in his life, or did he say this out of modesty? To answer these and

⁴²¹ This *qaside* can be found on pp. 253-257 of Ayatollah Khomeini’s *Divân* and will for the sake of convenience be referred to as *qaside* I.

similar questions I will focus briefly on the formal characteristics of the *qaside* such as length, metre, rhyme scheme, rhetorical figures, themes, and metaphors, before beginning a detailed analysis of Ayatollah Khomeini's *qasides*.

5.1 The *Qaside* in Historical Perspective

Ayatollah Khomeini composed all of his panegyric poems in a style typical for Persian *qasides*. Since the ninth century, panegyric poetry has played a crucial role in Persian society. The *qaside*, which is initially of Arabic origin, developed into a Persian variant from the tenth century onwards, which relates to an existing tradition of courtly poetry in Persian.⁴²² Before the seventh century, minstrel poetry was used mainly for entertainment at Persian courts. After the introduction of written poetry in the seventh century, poetry also became an important means to give a patron and his family practical and ethical advice, for example on how to behave in matters of love, or how to hunt or conduct a war.⁴²³ While panegyric poems could contain subtle forms of critique, they were used mainly to glorify and legitimize the rule of the poet's patron.⁴²⁴ The Persian *qaside* thus developed a strong propagandistic character, serving not only the patron, but also the poet, who often included his name in the last lines.⁴²⁵ Unlike the Arabic *qaside*, in which the introduction focuses on desert scenes, the classical Persian *qaside* starts with lively depictions of exquisite gardens, depictions of wine and convivial gatherings and lavish life at court.⁴²⁶ Ayatollah Khomeini continued this tradition since his *qasides*, as we will see, are also filled with nature descriptions.⁴²⁷

⁴²² Rudaki (d. 936) was among the poets who gave the Arabic *qaside* a Persian twist. See J.S. Meisami, "Poetic Microcosms: The Persian Qasida to the End of the Twelfth Century," in *Studies in Arabic Literature: Qasida Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa; Classical Traditions and Modern Meanings*, Vol. I, Leiden: Brill, 1996, p. 140.

⁴²³ J. Scott Meisami, "The Uses of the 'Qaṣīda': Thematic and Structural Patterns in a Poem of Bashshār," in *Journal of Arabic Literature*, Vol. 16, Leiden: Brill, 1985, pp. 56-59; J.T.P. de Bruijn, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Courts and Courtiers; Court Poetry.

⁴²⁴ J. Scott Meisami, "The Uses of the 'Qaṣīda'...", pp. 56-59.

⁴²⁵ J.T.P. de Bruijn, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Courts and Courtiers; Court Poetry.

⁴²⁶ Traditionally the Arabic *qaside* begins with the poet stopping at a desert campsite where he thinks about his beloved (metaphor for patron) who has just left the site. This is followed by poetic descriptions of the desert environment and the unhappy life of the poet, who describes his unrequited love. The poet then ends his poem with the actual praise of his patron. Nature themes have already been found in Turfan-manuscripts dating from Parthian times (247 B.C.-224 A.C.) and are typical for Persian poetry. See J. Scott Meisami, "Poetic Microcosms...", pp. 137-181; See also J.T.P. de Bruijn, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Iran.

⁴²⁷ On nature imagery in *qaside* see J.S. Meisami, "Poetic Microcosms...", pp. 137-182.

From the twelfth century, the panegyric poem was also used in a non-courtly setting, to eulogize religious figures, including Shiite saints and Sufi sheikhs.⁴²⁸ Such *qasides*, conveying mystical and religious ideas, reached a much wider public, yet the *qaside* continued to be strongly connected to court life until the beginning of the twentieth century.⁴²⁹

Persian literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was dominated by the style of *bâzgasht-e adabi* (“return to classical literary forms”). Court poets revived the classical ways, writing poetry full of classical imagery and well-known themes. During and after the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911) the *qaside*, like other poetic forms, was revolutionized.⁴³⁰ Poets were fed up with age-old images and themes that lacked any originality. As censorship relaxed, and poets were freed from their courtly environment, the *qaside* was used effectively to spread political and social ideas in innovative forms. The public was no longer limited to readers and listeners of royal or bourgeoisie background, it consisted largely of average citizens. Poets adopted colloquial language to reach this public and the classical themes in the *qaside* were abandoned, since they were no longer connected to the interests of the intended audience. Poetic forms such as *qaside*, *ghazal* and *robâ’i* remained the same but poets used novel contemporary themes related to social and political situation in such poems. Themes such as the motherland (*vatan*) became popular, replacing the Beloved, who could previously represent the patron or a religious figure. Poetry was an effective form in which social and political messages could be conveyed, as poems, because

⁴²⁸ Iran, which was officially Sunnite until the sixteenth century, had a Shiite minority. The differences between these two groups caused a sort of ‘poetic battle’ (*manâqeb-kh_wâni*), in which poets tried to promote ‘their’ religion, especially in the twelfth century. Famous religious poets from this period were Naser-e Khosrow (d. 1088) and Sanâ’i of Ghazna (d. 1130). Both promoted the Shiite faith. See J.T.P. de Bruijn, “The Religious Use of Persian Poetry,” in *Studies on Islam, Symposium of Islamic Studies*, Amsterdam/London: North Holland Publishing Company, 1974, pp. 63-71.

⁴²⁹ The enrichment of Persian poetry with mystical terms has continued, and they have become an important element of Persian poetry today. The ambiguity of mystical terms makes them perfect for expressing concealed critique. But, as we will see, they also make poetry more difficult to understand. See further J. Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature*, Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1968, pp. 82-83, 231-232; M. Glünz, “Poetic Tradition and Social Change: The Persian Qasida in Post-Mongol Iran,” in *Studies in Arabic Literature: Qasida Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa; Classical Traditions and Modern Meanings*, Vol. I., Leiden: Brill, 1996, pp. 189-203.

⁴³⁰ On the *bâzgasht-e adabi* style see W.L. Hanaway, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Bâzgašt-e Adabī.

of their rhyme, were easy to remember and could spread by word of mouth.⁴³¹ Often government officials wrote poetry to reflect on political and social events. And poets had a high social status as intellectuals of society. They were often given political positions. Mohammad Taqi Bahâr (d. 1951), who was one of the famous poets of the period, was also a politician, a member of the parliament.⁴³²

5.2 Ayatollah Khomeini's *Qasides*

The metre and rhyme that Ayatollah Khomeini used in his *qasides*, and his inclusion of nature scenes, show that he was well aware of the traditional poetic rules and forms of the *qaside* genre. Three of his panegyric poems (*qaside* I, II and III) have different meters but have the same aa/ba/ca rhyme scheme, which is typical for the classical *qaside*.⁴³³ *Qaside* IV, as already noted, is a variation known as a *mosammat*, containing refrains.⁴³⁴ Another characteristic of a Persian *qaside* is that it comprises at least fifteen couplets.⁴³⁵ The four *qasides* that Ayatollah Khomeini wrote consist of 44, 46, 44 and 26 couplets (*beyts*) respectively. Ayatollah Khomeini wrote *qaside* II, III and IV at the time of the Persian New Year (*Nowruz*) on March 21st, which continues the practice of the classical panegyric poets, who often wrote praise poems on such special festivals, or to mark the birth or death of a member of the royal family, or when a patron set out or returned from travelling.⁴³⁶

What did Ayatollah Khomeini want to achieve with writing panegyric poems? Given the range of purposes that the *qaside* has had over the centuries, he could have adopted the form for genteel entertainment, to give moral advice, to instruct rulers or teach ethical lessons, to teach piety, or to critique or legitimise a certain person's rule. What he actually did will be clear as we turn to a detailed discussion of his four *qasides*.

⁴³¹ J.T.P. de Bruijn, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Courts and Courtiers; Court Poets; S. Soroudi, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Constitutional Revolution vii. The Constitutional Movement in Literature. See also chapter 4.3 of this study in which I elaborate on socio-political poetry.

⁴³² J.T.P. de Bruijn, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Iran.

⁴³³ M. Glünz, "Poetic Tradition and Social Change...", p. 183.

⁴³⁴ In addition to the *mosammat* there is another variation on the *qaside*, the *tarji'*, which has a single metre and sections divided by a distich, which resembles a refrain. Each of the sections has its own rhyme. See C.H. de Fouchécour, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under *Qasida* 2. In Persian.

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

⁴³⁶ J.T.P. de Bruijn, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (2), under Courts and Courtiers; Court Poetry.

5.3 The Concept of the Mohammadan Light

Ayatollah Khomeini deals with several key concepts of Islamic mysticism in his *qasides*. These poems are mainly spiritual, rather than praising a king. If there is any praise, the poet is praising spiritual masters and Shiite saints. He combines mysticism and Shiism through the concept of *nur Mohammadi*, as we shall presently see. The first panegyric already shows that Ayatollah Khomeini's thinking and interests went far beyond normative Shia Islam. Ayatollah Khomeini dedicated this poem, written in 1922, to Fâteme Ma'sume (d. 816/817), 'patron saint' of the city of Qom.⁴³⁷ The last three couplets indicate that Ayatollah Khomeini wrote the panegyric in 'response' (*javâb*) to two other poems devoted to Fâteme Ma'sume. The first was written by Qâ'âni (d. 1854), a famous nineteenth-century 'poet laureate' (*malek al-sho'arâ*) at the Qajar court (r. 1785-1925), whom Ayatollah Khomeini describes as the 'poet from Shiraz' (*shâ'er-e shirâz*).⁴³⁸ The other poet that dedicated a poem to Fâteme Ma'sume and whom Ayatollah Khomeini refers to as an '*adib-sokhanvar*' (eloquent man of letters) has not been identified.⁴³⁹

In the poem, Ayatollah Khomeini makes a comparison between the female patron of Qom, Fâteme Ma'sume, and another Fâteme, Fâteme Zahrâ (d. 632), who was the daughter of the prophet Mohammad and the wife of the first Shiite Imam, 'Ali ibn Abi Tâleb. Although Ayatollah Khomeini speaks of both Fâtemes, his focus is on Fâteme Ma'sume. Fâteme Ma'sume was the daughter of the seventh Shiite Imam Musâ al-Kâzem (d. 799) and sister of the eighth Imam 'Ali al-Rezâ (d. 818). During a journey from Medina to Khorasan to visit her brother, Fâteme, at that time only a young girl, fell ill and was taken to the nearby city of Qom

⁴³⁷ The formal characteristics of this poem are its structure, rhyme and metre. The poem can be divided into an introduction (*nasib*), a transition couplet (*gorizgâh*) and the praise (*madih*). Usually the opening is a description of nature, of love or other courtly elements, but this poem starts with praise. The poem is written in the metre *monsareh mothamman matvi-ye makfuf-e manhur* (-0 0 - / - 0 - 0 / - 0 0 - / -, based on Persian prosody (*aruz*), with a rhyme scheme of aa/ba/ca.

⁴³⁸ Qâ'âni's poem can be found in his *Divân* named *Divân-i Hakim Qâ'âni Shirâzi*, ed. M.J. Mahjub, Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1336/1957, pp. 217-219. For background information on Qâ'âni, see A. Karimi-Hakkak, "Preservation and Presentation: Continuity and Creativity in the Contemporary Persian Qasida," in *Studies in Arabic Literature: Qasida Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa; Classical Traditions and Modern Meanings*, Vol. I, Leiden: Brill, 1996, p. 253; See also A. Gabbay, "In Praise of One of the Deeply Learned 'Ulamâ': A Mysterious Poem by Qājār Court Poet Mirzā Habiballāh Shirāzi "Qā'āni"," in *The Necklace of the Pleiades: studies in Persian literature presented to Heshmat Moayyad on his 80th birthday*, eds. F.D. Lewis and S. Sharma, Leiden: Leiden University Press, pp. 131-148.

⁴³⁹ See the comments of B. Reinert on these two poets in "Hūmainī im Spiegel seiner Gedichte," in *Islamische Grenzen und Grenzübergänge*, Vol. 4, Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2007, p. 204.

where she died shortly after, in 816/817.⁴⁴⁰ Fâteme owes her nickname Ma‘sume (‘the sinless’) because it is said she was very modest and innocent.⁴⁴¹ After her death, several miracles took place near her shrine. For this reason, she was considered a saint, and people attribute miracles to her to this day.⁴⁴²

In his panegyric, Ayatollah Khomeini compares Fâteme Ma‘sume to Fâteme Zahrâ (d. 632), her ancestor. As Venzlaff has stated, it is supposed that Fâteme Ma‘sume inherited her “purity and praiseworthiness” from Fâteme Zahrâ.⁴⁴³ Although there are few sources on Fâteme Zahrâ’s life dating from the eighth to tenth centuries, many stories were written about her in later periods.⁴⁴⁴ She was probably born in the year 606 in Mecca. When she was between fifteen and twenty-one years old, she married ‘Ali ibn Abi Tâleb (d. 661), the first Shiite Imam, who was 25 years old at the time. They had five children together: Hasan, Hoseyn, Mohsen, Umm Kolthum and Zeynab. She died in Medina in 632.⁴⁴⁵ Fâteme Zahrâ, along with ‘Ali ibn Abi Tâleb, the Prophet Mohammad, Hasan and Hoseyn constitute the five *Ahl al-bayt*, the people of the house of Mohammad, who have a pre-eminent station. She is also one of the fourteen ‘immaculate beings’ (*ma‘sum*), who are believed to be free from sin and error. She is known as the Eternal Weeper.⁴⁴⁶ At the End of Times, Fâteme Zahrâ will

⁴⁴⁰ J. Calmard, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Qum.

⁴⁴¹ H. Venzlaff, “Gebetssiegel und Gebetstuch aus Qum,” in *Die Welt des Islams*, New Series, Vol. 39, Issue 2, Leiden: Brill, 1999, pp. 218-220.

⁴⁴² Ibid., p. 219.

⁴⁴³ Ibid., p. 220.

⁴⁴⁴ See S. Rosiny, “The Tragedy of Fāṭima al-Zahrâ’ in the Debate of two Shiite Theologians in Lebanon,” in *The Twelver Shia in Modern Times; Religious Culture & Political History*, eds. R. Brunner and W. Ende, Leiden: Brill, 2001, pp. 206-219. Also interesting to read is Susan Sered’s comparative study of Fâteme Zahrâ, Mother Mary and Rachel: see S. Sered, “Rachel, Mary, and Fatima,” in *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 6, No. 2, Blackwell Publishing, 1991, pp. 131-146. For detailed information on her life see L. Veccia Vaglieri, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Fāṭima; A. Shariati, *Fatima is Fatima*, tr. Laleh Bakhtiar, Tehran: Shariati Foundation, 1983; H. Lammens, *Fāṭima et les Filles de Mahomet; Notes Critique pour l’Étude de la Sîra*, Romae: Sumptibus Pontifici Institutii Biblici, 1912.

⁴⁴⁵ It is not certain where she was buried. Some sources say in her house in Medina, others say in the Baqi and again others say near her father’s tomb in the Great Mosque. See L. Veccia Vaglieri, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Fāṭima.

⁴⁴⁶ She is said to have cried continuously after the death of her father and her sons Hassan and Hoseyn. See S. Sered, “Rachel, Mary, and Fatima,” in *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 6, No. 2, Blackwell Publishing, 1991, p. 134. L. Veccia Vaglieri indicates that she is the person that visited the graves of the persons that were killed

allegedly advise God in judging the people. She is often compared to the Virgin Mary and is called the ‘woman of Paradise par excellence.’ As Roswitha Badry states in her article on female Islamic role models in Iran, the model of Fâteme Zahrâ as the cornerstone of the family was very popular, especially in the course of and during the Islamic revolution.⁴⁴⁷ During the 1960s and 1970s, Marxist groups and modern Islamists such as ‘Ali Shari’ati (d. 1977) used Fâteme Zahrâ as an example of the ideal Iranian mother and ideal wife: modest, courageous, educated but at the same time veiled.⁴⁴⁸ Although Fâteme Zahrâ holds a very important place within Shia Islam and Iranian culture, Ayatollah Khomeini only devotes a few lines to her in this poem, focusing most of his attention to Fâteme Ma’sume. The first couplet of this poem immediately reveals the unorthodox view that Ayatollah Khomeini has of Fâteme Ma’sume. He states: “O you, through whose dust eternity becomes intoxicated. O you, through whose splendour eternity is created.” In this couplet, Ayatollah Khomeini links Fâteme to the Mohammadan Light, the *nur Mohammadi*, which plays a central role in Islamic mysticism and in Twelver Shiism.⁴⁴⁹ The Mohammadan light recurs later in this poem and becomes a key motif. It is believed to be the essence of Prophet Mohammad, who existed in the form of light before the creation of Adam. According to this idea, which has its origin in the beginning of the eighth century, God created a light from His own light, which was the light of Mohammad.⁴⁵⁰ This light passed through Mohammad’s progenitors until it finally reached the ‘bodily’ Mohammad. Mohammad’s direct derivation from the Light of God makes him infallible and a perfect being, reflecting all of God’s attributes. It also implies that Mohammad was the first of all prophets.⁴⁵¹

during the battle at Uhud. For further reading see L. Veccia Vaglieri in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Fâtîma.

⁴⁴⁷ R. Badry, “Zum Profil weiblicher ‘Ulamâ in Iran: Neue Rollenmodelle für "islamische Feministinnen," in *Die Welt des Islams*, New Series, Vol. 40, Issue I, Leiden: Brill, 2000, p. 39.

⁴⁴⁸ ‘Ali Shari’ati dedicated a whole book to Fâteme Zahrâ. See A. Shariati, *Fatima is Fatima*, tr. Laleh Bakhtiar, Tehran: Shariati Foundation, 1983. ‘Ali Shari’ati wanted to change the image of Fâteme Zahrâ as the embodiment of suffering, presenting her as the brave and educated mother and wife who could be a role model for Iranian women. See further G. Nashat, “Women in the Islamic Republic of Iran,” in *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 1/4, 1990, pp. 165-194.

⁴⁴⁹ Twelver Shi’ism is the form of Shi’ism prevalent in Iran, getting its name from the twelve Imams it recognizes, who will be discussed below.

⁴⁵⁰ For the idea of the *nur Mohammadi* see A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975, pp. 214-227.

⁴⁵¹ See A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, *Soefisme*, pp. 140-41.

Islamic mystics believe that each person also contains a portion of this light, which is equal to that person's share of divine knowledge (*ma'refat*). By following the various steps on the mystical path, then disciplining the soul, and finally by removing all evil from the heart, the mystic obtains more access to this divine knowledge, to the point at which his Ego becomes one with God. The mystic is now a perfect reflection of God's attributes, a perfect being. Islamic mystics have elaborated widely on this concept. A very useful and unique mystical work that treats the concept of the Mohammadan light elaborately is the *Kernel of the Kernels* (*Lubb al-Lubâb*) which was originally published in 1987, and rendered into English in 2003.⁴⁵² It is based on the private teaching on the mystical path given in the years 1949 and 1950 by Sayyed Mohammad Hoseyn Tabâtabâ'i, one of the greatest Iranian religious scholars of the twentieth century. One of his students, the well-known 'Allâme Sayyed Mohammad Hoseyn Hoseyni Tehrâni (d. 1995), decided to record and publish the oral teachings of his master, resulting in this highly interesting work which gives a detailed description of the various stages the mystic has to pass through to achieve spiritual perfection. It is interesting since it allows the reader to enter a 'hidden' spiritual world that is normally accessible only to a select group of initiated mystics, such as Ayatollah Khomeini. The book is filled with mystical concepts such as the unity of being (*vahdat al-vojud*) and the Mohammadan Light.

Twelver Shiites have adopted the concept of the Mohammadan Light. They believe that 'Ali ibn Abi Tâleb, his wife Fâteme Zahrâ and the other eleven Imams have inherited this primordial light from Prophet Mohammad, but that no one beyond them has access to this light and is free from sin and error. They consider these fourteen to be infallible persons (*ma'sum*), free from sin and error.⁴⁵³

In his first panegyric, Ayatollah Khomeini connects Fâteme Ma'sume at various points to this primordial Mohammadan light, although in the orthodox view she does not have the same infallible position as Fâteme Zahrâ. For example in couplet five, Ayatollah Khomeini writes:

⁴⁵² S.M.H. Ḥusaynī Tihirānī, *Kernel of the Kernel; Concerning the Wayfaring and Spiritual Journey of the People of Intellect, A Shī'ī Approach to Sufism* [*Risāla-yi Lubb al-Lubāb dar Sayr wa Sulūk-I Ulu'l Albāb*], comp. and ed. and exp. S.M.H. Ḥusaynī Tihirānī, tr. M.H. Faghfoory, ed. S.H. Nasr, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003.

⁴⁵³ U. Rubin, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Nūr Muḥammadī; M.A. Amir-Moezzi, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Cosmogony & Cosmology: In Twelver Shi 'ism.

Your beauty is the place where the light of God
manifests itself.
Your chastity is a manifestation of the hidden
secret.

جلوه‌ی تو، نور ایزدی را مَجَلّی^۱
عِصمت تو، سِرِّ مُخْتَفی را مَظْهَر

By stating that the light of God ‘manifests itself in Fâteme Ma‘sume, Ayatollah Khomeini implies that she also possesses this Mohammadan light.⁴⁵⁴ As couplets eleven to thirteen demonstrate, Ayatollah Khomeini believed that Fâteme Ma‘sume inherited her Mohammadan light from the Prophet Mohammad, from Fâteme Zahrâ and from ‘Ali ibn Abi Tâleb, whose nickname is Lion (Heydar):

And this is not surprising because her light comes
from Zahrâ.
Her light comes from the Lion (‘Ali) and from
the Prophet Mohammad.

وین نه عجب، زانکه نور اوست ز زهرا
نور وی از حیدر است و او ز پیمبر

God’s light is visible in the honourable
Messenger (Mohammad).
Who transmitted the light to the courageous Lion.

نور خُدا در رسول اکرم پیدا
کرد تجلّی ز وی به حیدر صفدر

And from Mohammad it was transmitted to holy
Zahrâ.
This light is now visible in the daughter of Musa
Ja‘far.

وَز وی، تابان شده به حضرت زهرا
⁴⁵⁵ اینک ظاهر ز دُختِ موسی جعفر.

Ayatollah Khomeini accords her an immensely high station, equal to that of Fâteme Zahrâ. This can be deduced from couplet 31, where Ayatollah Khomeini says: “If the words “He did not procreate” had not shut my mouth, I would say: “these two pure lights are God’s daughters””. The fact that Khomeini would consider both Fâtêmes to have been ‘daughters of God,’ had God not said that “He did not procreate”, also seems to be a comment on the Christian concept of the trinity of God, which states that God consists of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Although Ayatollah Khomeini rejects the idea that God fathered anyone, this couplet contradicts the orthodox Shiite view of the Mohammadan light, implying that certain persons, not only the immaculate Fâteme Zahrâ but also Fâteme Ma‘sume, have reached the highest spiritual level, in which they are constantly in the presence of God. In the

⁴⁵⁴ Qâ‘ânî, the poet who had also composed a panegyric on Fâteme Ma‘sume and to whom Ayatollah Khomeini refers in this poem, also implied that Fâteme Ma‘sume contained a part of this primordial light. See B. Reinert’s discussion in “Hûmainî im Spiegel seiner Gedichte,” pp. 204-206.

⁴⁵⁵ This is a reference to Musâ ibn Ja‘far al-Kâzem (d. 799), the seventh Shi’ite Imam and father of Fâteme Ma‘sume. See E. Kohlberg, in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Mūsā al-Kāzīm.

mystical treatise the *Kernel of the Kernel*, ‘Allâme Tabâtabâ’i explains how the mystical traveller can develop this primordial light or ‘divine knowledge’ within himself in stages, as he travels through the various Divine realms of light to the point at which the mystic has annihilated his Self completely and is nothing more than a reflection of the Divine essence. At this point there is no multiplicity and the mystical experiences nothing but God. Tabâtabâ’i says that there are two groups of individuals who have travelled through all these realms: the prophets and “a number of individuals who, by following the path of the prophets are blessed and honoured with a perception of these realities and Divine effusion in accordance with the degree of their intellect and preparedness.”⁴⁵⁶ The latter group are the mystical travellers who have completed their journey and attained spiritual perfection. In this poem, Ayatollah Khomeini clearly places himself in the same mystical tradition as Tabâtabâ’i, by connecting non-immaculate persons, in this case Fâteme Ma’sume, to this primordial light, allowing them to reach a point of spiritual perfection and elevating them to the level of the prophets and the immaculate ones.

In the poem Ayatollah Khomeini explains Fâteme Ma’sume’s position in the world by relating her position to the Necessary Being (*vâjeb al-vojūd*) and to contingent or possible reality or existence (*momken al-vojūd*).⁴⁵⁷ The two terms are central to Islamic metaphysics and have been extensively discussed by philosophers such as Ibn Sina (d. 1037).⁴⁵⁸ According to Ibn Sina, only God exists unconditionally and therefore He is a necessary being. Everything other than God is a contingent or possible reality, since it does not necessarily have to be. By making use of these metaphysical terms, Ayatollah Khomeini explains, in couplets eight to ten, how Fâteme Ma’sume’s being transcends all “contingent realities,” having the highest possible state of perfection, above all contingent beings. She has, metaphorically speaking, “climbed the ladder of perfection” to the highest possible step. According to Ayatollah Khomeini, because she has reached this stage, Fâteme Ma’sume may be called the possessor of God’s knowledge, and of the Mohammadan light, and can therefore mediate between the divine and visible world. In the poem, Ayatollah Khomeini describes

⁴⁵⁶ See S.M.H. Ḥusaynī Tihrānī, *Kernel of the Kernel; Concerning the Wayfaring and Spiritual Journey of the People of Intellect, A Shī’ī Approach to Sufism [Risāla-yi Lubb al-Lubāb dar Sayr wa Sulūk-i Ulu’l Albāb]*, comp. and ed. and exp. S.M.H. Ḥusaynī Tihrānī, tr. M.H. Faghfoory, ed. S.H. Nasr, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003, pp. 27-28.

⁴⁵⁷ See couplets 6-11.

⁴⁵⁸ For an elaboration on Avicenna’s view of contingent and necessary reality see M.E. Marmura, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Avicenna iv. Metaphysics.

how all prophets and saints from Moses to Jesus are at Fâteme Ma'sume's service, for the first is the "obedient guardian at her door" while the latter is the "door-keeper at her court".⁴⁵⁹ Ayatollah Khomeini even implies that Jesus was crucified so that he could better keep watch at Fâteme Ma'sume's door, saying: "Jesus, son of Mary, is the door-keeper at her court."⁴⁶⁰

How should these words of the future leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran be interpreted? In what setting can these couplets be placed? These lines certainly do not fit into the orthodox Shiite belief system, in which only the fourteen immaculate ones possess this Mohammadan light. Ayatollah Khomeini's linking of Fâteme Ma'sume with the Mohammadan light can only be explained from a mystical point of view: he considered it possible for any person to reach a state of perfection, in accordance with the Islamic mystical idea that every individual contains a portion of divine light. The amount of Mohammadan light a person possesses relates to his or her level of divine knowledge, *ma'refat*.⁴⁶¹ As W. Chittick explains, divine knowledge is often described as a light, and one that 'enlightens the darkness of ignorance.' God discloses himself in the heart of the mystic in the form of knowledge, in the sense of a consciousness or realization, rather than a sum of propositions and facts. On his path towards God, the mystic receives more knowledge and is able to see more of the unseen divine world. According to S.H. Nasr, the essence of a human "is pure consciousness and knowledge".⁴⁶² Therefore, those who seek mystical knowledge must cleanse their souls of all evil and return to their own essence.⁴⁶³ Next, a perfect person, an *ensân-e kâmel*, is one who reflects God's essence in all aspects, a person who has unravelled all divine mysteries and passed through all the stages on the path towards divine realization. The more divine knowledge a person attains, the more his divine essence comes forth, and he reflects God's attributes. Finally, a person who reflects God's attributes in all senses is called a perfect being. While Twelver Shiites believe that this state of perfection was reserved for the fourteen immaculate ones, mystics believe that each person can attain to it.⁴⁶⁴ Hence, when

⁴⁵⁹ *Qaside I*, couplets 19-20.

⁴⁶⁰ *Qaside I*, couplet 20.

⁴⁶¹ W.C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989, p. 215.

⁴⁶² S.H. Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1981, p. 29.

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁴ For an elaborate discussion of the *ensân-e kâmel* see M. Takeshita, *Ibn 'Arabi's Theory of the Perfect Man and its Place in the History of Islamic Thought*, Tokyo: Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 1987.

Ayatollah Khomeini links Fâteme Ma‘sume to this pure light, it indicates that he sees her as a perfect being and that the poem should be read in a mystical context.

There are other indications in this poem that Khomeini opts for a mystical interpretation of Islam. In the poem Ayatollah Khomeini connects the Mohammadan light to the story of Eblis (Satan), saying:

Satan would have become a wise man if he had
not said to this light:
“Adam is made of clay and I from fire.”

شیطان عالم شدی اگر که بدین نور

ناگفتی آدم است خاک و من آذر.⁴⁶⁵

According to tradition, Eblis refused to prostrate himself before Adam at God’s command and was therefore expelled from Heaven and separated from God eternally. Some mystics interpret Eblis’ refusal as a sign of ultimate love, since Eblis’ focus was entirely on God, so he was prepared to bear any burden in order not to violate his monotheism.⁴⁶⁶ However, most mystics see Eblis’ act as a sign of pride and egocentrism. The story of Eblis shows the lesser position of the angels as compared to humankind. Whereas man was made of clay mixed with God’s love, angels were made of fire.⁴⁶⁷ By saying that it would have been better if Eblis had obeyed this light (God), Ayatollah Khomeini sides with the majority of mystics who interpret Eblis’ refusal as a sign of haughtiness.⁴⁶⁸ Ayatollah Khomeini sees himself as part of this mystical tradition.

Ayatollah Khomeini’s linking of Fâteme Ma‘sume to the Mohammadan light shows itself in another way in this *qaside*, at the points at which he highlights her saintly character and the mystical knowledge she carries within her. In couplets 28 and 29 Ayatollah Khomeini states:

⁴⁶⁵ *Qaside I*, couplet 16.

⁴⁶⁶ A.J. Wensinck & L. Gardet in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Iblīs; P.J. Awn, *Satan’s Tragedy and Redemption: Iblis in Sufi Psychology*, Leiden: Brill, 1983.

⁴⁶⁷ A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, “The Erotic Spirit: Love, Man and Satan in Hāfez’s Poetry,” in *Hafiz and The School of Love in Classical Persian Poetry*, eds. L. Lewisohn & J. Morris, London: I.B. Tauris, 2010, pp. 115-121.

⁴⁶⁸ The traditions differ on whether Eblis was an angel or jinn, since it was believed that angels were made of light while jinns were made of fire. Some say that Eblis was a fallen angel whose jealousy had changed his essence into fire. Others say that Eblis had a fire nature from the beginning and therefore was not an angel but a jinn. See A.J. Wensinck & L. Gardet, *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Iblīs.

Fâteme Zahrâ is created through His command that came to manifestation;
Fâteme Ma'sume is annihilated through His hidden seclusion;

آن یک، موجود از خطابش مَجْلٰی
وین یک، معدوم از عقابش مُسْتَر

Fâteme Zahrâ is the crown on the prophets' heads,
Fâteme Ma'sume is the diadem on the saints' heads.

آن یک، بر فرق انبیا شده تارک
469 وین یک، اندر سرّ اولیا را مِغْفَر.

In these couplets, Ayatollah Khomeini is connecting Fâteme Zahrâ to mystical ideas on prophets and saints. Prophets only transfer exterior knowledge of God's Will whereas Fâteme Ma'sume, as a saint, explains the hidden divine mysteries. Mystics refer to the inner and outer dimensions as *bâten* and *zâher*. *Bâten* connotes the idea that all things have an interior, hidden meaning. *Zâher* refers to outer, visible meanings. Both terms are commonly connected to knowledge ('*elm*'). In this reading the Koran has, for mystics, an inner, hidden meaning and an outer, visible meaning.⁴⁷⁰ The revelation (*tanzil*) of God's words by the Prophet is referred to as the outer exoteric meaning, while the explanation of the Koran (*ta'vil*) by the twelve Shiite Imams (or, in the case of the mystics, by saints), is its inner, esoteric meaning. Thus Ayatollah Khomeini is connecting Fâteme Zahrâ to outward manifestation, and Fâteme Ma'sume to hidden mystical knowledge. He connects the former to the messengers of God (s. *nabi*/pl. *anbiya*) who merely convey God's message, while he reckons Ma'sume among the saints (s. *vali*/pl. *âwliyâ*), who are close to God because of their esoteric knowledge, and who therefore possess some of His authority and capacities.⁴⁷¹ Twelver Shiites believe that saints are exempted from sin.⁴⁷² Like the prophets, they can perform miracles (*karâmat*) and receive inspiration (*elhâm*). They are also seen as mediators between man and God, and their supernatural powers can even be drawn on for 'blessings' (*baraka*) after their death. Most Twelver Shiites believe that only the Shiite Imams may be called saints, for only they have the ability to understand the inner meaning of the Koran and the Sharia.⁴⁷³ Mystics, on the other hand, believe that each person has the ability to reach this hidden knowledge by following a

⁴⁶⁹ *Qaside I*, couplets 28-29.

⁴⁷⁰ B. Radtke, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Bâten.

⁴⁷¹ Although this last meaning cannot be found as such in the Koran or *Hadith*, the majority of the Islamic community from the eighth century onwards have accepted this interpretation. See B. Radtke, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Walî 1. General Survey; H. Algar, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Awliâ'.

⁴⁷² Ibid.

⁴⁷³ For the difference between Shiite and mystics' interpretation of the terms *bâten* and *zâher* see the article by B. Radtke, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Bâten.

thorough training to discipline the soul. In the *Kernel of the Kernel*, Tabâtabâ'i gives an extensive overview of the qualities that a perfect man must possess. He speaks of: 'abandoning conventionalism, habitual practices, and customs,' 'steadfastness,' 'compassion and forbearance,' 'loyalty,' 'stability and perseverance,' 'constant attention,' 'calling oneself to account,' 'self-condemnation,' 'expeditious action,' 'devotion,' 'proper manner,' 'intention,' 'silence,' 'abstaining from indulgence in food consumption,' 'spiritual retreat,' 'morning wakefulness,' 'constant observance of ritual cleanliness,' 'extreme humility,' 'curbing desires for worldly pleasures,' 'guarding the mysteries [of the path],' [the relationship between] 'spiritual master and teacher,' 'litany,' 'control of intruding thoughts, meditation, and invocation.'⁴⁷⁴ According to the mystical worldview, knowing one's Self means knowing the inner meaning of the Koran and the Sharia. Every person who has attained to this level of inner knowledge may be called a saint. Ayatollah Khomeini's reference to Fâteme Ma'sume as the "diadem on the saints' heads" and his focus on her saintliness are further indications that the poem can only be interpreted from a mystical point of view.

5.4 Veiling and mystical Unveiling

There are more mystical elements in Ayatollah Khomeini's panegyric. For example, Ayatollah Khomeini connects Fâteme Ma'sume to the 'veil' and on at least nine occasions uses terms that are connected to 'seclusion' or 'veiling.'⁴⁷⁵ In couplet five, Ayatollah Khomeini says:

Your beauty is the place where the light of God
manifests itself.
Your chastity is a manifestation of the hidden
secret.

جلوه‌ی تو، نور ایزدی را مَجْلُی^۱

عِصْمَتِ تو، سِرِّ مُخْتَفِی را مَظْهَر

And in couplet 33, he states:

The veil of Fâteme Zahrâ is the *hejâb* of God's
purity;
The veil of Fâteme Ma'sume is the *neqâb* of
God's purity.

چادر آن یک، حِجَابِ عِصْمَتِ ایزد

مِغْجَرِ اَیْنِ یک، نِقَابِ عَقَّتِ داور

The terms *esmat* ('chastity') and *effat* ('purity'), commonly associated with women, which Ayatollah Khomeini uses in these couplets, both mean chastity and refer to one of God's attributes, i.e. His purity. Ayatollah Khomeini uses several similar terms that are

⁴⁷⁴ See S.M.H. Ḥusaynī Tihirānī, *Kernel of the Kernel*, pp. 83-130.

⁴⁷⁵ *Qaside I*, couplets 4, 5, 7, 28, 32 and 33.

connected to His purity: the ‘cloak,’ the ‘*maghna‘a*’ (face-veil), the ‘chador’ and the ‘*hejâb*.’ Veiling, or rather unveiling (*kashf*), plays a central role in Islamic mysticism. The word is often used in combination with the word *shohud*, which means ‘witnessing.’ On the mystical road towards union with God, it is the mystic’s task to reveal all possible divine mysteries. Each divine secret the mystic solves brings him closer to the Essence of God. The unsolved secret that stands between the mystic and God’s essence is often presented as a veil. Only when the mystic has lifted this veil can he ‘witness’ God’s pure essence.⁴⁷⁶ As ‘Allâme Tabâtabâ’i puts it: “interest in material possessions and love for multiplicities become a veil for this primordial love and prevents this eternal light from manifesting itself. Through *murâqaba* [‘constant attention’] the veils gradually become thinner and eventually disappear, and that primordial love manifests itself in one’s heart and guides him to that Source of Beauty and Perfection.”⁴⁷⁷ Ayatollah Khomeini’s numerous references to the veil and other female body coverings in this panegyric can be put in this same mystical context. In couplet 32, for example, Ayatollah Khomeini says that “The terrestrial world depends on Fâteme Zahrâ’s veil [*maghna‘a*]... [while] the heavenly world depends on Fâteme Ma’sume’s veil [*me‘jar*]. Both *maghna‘a* and *me‘jar* are veils covering the face. When one reads this couplet from a mystical perspective, one can conclude that Ayatollah Khomeini not only compares Fâteme Zahrâ to God’s essence, which is also separated by a veil from the ‘ordinary’ people, he also implies that Fâteme Ma’sume is a reflection of God’s essence. By connecting the two women to veiling in this panegyric, Ayatollah Khomeini implies that both Fâtemes were pure reflections of God’s essence, when understood in a mystical context.

Ayatollah Khomeini may have had another reason for expressing his mystical thoughts on Fâteme Ma’sume in terms of veiling. In 1921, just a few months before Ayatollah Khomeini wrote this poem, Reza Khan, the head of the Cossack Brigade, successfully executed a coup to displace the Qajar regime. With the help of the military and the Iranian secret service, Reza Khan became first the Minister of War, then Prime Minister, and then, in 1926, he crowned himself Shah of the new Pahlavi dynasty. One of the first changes the new government implemented was the separation of religion and state in 1921. The Iranian clergy were furious and organised huge demonstrations, together with Iranian merchants.⁴⁷⁸ It is very likely that Ayatollah Khomeini, like his colleagues in Qom, feared the new secular regime’s future modernization plans. By linking the veil to Fâteme Zahrâ, Fâteme Ma’sume and God’s

⁴⁷⁶ C.A. Zargar, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Kašf o Šohud.

⁴⁷⁷ See S.M.H. Ḥusaynī Tihirānī, *Kernel of the Kernel*, pp. 19-20.

⁴⁷⁸ See also my discussion of this period in chapter 1.6 and 1.7 of this study.

own purity, Ayatollah Khomeini attempts to strengthen the sacred status of women's veiling at a time when the practice was under heavy criticism from the secular government. If this reference to actual veiling is intended, the panegyric reflects the earliest thoughts of the future leader of Iran about secular modernisation.⁴⁷⁹

While it is difficult to prove that Ayatollah Khomeini's references to veiling in this panegyric served a political purpose, the poem certainly shows that, from an early age, Ayatollah Khomeini tried to combine Shiite ideas with mystical thoughts. By extending the concept of the Mohammadan light to Fâtème Ma'sûme, Ayatollah Khomeini clearly places himself in a mystical tradition and shows that his ideas on perfection and sainthood deviated strongly from the orthodox Shiite view.

5.5 Mohammad al-Mahdi, The twelfth Shiite Imam

Ayatollah Khomeini wrote another three *qasides*, all dedicated to Mohammad al-Mahdi, the twelfth Shiite Imam. According to the Twelver Shiites, twelve rightly guided Imams followed the Prophet Mohammad, and Imam Mohammad al-Mahdi was the last.⁴⁸⁰ The Imams came to this world to guide the Muslim community in both political and spiritual matters.⁴⁸¹ The son of the eleventh Imam, Hasan al-Askari (d. 874), is said to have been born on the 22nd of July

⁴⁷⁹ As Kian has analysed, in his *Kashf al-Asrâr* (written in 1943) Ayatollah Khomeini criticized the unveiling law of 1936. See *Kashf al-Asrâr*, Tehran, 1943, pp. 1-66. See A. Kian, "Gendered Khomeini", in *A Critical Introduction to Khomeini*, p. 172.

⁴⁸⁰ These twelve Imams are: Imam 'Ali (d. 661), Imam Hasan (d. 680), Imam Hoseyn (d. 680), Imam 'Ali Zeyn al-Âbedin (d. 712), Imam Mohammad al-Bâqer (d. 732), Imam Ja'far al-Sâdeq (d. 765), Imam Musâ al-Kâzem (d. 799), Imam 'Ali Rezâ (d. 817), Imam Mohammad al-Javâd (d. 835), Imam 'Ali al-Hâdi (d. 868), Imam Hasan al-Askari (d. 874) and Imam Mohammad al-Mahdi, who is supposed to be living in concealment. There is considerable variation, within Twelver political theology, regarding the political role of the Imams.

⁴⁸¹ The concept of 'Imâmat' (*Imâmiyyeh*), the belief in the authority of the twelve Imams, forms the basic principle of the Twelver Shiite faith and has divided the Muslim community in two major groups: the Sunnites who worldwide form the majority of the Muslim community and the Shiites who can be found in Iran and in parts of Iraq, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and some gulf countries. The cause of the dispersion is placed at the time of the death of Prophet Mohammad in 632. According to some Muslims, which would later be called the Sunnites, the Islamic community after the death of the Prophet had to be guided by the best Islamic leader. Another group of Muslims, who would later be called Shiites, believed that the Prophet Mohammad had appointed his cousin and son-in-law 'Ali ibn Abi Tâleb to succeed him. They believed that the Islamic community should be governed by descendant of the Prophet Mohammad, starting with Imam 'Ali. For consultation see H. Halm, *Shiism*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991, pp. 13-14; M. Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985, pp. 147-159; H. Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 1982, pp. 4-6.

870 (in the Islamic era: 15th of Sha'ban 256), in the middle of spring. Hardly anybody at that time knew of his birth, but when his father died in 874, the Mahdi became the twelfth Imam because Shiites believe that the Imamate is hereditary from father to son.⁴⁸² Only a few people claimed to have seen him. Twelver Shiites believe that the Mahdi never died but has gone into occultation (*ghaybe*). Although he is physically absent, Twelver Shiites believe that Imam Mahdi is the only rightful leader of the Muslims. When he comes out of hiding at the end of times, he will restore justice and peace in the world, bring about the completion of the faith and the end of the world.⁴⁸³

Ayatollah Khomeini has composed three *qasides* in honour of Mohammad al-Mahdi. All three *qasides* fall in the genre of 'Mahdi-poems,' which are hymns on the subject of the Imam of the Age, the earliest of which date back as far as the twelfth century.⁴⁸⁴ Although many poems were written on the various historical Imams from the tenth century, such as the poem by Kisâ'i of Marv (b. 952), who wrote one of the first poems on the first Shiite Imam, 'Ali ibn Abi Tâleb, it was only in the twelfth century that poems on the Imam of the Age were composed.⁴⁸⁵ Initially, only the worldly qualities of the Mahdi were praised, but from the end of the nineteenth century and particularly at the beginning of the twentieth century, there was a change of focus. In addition to praising his worldly powers, the position of Imam Mahdi in the history of the universe was emphasized. B. Reinert explains that many Mahdi-poems were written during this period in response to the modernization that Iran was experiencing. They emphasized the leading role that religion should play in society, and that only the Mahdi is allowed to guide the Islamic community, whereas all other forms of government are

⁴⁸² This is only a simplified version. For a more complete and detailed version I refer to M.A. Amir-Moezzi's article in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Islam in Iran vii. The Concept of Mahdi in Twelver Shi'ism.

⁴⁸³ According to Twelver Shiite thought, the Mahdi went into a Minor Occultation at the time of his father's death in 874. From that period on he is said to have communicated with the people for 66 years through four successive intermediaries. In 940, the Mahdi went into a Major Occultation. Since then, nobody has communicated with him and no one will until his return at the end of times. See M.A. Amir-Moezzi, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Islam in Iran vii. The Concept of Mahdi in Twelver Shi'ism.

⁴⁸⁴ B. Reinert, "Hûmainî im Spiegel seiner Gedichte," pp. 197-199.

⁴⁸⁵ For parts of Kisâ'i's poem see A.C. Hunsberger, *Nasir Khusraw: The Ruby of Badakhshan*, London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000, pp. 170-173. One of the first Mahdi poems was composed by Naser Khusraw, who adhered to the Isma'ili faith, a variant of Shi'ism. Naser Khusraw composed poems on Caliph Mustansir, who resided in Cairo and whom he considered the Imam of the Age. For consultation see A. Nanji, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Nâsir-Khusraw.

illegitimate.⁴⁸⁶ The three Mahdi-poems that Ayatollah Khomeini composed all combine politics with mysticism: the themes are oppression, secularization, governance and sainthood. The poems are interesting since they show the development of Ayatollah Khomeini's socio-political thinking, poured into the classical mould of the *qaside*-genre.

In *Qaside* II, the first of these Mahdi-panegyrics, which he wrote in 1922, Ayatollah Khomeini describes the yearly celebrations, surrounding the birthday of Mohammad al-Mahdi, who was born in 870 and supposedly went into occultation shortly after his birth, to return at the end of times.⁴⁸⁷ The opening (*nasib*) of this panegyric, like most classical Persian poems, is about spring. The introduction often contains a correlative or metonym for the qualities of the praised person, which will be listed in the next section.⁴⁸⁸ Ayatollah Khomeini starts the *nasib* (couplets one to fourteen) of his panegyric with a description of spring, which coincides with the pre-Islamic Persian New Year called Nowruz. In the first six couplets Ayatollah Khomeini sets the scene with a description of numerous flowers at the height of blossoming, which turn the world into "a sublime Paradisiacal garden". Both "life-giving wind" and "bounteous cloud" have helped to turn the earth into gardens that are "better than the garden of Eram". "Indian cress...creeping-plant...mirth and anemone" fill the air with the most pleasant scents. Like a classical poet, Ayatollah Khomeini follows the floral scenery with a description of various kinds of melodious birds. Each bird produces the most beautiful and 'heart-ravishing' songs. It is almost as if the reader can hear the songs of the birds and can smell the wonderful perfumes which the flowers produce. Then in couplets eleven and twelve, Ayatollah Khomeini introduces a "rosy-cheeked moon-faced one" who "smells like sweet basil" and whose body has the shape "of a jasmine".

How might these nature scenes be interpreted? What is the function of all these singing birds and fragrant flowers, and what do they tell the reader about the praised one? Everything in the opening couplets revolves around love: love for the "rosy-cheeked moon-faced one" whom Ayatollah Khomeini introduces in couplet eleven. All birds and flowers are in praise of this beautiful creature. Often in Persian court poetry, the poet compares the

⁴⁸⁶ B. Reinert, "Ḥumainī im Spiegel seiner Gedichte," pp. 199-201.

⁴⁸⁷ *Qaside* II comprises 46 couplets and appears on pages 258-262 in Ayatollah Khomeini's *Divân* in the Persian metre *rajaz-e mothamman-e sâlem* (- - 0 - / - - 0 - / - - 0 - / - - 0 -).

⁴⁸⁸ The introduction of the classical *qaside* may also consist of elegies (*marthiya*) of Twelver Shiite figures, or of a debate (*munâzara*) or riddle (*chistan*). See J.T.P. de Bruijn, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Courts and Courtiers; Court Poetry; J.S. Meisami, "The Uses of the 'Qasida' ...," pp. 45, 56.

relation he has with his patron to that of a lover and his Beloved.⁴⁸⁹ This is because, just like the lover, the poet devotes himself completely to his ‘Beloved,’ his patron.⁴⁹⁰ Both Beloved and patron, as Julie Scott Meisami says, “can do favors” and, “have power on life and death”.⁴⁹¹ In this panegyric, because of the arrival of the Beloved, the “time of suffering has come to an end”.⁴⁹² The theme of love was adopted in courtly poetry towards the end of the Umayyad Dynasty (r. 661-750) and has been a popular metaphor until modern times. Ayatollah Khomeini has also adopted the love-theme in this panegyric, as in couplet twelve, where all flowers and birds adore the ‘jasmine-shaped’ character that “has the hue of the Judas-Tree”. The mixing of nature themes and eroticism has been popular in Persian poetry since its very beginning, although its origin cannot be traced exactly.⁴⁹³ Ever since the tenth century, Persian poets have used flower and bird symbols to explain their ‘symbolic’ love-relationship with the *mamduh*, the praised one. Ayatollah Khomeini has followed the classical masters here, for in his introduction the birds and flowers represent the poet and the “rosy-cheeked moon-faced one” symbolizes the praised one. To be more specific, the nightingale represents the poet, in this case Ayatollah Khomeini, who has composed the poem in praise of the rose, the beloved Mahdi. Ayatollah Khomeini has chosen to introduce his poem with a Persian garden in spring, in which everything is in bloom and displays perfect harmony. The beauty and perfumes of the flowers are beyond comparison. The birds could not be more excited and livelier. As couplet eleven indicates, all the flowers and birds are happy that the rose has come into blossom because, with the appearance of the Beloved, the “time of affliction has come to an end” and the “time for pleasure and joy” has begun. There are numerous examples of classical Persian poems in which the imagery of flowers and birds correlates with the praised one, whether that be God or an actual person. Sanâ’i (d. 1131), for instance, wrote the “Litany of the Birds”, a poem in which each bird praises God in his own particular way.⁴⁹⁴ The dove for example repeatedly says *ku ku* (“where, where”) because he

⁴⁸⁹ See chapter 4.2 of this study where I elaborate on the lover and the beloved.

⁴⁹⁰ J. Scott Meisami, “Poetic Microcosms...,” pp. 137-182.

⁴⁹¹ J. Scott Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987, pp. 24-27.

⁴⁹² *Qaside* II, couplet 11.

⁴⁹³ B. Reinert, “*Ḥumainī im Spiegel seiner Gedichte...*,” pp. 195-196.

⁴⁹⁴ Abu ‘l-Majd Majdud Sanâ’i was a poet at the royal court in Ghazna, famous particularly for his mystical didactic poems, the *mathnavi*, a genre for which he laid the basis. His most important book is the *Hadiqat al-Haqiqah* (“The Orchard of Truth”) in which he writes on themes in practical and mystical life. See further A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, pp. 301-303.

wants to know where he can find God.⁴⁹⁵ Attâr (d. 1220) wrote a longer poem, the *Manteq al-Teyr* ("The Conference of the Birds"), in which a group of birds on a quest for the Simorgh, the king of the birds, represent the different stages of the mystic's spiritual journey.⁴⁹⁶ In the *Kernel of the Kernel* Tabâtabâ'i connects the Simorgh to the last of the four realms the mystic witnesses, the phase in which he witnesses nothing but God's essence. Tabâtabâ'i describes this bird as "that Pure Essence and Absolute Being, which is called variously the world of Non-Being (*'ālam-i 'amā*), the Hidden Treasure (*kanz-i makhfi*), the Invisible of all invisibles (*ghayb al-ghuyūb*), and the Essence that has no name and no identity (*dhāt mā lā isma lahū wa lā rasma lahū*)."⁴⁹⁷ Ayatollah Khomeini's bird references in this panegyric can be contextualised in this tradition of mystical bird symbolism. They help to explain Ayatollah Khomeini's relationship with the praised one. In the same way, the flower elements that dominate the first six couplets of the poem embody the virtues of the *mamduh*, their beauty and pleasant perfumes remind the reader of the beauty and excellence of the praised one. The symbolic garden was very popular in medieval Persian literature,⁴⁹⁸ and has a metaphysical foundation in the belief that there is an analogy between the different levels of existence. For example, there is a parallelism between nature and man. Nature represents man on a microcosmic level, just as the wonderfully fragrant flowers in the first couplet of this *qaside* represent the *mamduh*'s beauty: "the flowers are smiling in the grass, like the face of the lovely Beloved". Zoroastrian and Manichaean documents also refer to the cultivated garden that represents not only Paradise, but also the cosmos.⁴⁹⁹ The garden has a certain set of conditions: it is enclosed by a wall and has running water, shady trees, and colourful, fragrant flowers. Birds of all colours sing the most beautiful songs. Ayatollah Khomeini follows in this

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 308. See also C.W. Ernst, "Vertical Pilgrimage and Interior Landscape in the Visionary Diary of Rūzbihān Baqlī (d. 1209)," in *The Muslim World*, Vol. 88(2), 1998, pp. 129-140.

⁴⁹⁶ The Simorgh is used in mystical poetry to represent the Perfect Man, the *ensân-e kâmel*. It is a bird that looks like a phoenix and originates in pre-Islamic Iranian mythology. See A. Najm al-Din Râzi, *The Path of God's Bondsmen from Origin to Return*, tr. H. Algar, Delmar: Caravan Books, 1982, p. 141, For bird symbolism see A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, pp. 301-307.

⁴⁹⁷ See S.M.Ĥ. Ḥusaynī Tihrānī, *Kernel of the Kernel*, pp. 124-125.

⁴⁹⁸ The allegorical garden was also a popular theme in medieval Western and other Islamic medieval literature. See J. Scott Meisami, "Allegorical Gardens in the Persian Poetic Tradition: Nezami, Rumi, Hafez," in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 17, Issue 2, 1985, pp. 229-260.

⁴⁹⁹ The word Paradise comes from the old Persian word 'Pairadaēza' and was the name for the garden of a Persian royal. See A. Bartlett Giamatti, *The Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966, p. 11.

tradition: each element in the garden is suggestive of the praised one's beauty, and a reflection of his essence. This personification is typical for Persian poetry.⁵⁰⁰ The bird and flower elements in the opening part help to underline the central position of the praised one, and show why his coming has put an end to a period of pain and affliction.

In the transitional passage, or *gorizgâh*, of a *qaside*, the poet links the praised one of the introduction in a creative way to the patron in the actual praise section of the poem. In this *qaside*, the transitional passage is couplets fifteen and sixteen, where Ayatollah Khomeini says:

With such a beautiful Beloved, you must walk through the garden.	با اینچنین زیبا صنم، باید به بستان زد قدم
The soul is released from every pain and grief; the heart is empty of love and hatred.	جان فارغ از هر رنج و غم، دل خالی از هر مهر و کین

Especially now in this world, the birth of Mahdi is visible everywhere.	خاصه کنون کاندن جهان، گردیده مولودی عیان
Because of his pure Essence, water has become mixed with clay.	کز بهر ذات پاک آن شد امتزاج ماء و طین

In these couplets the poet reveals the identity of the 'rosy-cheeked moon-face' one of couplet eleven. After a lively image of birds and flowers that have all 'bent' for the praised one, in couplet fifteen, the poet introduces the name of the Beloved by saying: "Especially now that in this world, the Mahdi's birth is visible everywhere." As was already clear from the title, Ayatollah Khomeini has written this panegyric for Imam Mahdi, the twelfth Shiite Imam.

The spring scene in this poem refers to the central role that the Mahdi plays in the universe. Ayatollah Khomeini metaphorically describes how all plants and birds have been waiting for his coming. Like a rose that appears for the first time in spring, the Mahdi was born in spring. In 1922, the fifteenth of Shaban in the lunar calendar fell on April 13, during the blossom time in northern Iran. Ayatollah Khomeini has probably written this poem during the Persian New Year, wishing the return of Mahdi, imagining how thriving the world would be under his rule.

⁵⁰⁰ Numerous poems have been written on precious gems, such as the emerald or the pearl, each of them representing a particular attribute of God. This personification is typical for Persian poetry. Also, parts of the body such as the 'curl' (*chin*), 'mole' (*khâl*) or 'lip' (*lab*) are given generally accepted abstract correspondents. 'Curl' for example stands for the divine secret and 'mole' represents the point on which a believer focuses his attention. See A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, pp. 300, 308- 309.

Next, Ayatollah Khomeini describes how the Mahdi forms the centre of the garden, and how he is praised by all, just as he is praised by the Shiites. After Ayatollah Khomeini has introduced the name of the Mahdi, the *mamduh*, in the transitional passage he arrives at the *madih*. This is the part of a *qaside* that contains the actual praise and in which, traditionally, the qualities of the Maecenas are sung. In this panegyric, the *madih* consists of thirty couplets. From couplet seventeen Ayatollah Khomeini starts with a description of the Mahdi's position in the universe. He describes how the prophets and the seventh heaven 'bow' for him, and how the light of the sun and moon are nothing in comparison to the 'brilliancy' of the Mahdi. The Mahdi is the axis of the world, and all the prophets and Imams are at his command because he is the last of the infallible ones. In couplet 24, Ayatollah Khomeini says that the angels are also at his service, stating:

His essence is by the command of God just, it has become the source of the graces of mankind. The army of angels all together, chained to his favours, are his subordinates.

ذاتش به امر دادگر، شد منبع فیض بشر
خیل ملایک سر به سر، در بند الطافش رهین

In these lines Ayatollah Khomeini refers to the Divine essence of the Mahdi, since he contains the primordial Mohammadan light.⁵⁰¹ He shows how every created being is at the Mahdi's service. As indicated by M.A. Amir-Moezzi, Twelver Shiites believe that the Mahdi, together with the Prophet Mohammad, is at the top of the hierarchy.⁵⁰² In couplets 28 and 29 Ayatollah Khomeini says that all the prophets are at his command, but especially Jesus, saying:

Noah and Abraham and Adam the father of mankind, Idris and David and David's son received benefits from the cloud of His Excellence, find assistance from his mine of knowledge.

نوح و خلیل و ابوالبشر، ادريس و داوود و پسر
از ابر فیضش مُستمد، از کان علمش مُستعین

Moses, who has a staff in his hand, is waiting to be his door-keeper. Jesus, in the fourth heaven, is waiting to follow him in prayer.

موسیٰ به کف دارد عصا، دربانیش را منتظر
آماده بهر اقتدا، عیسی به چرخ چارمین

The last line refers to the belief that, shortly after the Mahdi has come out of occultation, Jesus will return to earth. Ayatollah Khomeini says that at the end of time,

⁵⁰¹ *Qaside* II, couplets 18 and 20.

⁵⁰² See M.A. Amir-Moezzi, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Eschatology iii. Imami Shi'ism.

Islamic, Jewish and Christian religious figures will all show their respect to the Mahdi.⁵⁰³ Not only Moses “is waiting to be his door-keeper”, but also Adam, David, Noah, Abraham and Idris “find assistance from his mine of knowledge”. However, this does not imply that Christians and Jews will convert to Twelver Shia Islam at the end of times: rather they will return to the essence of their own faith, which Shiites believe is the same as Shia Islam.⁵⁰⁴

5.6 Rejection of the Monarchy

Could it be that Ayatollah Khomeini was not only celebrating the birthday of Imam Mahdi, but also writing in reaction to the secularization trend Iran had experienced since the late nineteenth century? Could it be that Ayatollah Khomeini was condemning the monarchy and their anti-clergy program, and asserting that the twelfth Imam was the only legitimate ruler of Iran? As in the case of *qaside* I, where I opted that Ayatollah Khomeini composed the panegyric partly in reaction to the anti-veiling program that he feared would be introduced by Reza Khan, the panegyric by Ayatollah Khomeini also responds to the secularization trend that was taking place in Iran since the nineteenth century. Secularization and the political reform of Reza Shah limited the role of the clergy in society. It is in this context that Khomeini desires the return of Mahdi. Several clues support these hypotheses. At first Ayatollah Khomeini mainly describes the worldly qualities of the Mahdi. But throughout the poem, he emphasizes his political role, as in couplet 23, where he says:

King of the Faith, ruler of time, Lord of Guarding
men and women.
The power to grant benefits is at his command,
on earth as well as under the sky.

سُلطان دین، شاهِ زَمَن، مالکِ رقابِ مرد و زن
دارد به امرِ دُوالَمِنَن؛ روی زمین، زیرِ نگین

In couplet thirty, Ayatollah Khomeini calls the Mahdi the “Persian king” by which he implies that he is the only rightful king of the Persian nation. And then in couplets 32 and 33, Ayatollah Khomeini says:

If the king appears, with the sword of ‘Ali on his
belt.
wearing the turban of the Prophet Mohammad on
his head, and the hands of God in his sleeves.

ظاهر شود آن شه اگر، شمشیرِ حیدر بر کمر
دستارِ پیغمبر به سر، دست خدا در آستین

⁵⁰³ According to Islamic theology, Jesus, Zakaria, Aaron and Lot were prophets, along with some other religious figures, while they were not prophets according to Christians and Jews.

⁵⁰⁴ See M.A. Amir-Moezzi, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Eschatology iii. Imami Shi’ism.

None of these unbelievers will remain in this world.
It will be safe on earth from injustice and oppression of these oppressors.

دیارى از این مُلحدان، باقى نماند در جهان
ایمن شود روی زمین از جور و ظلم ظالمین

All these couplets support the assumption that Ayatollah Khomeini condemned the monarchy and saw the Mahdi as the only legitimate ruler of the Iranian nation.

Another element that implies that Ayatollah Khomeini disapproves of the monarchical system is the prominent role of ‘injustice’ and ‘oppression’ in this panegyric. Ayatollah Khomeini depicts the world as a fight between believer and unbeliever, between the oppressor and oppressed, between paganism and ‘down-trodden Islam’ (*Eslâm mostaz’af*), between truth and falsehood. These terms are reflected in Ayatollah Khomeini’s later public speeches and political works, which were also laden with the same dichotomies. In this poem, Ayatollah Khomeini calls the enemy ‘pagans’ (*koffâr*⁵⁰⁵), ‘unbelievers’ (*lâ-madhhabân*⁵⁰⁶), ‘enemy’ (*i’dâ*⁵⁰⁷) or ‘enemies of the faith’ (*i’dâ’-ye dîn*⁵⁰⁸), ‘unbelievers’ (*molhedân*⁵⁰⁹), ‘oppressors’ (*zâlemin*⁵¹⁰), and ‘enemies of your [the Mahdi’s] reign’ (*doshmanân-e dowlât*⁵¹¹). In the poem he makes a sharp distinction between the believers and all those who rally behind the unbelievers.

As in his later speeches, the ‘enemies of the faith’ play a central role in this panegyric. It is not clear who Ayatollah Khomeini targets here in these couplets: it could be Russia or Great Britain that profited from Iran on an economic and political level. It could also be the Iranian government, which allowed these two European countries to profit from Iran’s resources. The ‘enemies’ could also be theological opponents and deviants such as Sunnis and Bahais. Another possibility is that Ayatollah Khomeini refers to those Shiite clerics who disparaged him for his philosophical and mystical leanings, or who supported the Pahlavis or advocated political quietism. Although Ayatollah Khomeini does not mention these enemies by name, he is clear about how to end this period of affliction, for he sees a crucial role for the Mahdi, who will free humans from all forms of oppression and put an end to the “time of

⁵⁰⁵ *Qaside II*, couplet 30.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid*, couplet 31.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, couplet 37.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, couplet 31.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, couplet 33.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid*.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*, couplet 39.

suffering”.⁵¹² Ayatollah Khomeini asks the Mahdi to come and “cast a glance at the dominance of the pagans, [and to] look at down-trodden Islam”.⁵¹³ Ayatollah Khomeini advises the believers to stick to their religion and not to line up behind the ‘enemy,’ by saying in couplets 36 and 37:

As long as the falcon will catch the pigeon in the
air with its claws,
As long as the wolf will be rabid with the sheep
on earth,

تا چنگل شاهین کند، صید کیوتر در هوا
تا گرگ باشد در زمین، بر گوسفندان خشمگین

The doors of victory will be opened to your
lovers
And immense disasters will overcome the souls
of your enemy.

بر روی احباب شود مفتوح ابواب ظفر
بر جان اعدایت رسد هر دم بلای سهمگین

Then, in couplets 38 and 39, Ayatollah Khomeini compares the lives of the faithful to spring, full of blossoming and prosperity, whereas the lives of the unbelievers will be like the failing autumn, filled with decay and destruction, saying:

As long as the breeze of Nowruz blows every
year in the garden
As long as the clouds of spring breathe, there will
be basil and roses on earth.

تا باد نوروزی وزد هر ساله اندر بوستان
تا ز ابر آذاری دمد، ریحان و گل اندر زمین

For the enemies of your reign, every season will
be like autumn.
For your friends, every month will be like spring.

بر دشمنان دولنت هر فصل باشد چون خزان
بر دوستانت هر مهی بادا چو ماه فرودین!

The fact that Ayatollah Khomeini presents the Mahdi as a ‘Persian king’ who will guard men and women, and who has the power to give benefits on earth as well as under the sky, implies that Ayatollah Khomeini condemned the monarchical system and saw the Mahdi as the only legitimate king of the Iranians.⁵¹⁴

5.7 Mahdi’s Representative on Earth: A Predecessor to *Velâyat-e Faqih*.

Although the main part of Ayatollah Khomeini’s second panegyric is about the Mahdi, an interesting shift of focus takes place towards the end of the poem, in couplet forty, where Ayatollah Khomeini introduces one of his teachers, ‘Abd al-Karim Hâ’eri Yazdi (1859-1937), saying: “The world becomes empty of ignorance and full of knowledge through his coming, like the city of Qom after the coming of the great Sheikh, the grand commander [*Sheikh-e*

⁵¹² *Qaside II*, couplet 11.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*, couplet 30.

⁵¹⁴ For an analysis of these lines see A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, “Khomeini the Poet Mystic,” pp. 438-458.

Ajal].” ‘Abd al-Karim Hâ’eri, who was also known as the ‘*Sheikh-e Ajal*,’ was one of the most influential *mujtaheds* in the 1920s and greatly admired by Ayatollah Khomeini.⁵¹⁵ He was born in 1859 in a small town called Mehrjard near the city of Yazd and was a *sayyed*, a descendant of the Prophet. After having completed the traditional religious education in a seminar (*madrassa*), Hâ’eri went to the city of Sâmarrâ in Iraq, to continue his religious education there.⁵¹⁶ Many Iranian religious students at that time went to Iraq to study in one either Karbalâ, Najaf or Samarra, which were then the most important Shiite scholarly centres in the world. After completing his studies, Hâ’eri taught and lived in both Iran and Iraq. In 1913 he returned to Iran for good, establishing a religious institute in Arâk. By then, his popularity had grown enormously among religious scholars within and outside Iran, and he was asked to teach at different religious institutes such as those in Mashad and Qom.⁵¹⁷ Hâ’eri became one of the leading *marja’-e taqlids* (‘sources of emulation’).⁵¹⁸ This title is given by Twelver Shiites to the senior Islamic jurists who are allowed to interpret the *Sharia*, and make

⁵¹⁵ Hâ’eri was not only Ayatollah Khomeini’s teacher but he would later also be connected to him by family ties when Ayatollah Khomeini’s son Mostafâ married Hâ’eri’s daughter. Next to that, Hâ’eri’s son Morteza (d. 1986) was a close intimate of Ayatollah Khomeini and greatly approved of Ayatollah Khomeini’s political program. Not many books or articles have been written on Hâ’eri. Some important Western contributions have been made by H. Algar, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Hâ’eri, ‘Abd al-Karim Yazdi; V. Martin, *Creating an Islamic State; Khomeini and the Making of a New Iran*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2003, pp. 15, 29, 30, 33, 48-49, 53, 80; A. Hairi, in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*(2), under Ha’erî, Abd al-Karîm Yazdî; S. Akhavi, *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1980, pp. 27-28, 40-44, 62 and B. Moin, *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah*, London: I.B. Tauris, 1999, pp. 22-36, 55, 57, 68 and 75.

⁵¹⁶ For consultation see H. Algar, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Hâ’eri, ‘Abd al-Karim Yazdi; M. Momen, *An Introduction to Shi’i Islam*, pp. 247-248, 261, 303, 312-313.

⁵¹⁷ It is said that Hâ’eri at first doubted whether to accept the invitation to teach in Qom but he was convinced to stay after somebody referred to the words of the sixth Shiite Imam Ja’far al-Sâdeq (d. 765) who had said that Qom would be an extremely important place at the end of times. The tradition says that the knowledge that disappears into the ground of Najaf like a snake, will around that time reappear in Qom. See H. Algar, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Hâ’eri, ‘Abd al-Karim Yazdi

⁵¹⁸ The *marja’* is the highest authority in Twelver Shi’ism after the Prophet and the imams. Although the idea of the *marja’-e taqlid* was developed in the nineteenth century, Ayatollah Borujerdi (d. 1961) seems to have been the first *marja’* who was actually called this way. He was the sole *marja’* from 1947 up to his death in 1961. A *marja’* is not officially elected. More than one *marja’* can exist at the same time. Every person is obliged to follow the advice and opinion of the *marja’* of his own choice. Now a *marja’-e taqlid* is also called an Ayatollah. For consultation see R. Brunner, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Shiite Doctrine ii. Hierarchy in the Imamiyya. See also chapter 1.2 of this study.

legal decisions.⁵¹⁹ In 1922, the year in which Ayatollah Khomeini wrote this panegyric, Hâ'eri moved to Qom and started erecting a new religious institute called the *Hawze-ye 'Ilmiyyeh*. Within fifteen years, this institute would be attended by thousands of students and religious scholars from within and outside of Iran, including Ayatollah Khomeini.

In this panegyric, Ayatollah Khomeini has used Hâ'eri's move to Qom as a pretext to link his teacher in an original way to the Mahdi. The knowledge that each brought to the world, the first in Qom and the other worldwide, is the connection for Ayatollah Khomeini's shift of focus from Imam Mahdi to Hâ'eri. Ayatollah Khomeini also applies similar character traits, such as the bestowing of 'benefits,' to both the Mahdi and Hâ'eri.' In couplet 41, Ayatollah Khomeini calls Hâ'eri the "cloud of benefit" (*abr-e 'atâ*), while in couplet nineteen he compares the Mahdi's benefits to the moon and concludes that the latter is "only a small coin in a little purse" compared to the first. Also in couplet 41, Ayatollah Khomeini praises Hâ'eri for his "universal grace" (*feyz-e amim*), whereas in couplet 24 and 28 he had called the Mahdi "the source of the graces of mankind" (*manba'-e feyz-e bashar*) and the one who gives "benefits from the cloud of his excellence". Ayatollah Khomeini also connects both Hâ'eri and the Mahdi to 'benevolence' (*karam*).⁵²⁰ And last but not least, Ayatollah Khomeini calls Hâ'eri "the treasure of knowledge from the past andthe source of science for the coming... [holding]...the reins of Sharia and the Faith."⁵²¹ How should we interpret these couplets? And why would Ayatollah Khomeini compare Hâ'eri to the Mahdi, something that was very unconventional in the orthodox milieu of early twentieth century Iran? The linking of Hâ'eri's qualities to those of the infallible Mahdi and presenting him as a master of both past and future knowledge can only be placed in a mystical context. As explained before, mystics believe that not only the fourteen immaculate persons but also the mystic who has reached a state of perfection has knowledge of both worlds and reflects all of God's qualities. By attributing this ability to Hâ'eri, Ayatollah Khomeini presents his teacher as a 'perfect man,' an *ensân-e kâmel*, reflecting God's attributes in all senses.⁵²² This is similar to

⁵¹⁹ Hâ'eri shared this title with Mirzâ Hoseyn Nâ'ini and Sayyed Abu'l Hasan Esfahâni.

⁵²⁰ The Mahdi in couplet 30 and Hâ'eri in couplet 41.

⁵²¹ *Qaside II*, couplets 42-43.

⁵²² According to Islamic mystical thought, each person reflects some of the qualities of God. A perfect man reflects all 99 'realities' of God, which are also called the 99 beautiful names of God. For consultation see M. Takeshita, *Ibn 'Arabi's Theory of the Perfect Man and its Place in the History of Islamic Thought*, pp. 106-109.

Ayatollah Khomeini's first *qaside*, where he attributes perfection to Fâteme Ma'sume, who in more orthodox thinking was an 'ordinary' person.

5.8 Spiritual Perfection and Leadership

It is not incongruous to see that Ayatollah Khomeini, unlike most of his fellow students in Qom, supported the mystical interpretation of 'perfection.' Some seven years after Ayatollah Khomeini wrote this panegyric, he discussed the concept of the perfect man in his *Mesbâh al-Hedâyat* (1929). In the same vein as the thirteenth-century mystical philosopher Ibn 'Arabi who became famous for his ideas on the 'oneness of being' (*vahdat al-vojud*), Ayatollah Khomeini believes that the whole of creation is a reflection of 'divine self-image,' meaning God. According to him, the goal of every human is to reflect this divine presence to the fullest. Ayatollah Khomeini elaborates on the fact that 'normal' entities only reflect one or some of God's divine names or attributes, while the perfect man represents them all. Also according to him, the prophets and saints are perfect men. But apart from this, and what differentiates Ayatollah Khomeini's opinion from the traditional Shiite view of the perfect man, he declares that every person has the ability to become perfect and to see the divine secrets. Both the panegyric that Ayatollah Khomeini wrote on Fâteme Ma'sume and *qaside* II in which he praises his teacher Hâ'eri support this view. In *Mesbâh al-Hedâyat* Ayatollah Khomeini writes extensively on the steps a mystic has to follow on his spiritual journey towards union with God. Ayatollah Khomeini explains that this journey takes place within a person. To attain to this union, the mystic has to cleanse his soul of all ego and all possible 'I-ness', i.e. any trace of one's ego and identity. After the mystic has reached this final stage and has become 'a perfect reflection of God,' he has to return to the community to share his divine knowledge with mankind. He explains how the perfect man represents both the created world and the divine world because he has knowledge of both the manifest world and of the hidden divine world.

As regards the duty of the perfect man, namely to share his divine knowledge, Ayatollah Khomeini was inspired by Mollâ Sadrâ. As B. Moin says, "For Khomeini, Mollah Sadra was the man who had enabled him to understand the path of perfection."⁵²³ This seventeenth-century mystical philosopher became very famous for his book *Hekmat al-Mota'aliye fi-l Asrâr al-'Aqliyye al-Arba'e* ("The Transcendent Wisdom in the Four Intellectual Journeys"), which for convenience will be called the *Four Journeys* here. Mollâ Sadrâ expanded on Ibn 'Arabi's theories and stated that the road to perfection consists of four

⁵²³ B. Moin, *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah*, p. 48.

journeys. In addition to Ibn 'Arabi's theory on Unity of Being, Mollâ Sadrâ declared that the mystic, after he has finished his spiritual journey, has the duty of spreading the messages of God among the people.⁵²⁴ According to Ayatollah Khomeini the perfect man can be called the ruler of the cosmos. He sees the perfect man as the representative of God, as his *khalife* ('vicegerent'), who has to guide mankind.⁵²⁵ In his *Mesbâh*, Ayatollah Khomeini calls the perfect man the 'archetypal vicegerent' who is timeless and who has become manifest through the various prophets and saints.⁵²⁶ In his panegyric on the Mahdi, Ayatollah Khomeini speaks of his teacher Hâ'eri in a similar vein. For Ayatollah Khomeini, he is a perfect man who combines spiritual and profane, visible and invisible knowledge, saying in couplets 41 to 43:

The cloud of benefit, the universal grace, the sea of generosity, treasure of delight.

Mine of benevolence, 'Abd al-Karim, supporter and defender of Muslims.

He is the treasure of knowledge from the past and he is the source of science for the coming.

Out of honour God has handed him the reins of Sharia and the Faith.

The religious scholars from all districts come together under his shadow.

And from all corners of the world, religious students come to his presence.

ابر عطا، فیض عمیم، بحر سخا، کنز نعیم

کانِ گَرم «عبدالکریم»، پشت و پناه مُسلمین

گنجینه‌ی علم سَلَف، سرچشمه‌ی فضل خلف

دادش خداوند از شرف بر کف زمام شرع و دین

در سایه‌اش گرد آمده، اعلام دین از هر بُلَد

بر ساحتش آورده رو طُلّاب از هر سرزمین

In this part Ayatollah Khomeini speaks of Hâ'eri as possessing both past and future knowledge and as reflecting the most excellent features of God. Because of these qualities many religious scholars are 'under his shadow', which is to say he has a guiding role. According to both Mollâ Sadrâ and Ayatollah Khomeini, the state of perfection was not reserved solely for the Shiite Imams. By comparing Hâ'eri's extraordinary qualities to those of the Mahdi, it is obvious that Ayatollah Khomeini is depicting Hâ'eri as an infallible person,

⁵²⁴In addition to Ibn 'Arabi's theories, Mollâ Sadrâ developed a metaphysical philosophy for the road to perfection that synthesized theoretical and metaphysical ideas. Mollâ Sadrâ not only adopted illuminationist philosophical theories from Sohrawardi and 'erfâni thoughts from Ibn 'Arabi, he also made use of Avicenna's rational philosophical theories and of Islamic theological (*kalam*) ways of thinking, and by doing so explained the road to perfection as both a spiritual and a physical one. See further B. Moin, *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah*, pp. 48-51.

⁵²⁵ See J.G.T. ter Haar, "Heiligheid en politiek gezag. Het begrip wilâyat in de optiek van Khumaynî," in *Mystiek: het andere gezicht van de islam*, eds. M. Buitelaar and J.G.J. ter Haar, Bussum: Coutinho, 1999, pp. 97-98. See also A. Knysh, "Irfan Revisited: Khomeini and the Legacy of Islamic Mystical Philosophy," *Middle East Journal* 46 (1992), pp. 636-653.

⁵²⁶A. Knysh, "Irfan Revisited" pp. 635-645.

a perfect reflection of God. Ayatollah Khomeini's reference in couplet 42 to Hâ'eri as a person of whom God "out of honour has handed the reins of Sharia and the Faith" is strong evidence that Ayatollah Khomeini believed that Hâ'eri should fulfil the highest religious position in society. In other words, that Ayatollah Khomeini saw Hâ'eri as the representative of Imam Mahdi, both at a religious and political level, a role which he would fulfil himself after the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran. This panegyric of 1922 shows that Ayatollah Khomeini's ideas of the 'governance of the jurist' (*velâyat-e faqih*), according to which there should always be one leading jurist (*faqih*) to implement religious and governmental matters in society, while the Mahdi is in occultation, the ideas that he presented to the public in the 1970s and made the basis of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic, were already present in his early years.

5.9 Anti-British Tendencies in Ayatollah Khomeini's *Qasides*

The idea that Ayatollah Khomeini sees his teacher Hâ'eri as the representative of the Mahdi comes out even more strongly in *qaside* III, the second panegyric on Imam Mahdi, which Ayatollah Khomeini wrote one year later, in 1923.⁵²⁷ Ayatollah Khomeini again composed the poem on the commemoration of the birthday of the Mahdi, to whom he dedicated the poem. It is called 'In Praise of the Guardian of Time (*vali-ye 'Asr*). It too links the Mahdi with Hâ'eri. Once again, following the traditional rules of the *qaside*, Ayatollah Khomeini begins with a depiction of a garden filled with flowers and birds, introducing the Beloved, i.e. the Mahdi, in a classical way. The world is in the midst of spring and life could not be more pleasant. In the manner of classical poets, Ayatollah Khomeini depicts the world as a 'mirror' that "after the union of a drop of rain in pure water...has become like a serving-plate of water that is full of Yemenite pearls".⁵²⁸ One drop of rain has turned "plain and desert... [into] ...carpets of dark-green brocade".⁵²⁹ The idea of the world as a 'mirror' reflecting the other world, i.e. the Divine, is based on Ibn 'Arabi's concept of *vahdat al-vojud* ('oneness of being') and is a recurrent theme in Ayatollah Khomeini's poetry. As in *qaside* II, Ayatollah Khomeini shows how the whole of creation aims at reaching union with the 'rose,' representing the Beloved or the praised one, in this case Imam Mahdi. All birds sing love

⁵²⁷ I will refer to the second Mahdi panegyric as *qaside* III. It consists of 44 couplets and appears on pages 263-267 in Ayatollah Khomeini's *Divân*. It is in the Persian metre *ramal-e mothamman-e sâlem*: - 0 - - / - 0 - - / - 0 - - / - 0 - -.

⁵²⁸ *Qaside* III, couplet 4.

⁵²⁹ *Ibid.*, couplet 5.

songs on the rose, and as A. Schimmel explains, their songs are ‘complaints’ about not having attained union with their Beloved. The features of the different flowers again indicate their relation to their Beloved.⁵³⁰ For example, in couplet nine, Ayatollah Khomeini mentions the red celandine, which is like a “lover who bows his head to see his Beloved” with half of his face “red-coloured and half of it...yellow”. The fact that half of its face is pale means that this part is still in affliction for it has not achieved union with the Beloved. However, the other side has already witnessed him and therefore has turned completely red, like a lover in the presence of his Beloved. The whole of nature reminds us of the Beloved’s beauty. In couplet eleven Ayatollah Khomeini explains that “the dew on the lily is heart-ravishing like the beauty-spot on the Beloved’s face” while the “narcissus and hyacinth are stealing the hearts like eyes and hair-locks”. The whole of nature is happy that the Beloved will return to the world, and to use Ayatollah Khomeini’s words, “God has brought together this world of pleasure, to receive His friend in this feast in a hundred ways”.⁵³¹

In the transitional passage, in couplets nineteen and twenty, Ayatollah Khomeini mentions Imam Mahdi for the first time, referring to him as “the Mahdi of the end of times.” His birthday is celebrated on the fifteenth of the lunar month Sha‘ban. In the year 1923, when Ayatollah Khomeini composed the poem, the day of his birth, took place on April 4, on the twelfth day of the Persian month *Farvardin* (Spring), that is based on the solar calendar. This is also the twelfth and last day of Nowruz. So it coincided with the festivities of Nowruz, taking place during springtime. The birthday of the Mahdi is the reason behind the felicity and happiness of the flowers and birds in the opening passage. The flowers that are at the height of their bloom in the springtime have metaphorically put on their best clothes and finest perfumes to celebrate the Mahdi’s entry in the world, because he is the centre of the world. It is to him that the world and its creatures owe their existence, and it is to him that all will return. The return of Imam Mahdi will take place on Nowruz. According to Shiites, many important events took and will take place on this day.⁵³² So they say that Nowruz coincided with the Day of Alast on which the souls of mankind, before God brought them into existence, promised to obey God as their Lord. It supposedly also coincided with the day on which prophet Mohammad appointed Imam ‘Ali as his successor at Ghadeer-e Khom. Ayatollah Khomeini also refers to this event in couplet 28, saying:

⁵³⁰ A. Schimmel, “Rose und Nachtigall,” in *Numen*, Vol. 5, Fasc. 2, Leiden: Brill, 1958, pp. 88-102.

⁵³¹ Ibid., couplet 18.

⁵³² See A.S. Shahbazi, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Nowruz ii. In the Islamic Period.

May the feast of Ghadeer-e Khom with a
Solomon like splendour and glory come,
So I can place the Kayanid crown on His head
because of the birth of the king Mahdi.

عید «خُم»، با حشمت و فرّ سلیمانی بیامد
که نهادم بر سر از میلاد شه تاج کیانی

In this couplet Ayatollah Khomeini refers to the date on which the birthday of the Mahdi and the first day of Nowroz (1 *Farvardin*) will take place on the exact same day. The conjunction of these two special days, which both have important value within a Shiite context, must be of superior value for the Shiites. But as Ayatollah Khomeini then indicates in couplet 30, the conjuncture of these two dates will not occur any time soon:

It will be centuries before such a feast comes to
this world.
This year's feast is a token of an auspicious.

قرنها باید که تا آید چنین عیدی به عالم
عید امسال از شرف زد سکه‌ی صاحبقرانی

Although it is in the far future that both days will take place on the exact same date, it is exceptional that in 1923 the birth of the Mahdi took place during the 12-day long Nowruz festivities. Ayatollah Khomeini uses the pretext of 'king Mahdi' in couplet 28 to turn the attention to the political situation in Iran, saying in couplet 31:

Reason says: "Be silent! How long do you want
to praise a king?
Who has sung the praise of his qualities through
a tongueless tongue.

عقل گوید: باش خامش، چند گویی مدح شاهی
که سروده مدحتش حق، با زبان بی‌زبانی

Although Ayatollah Khomeini became famous for his political reading of Islam from the 1960s, he would not openly mingle in political affairs prior to that period. This does not mean that he was not concerned with the threats that imperialism and secularization posed to Islam. However, in this couplet, Ayatollah Khomeini is very clear in his rejection of the Iranian monarchy, condemning their empty achievements.⁵³³ He condemns the Iranian monarchs for cooperating with the British, whom he describes in couplets 34 to 37 in the following way:

How long will these unbelievers drink the blood
of the believers,
For how long will these wolves be the shepherds
of these sheep?

تا به کی این کافران نوشند خون اهل ایمان؟
چند این گرگان کنند این گوسفندان را شبانی؟

⁵³³ See also A.A. Seyed-Gohrab's analysis of this *qaside* in his "Khomeini the Poet Mystic", pp. 447-449.

How long will these worthless people be our commanders,
How long will these thieves watch over these uncivilized people?

تا به کی این ناکسان باشند بر ما حکمرانان؟

تا کی این دزدان کنند این بی‌کسان را پاسبانی؟

How long should we endure the British oppression?
The British who are matchless in their oppression and tyranny.

تا به کی بر ما روا باشد جفای انگلیسی؟

آن که در ظلم و ستم فرد است و او را نیست ثانی

The British who, because of their greed, the world have become poor.
The British who incurred faults on the Islamic tenets.

آنکه از حرصش نصیب عالمی شد تنگدستی

آن که بر آیات حق رفت از خطایش آنچه دانی

From the use of the first-person plural “we” and “our,” it is evident that Ayatollah Khomeini intends these couplets to mirror the socio-political situation at the time. Although the allusions to the British refer to the imperialist designs of Great Britain, Ayatollah Khomeini may also have been referring indirectly to the Iranian government, which cooperated with the imperialist forces and wished to model Iran on British lines (“The British who because of their greed, have become the rest of the world”). Ayatollah Khomeini shows how the British dominate the country, depriving the Iranian people of all their possessions and threatening their Islamic institutions.

As in his previous panegyric, oppression (*zolm*) is an important theme in this poem. Ayatollah Khomeini speaks of the oppressors as ‘unbelievers’ (*kâferân*⁵³⁴), ‘wolves’ (*gorgân*⁵³⁵), ‘ill-wishers’ (*badkh^wâh*⁵³⁶), ‘thieves’ (*dozdân*⁵³⁷) and ‘worthless people’ (*nâ-kesân*⁵³⁸) who continue in their practices of tyranny (*setam*⁵³⁹) and oppression (*jafâ* or *zolm*⁵⁴⁰). Unlike the previous poem, in this panegyric Ayatollah Khomeini is specific about whom he connects to oppression, in this case the British. In his view, the British are the greatest oppressors of all. The way in which Ayatollah Khomeini refers to the British in this poem is similar to the way he speaks of the West in his *Islamic Government* of 1970. In that book, Ayatollah Khomeini frequently uses the term *zâlem* (oppressors) to denote the Western

⁵³⁴ *Qaside* III, couplet 34.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁶ *Qaside* III, couplet 42.

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*, couplet 35.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁹ *Qaside* III, couplet 36.

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

powers and Iranians who support the westernization of Iran.⁵⁴¹ Ayatollah Khomeini speaks of them as people who want “to keep us backward, to keep us in our miserable state so they can exploit our riches, our underground wealth, our lands, and our human resources.”⁵⁴² The bad image of the British that prevailed in Iran since the end of the nineteenth century, reflects in this panegyric in which Ayatollah Khomeini connects the British to oppression and injustice. His hostile depiction of the British reflects the frustrated and disturbed relation between Iran and the West at the time of writing.⁵⁴³ Iran had experienced years of Western penetration, in particular by British and Russian forces that had both been able to contract various lucrative concessions with the Qajar Shahs that were devastating for the country’s economic and socio-political stability.⁵⁴⁴ In 1923, the year that Ayatollah Khomeini composed this poem, Reza Khan was paving the way to promote himself from Commander of the Cossack Brigade to Minister of War, Prime Minister, and then, in 1925, to Shah of Iran. Reza Khan was able to pull Iran from its weak and dependant position. Through various reforms in the military, economic, judicial, educational, religious and cultural field, Reza Khan succeeded in modernizing the country on various levels and in strengthening it against foreign penetration. However, the clergy, and with them Khomeini, rightly feared that the modernization campaigns of the Shah would have great consequences for the religious institutions.⁵⁴⁵

In this particular panegyric of the early 1920s, Ayatollah Khomeini reflects the anti-British sentiment common in Iran since the late nineteenth century. Ayatollah Khomeini particularly blames Britain for being opportunistic. He depicts the country as an oppressing force that has made Iranians totally dependent on her. The ideas discussed in this poem come back in several of Ayatollah Khomeini’s speeches delivered much later, in 1978 in Neauphle-le-Chateau. This poem gives a good insight into Ayatollah Khomeini’s objections to the West

⁵⁴¹ Sometimes Ayatollah Khomeini used the word ‘oppressor’ to refer to the Sunnites. At other moments, he would use it to denote the Qajar or Pahlavi rulers or the imperialist forces such as Britain, Russia or America.

⁵⁴² R. Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution*, p. 34. In *Islam and Revolution* Ayatollah Khomeini accuses the West, particularly America, of using Iranian rulers as puppets, making Iran totally dependent on them. See also R. Khomeini, *Kauthar: an Anthology of the Speeches of Imam Khomeini (s.a.) including an Account of the Events of the Islamic Revolution 1962-1978*, Volume 2, Tehran, 1995, pp. 35-38.

⁵⁴³ See further A. Ashraf, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Conspiracy Theories; also R.W. Ferrier, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Anglo-Iranian Relations.

⁵⁴⁴ For an extensive discussion of anti-British and anti-Russian sentiments in Iran see A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, “Poetry as Awakening: Singing Modernity,” in *Literature of the Early Twentieth Century From the Constitutional Period to Reza Shah*, Vol. XI, London / New York: I.B. Tauris, 2015, pp. 90-97.

⁵⁴⁵ For the reforms in the religious field under Reza Shah, see chapter 1.6 and 1.7 of this study.

and in particular to England and Russia. Ayatollah Khomeini argues that from the beginning of the Western presence in Iran, it has been their goal to exploit Iran's natural resources and to establish a presence in a strategic country. The anti-British ideas presented in the poem are combined with other elements. For instance, in these speeches Ayatollah Khomeini first blames the British and then the Russians for exploiting Iran's oil and gas supplies. He produced evidence in the form of detailed British and Russian maps showing where these natural resources can be found.⁵⁴⁶

Panegyrics like these by Ayatollah Khomeini are interesting since they demonstrate that he was already at a young age concerned with socio-political matters and wanted to combine religion with politics and social issues. The terms 'oppression' and 'suffering' which he uses regularly in this panegyric but also in future speeches and books are integrally linked to the Shiite community. Shiites believe that they have been suffering ever since the early days of Islam.⁵⁴⁷ They feel that 'Ali ibn Abi Tâleb was unjustly bypassed as the successor to the Prophet, and the killing of Hoseyn, the third Shiite Imam, in 680, and the brutal treatment of his followers is seen as a great defeat for the Shiite community.⁵⁴⁸ Shiites believe that only the Mahdi can put a definitive end to the suffering the Shiite community experiences. As indicated by M.A. Amir-Moezzi, the Mahdi's return will be heralded by several signs. One is that the earth will be filled with oppression and injustice. In this poem, Ayatollah Khomeini points out the oppression and tyranny afflicting Iran. The return of Imam Mahdi and the ensuring end of the world is described as the culmination of a period in which most people have lost their faith in God, their sense of morality and religious obligation towards God and towards the community. Ayatollah Khomeini frequently refers to the 'unbelievers' and 'uncivilized people' that dominate the country in this panegyric. According to the Shiites, the Mahdi's main role would be to exact revenge for the continuous suffering and oppression of the Shiite community. The Mahdi is also expected to restore religious awareness among the people. However he will not convert the whole world to the Shiite faith, but rather will return

⁵⁴⁷ For a detailed discussion of the event at Karbalâ and its re-examination see H. Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 1982, pp. 183-194.

⁵⁴⁸ Hoseyn openly protested against Yazid, the ruling caliph whom the Sunnites considered to be the legitimate ruler. On the tenth of Moharram (tenth of October 680), Hoseyn and his troops met the troops of Yazid on the plain of Karbalâ. After a bloody fight, Hoseyn and his troops were killed. See H. Halm, *Shiism*, pp. 13-16 and J. Wellhausen, *The Religio-Political Factions in Early Islam*, Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1975, pp. 105-116. See also M.A. Amir-Moezzi, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Eschatology iii. Imami Shi'ism.

Christians and Jews to the true essence of their own faith, which according to some traditions is the same as Islam. The Mahdi will show the people the spiritual wisdom (*hekmat*), which is seated in their heart but which most people are unable to see. Like the Imams before him, the Mahdi will explain the hidden secrets of the universe. He will be accompanied by an army, because oppression and injustice can only be extinguished through the use of violence.⁵⁴⁹ After the Mahdi has carried out all of this, he will rule for several years, the exact period being unknown. Others believe that the Imam Zaman will die, after which the world will be ruled by ‘initiates’ until the day of Resurrection.⁵⁵⁰ Thus the Mahdi’s main tasks are to put an end to the continuous suffering of the Shiite community and revive religious awareness among the people.

5.10 The Shiite Interpretation of Oppression

In *qaside* III, Ayatollah Khomeini has adopted some interesting terms whose connotations have changed. To understand the passive posture vis-à-vis injustice that has typified the Shiite community for ages, we must examine the meanings of oppression from a Shiite point of view, for its connotations have changed significantly over the past few decades and give the panegyric a strong political loading. So does he use the term *mazlum*, which Ayatollah Khomeini connects to the effects of British interference, and which he also frequently used in his speeches during the Islamic Revolution. The term has been translated in this poem as ‘oppressed’ but it has various meanings. Hamid Enayat defines *mazlum* in the literal sense of the word as “injured, oppressed or sinned against”.⁵⁵¹ But the term also has a rather positive connotation in colloquial Persian, as it is also used for a person who is “associated with incurring injustice” or “who is unwilling to act against others even when he is oppressed, not out of cowardice or diffidence but because of generosity and forbearance.”⁵⁵² In the last sense, *mazlum* is a noble quality and has nothing to do with weakness. Shiites consider Hoseyn to be the embodiment of *mazlum*, and as H. Enayat says, he allowed “himself to be killed on the plains of Karbalā’ to purify the Muslim community of sins”.⁵⁵³ Enayat emphasizes Hoseyn’s image amongst the Shiites as a person who had “an almost masochistic wish for

⁵⁴⁹ This army will consist of 313 militants who carry black banners, by angels and by fear (*ro’b*), a frightful ‘entity.’

⁵⁵⁰ M.A. Amir-Moezzi, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Eschatology iii. Imami Shi’ism.

⁵⁵¹ H. Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, p. 183.

⁵⁵² Ibid.

⁵⁵³ Ibid.

martyrdom”.⁵⁵⁴ The result of this interpretation of the Karbalâ story is that for centuries the Shiites, in the image of Hoseyn, have adopted a rather quietist attitude towards opposing forces.

In the 1960s and 1970s there was a real change in this rather passive stance of the Shiite community towards injustice. The change related to a re-examination of the events at Karbalâ. Although over the ages many Sunnite and Shiite works have been written on the defeat of Imam Hoseyn and his troops in 680, the Islamic scholar Ni'matullah Sâlihi Najaf-Âbâdi wrote a crucial book, *The Immortal Martyr (Shahid-e jâvid)* in 1968. Najaf-Âbâdi ignited a discussion on why Hoseyn, who like all the Imams supposedly had knowledge of the future, would deliberately choose to be defeated in 680 on the plain of Karbalâ? To answer the question whether Hoseyn really did have prescience of his own and his family's defeat, Najaf-Âbâdi re-examined all the popular stories and traditions about the event at Karbalâ and compared them to historical reports from historians such as Tabari and Sheikh Mofid. Najaf-Âbâdi states that only the popular stories support the supposition that Hoseyn had foreknowledge of his defeat, but this is not confirmed in the official trustworthy traditions. Moreover, Najaf-Âbâdi shows that some details from the popular stories could not have taken place because they do not match historical facts. Najaf-Âbâdi concludes that Hoseyn did not know he would be defeated, and revolted against Yazid and his troops simply to prevent them from establishing an illegitimate monarchical system. Therefore, as Najaf-Âbâdi argues, the defeat of Hoseyn and his followers should not be seen as conscious self-destruction, but rather as a courageous attempt to safeguard the Islamic ideals, which unfortunately did not turn out positively. By presenting the tragedy at Karbalâ in this way, Najaf-Âbâdi gives the event a strong political character because he indirectly implies that all Shiites should follow Imam Hoseyn's example in fighting any form of political or religious injustice, even if a victory appears to be far from reach. In this way, the tragedy at Karbalâ is not an “inimitable event in history, above the capacity of the common run of human beings”, but can happen to any person who rebels against illegitimate rule or oppression.⁵⁵⁵ By presenting the story like this, Najaf-Âbâdi turned the earlier, rather passive and forbearing role of Hoseyn into one of active revolt against oppression and deviation from Islamic norms.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 184.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 194.

Najaf-Âbâdi's change of focus in the Karbalâ story had a widespread effect on Shiites worldwide.⁵⁵⁶ At first it was only discussed within religious circles, but Ayatollah Khomeini in particular repeatedly presented this new image to the public during the Islamic revolution and after the instalment of the Republic of Iran. In his book *Islamic Governance* of 1970, Ayatollah Khomeini speaks of the event at Karbalâ in the vein of Najaf-Âbâdi, as a revolt against the illegitimate rule of the Umayyad monarchy and a defence of the values of an ideal Islamic state. He says specifically that hereditary succession "prompted the Lord of the Martyrs (peace be upon him) to rise up in revolt and seek martyrdom in an effort to prevent its establishment. He revolted in repudiation of the hereditary succession of Yazid, to refuse to give him the oath of obedience. In this view, monarchy and the hereditary succession of rulers have no place in Islam."⁵⁵⁷ In this particular speech, Ayatollah Khomeini uses the story of Karbalâ and the revolt of Hoseyn against the illegitimate rule of the Umayyad monarch to indicate that the rule of Mohammad Reza Shah is equally illegitimate. The sentence also implies that, as in the case of Karbalâ, the monarchy should be removed to defend Islamic values.

Other sayings by Ayatollah Khomeini from the 1970s and 1980s, such as "Every day is Ashurâ and every land is Karbalâ," also imply that he interprets the event at Karbalâ as a conscious attempt by Hoseyn to fight injustice. By presenting the battle at Karbalâ in this way, Ayatollah Khomeini reinforced the political and active interpretation of *mazlum*, to project the events at Karbalâ and the figure of Hoseyn onto everyday life and to mobilize Shiites to act against the oppression of the Shiite community and violations of Islamic values.⁵⁵⁸

⁵⁵⁶ See also Evan Siegel's article "The Politics of Shahid-e Javid, in *The Twelver Shia in Modern Times: Religious Culture & Political History*, eds. R. Brunner and W. Ende, Leiden: Brill, 2001, pp. 150-77.

⁵⁵⁷ See R. Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution*, p. 31.

⁵⁵⁸ For various discussions on the re-interpretation of the event at Karbalâ see the article by P. Khosronejad, "Introduction: Unburied Memories," in *Unburied Memories*, *Visual Anthropology*, 25, 1-2, 2012, pp. 1-21; A.A. Seyed-Gohrab's "Martelaren: van Mystieke Weg tot Oorlogspad," in *Mededelingen*, deel 72, No. 4, Amsterdam: KNAW Press, 2009 and "Martyrdom as Piety, Mysticism and National Icon in Iran," in *Der Islam: Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Kultur des islamischen Orients*, issue 1-2, 87, 2012, pp. 248-73; H.E. Chehabi & F. Christia, "The Art of State Persuasion: Iran's Post-Revolutionary Murals," in *Persica*, Vol. 22, 2008, pp. 1-13; C.J. Gruber, "The Message is on the Wall: Mural Arts in Post-Revolutionary Iran", in *Persica*, Vol. 22, 2008, pp. 15-46; P. Karimi, "Imagining Warfare, Imagining Welfare: Tehran's Post Iran-Iraq War Murals and their Legacy", in *Persica*, Vol. 22, 2008, pp. 47-63.

The picture of life as a continuous battle between good and evil is strongly rooted in Iranian culture, and is central to the Twelver Shiite faith, and has also played a key role in the lives of numerous mystics. While for Shiites, the resurrection (*entezâr*) of the Mahdi will herald the end of oppression, mystics believe that the end of the spiritual path will herald a ‘personal’ resurrection and will mean the end of the soul’s suffering. In this sense the battle against oppression thus takes place on both a communal and personal level.

5.11 Islamic Governance

There is evidence in this panegyric that the young Ayatollah Khomeini was already at a young age engaged with the thought of adopting an Islamic form of governance that could replace any form of ‘illegitimate’ rule and that would actively defend Islamic ideals, protecting the Shiites against any form of oppression, intrusion or injustice. So he writes in couplets 38 to 42:

Oh God, humiliate these unbelievers in this world
till the dawn of the Judgement Day.
Those who have struck the drum of success based
on their worldly possessions.

خوار کن شاهها! تو او را در جهان، تا صبح محشر

آنکه می‌زد در بسیط ارض، کوس کامرانی

So that they will realize how the God of the
world judges.
So that they will see how the king of Muslims
rules.

تا بدانند از خداوند جهان این دادخواهی

تا ببینند از شه اسلامیان این حکمرانی

Make the Hawze-ye ‘Elmiyyeh in Qom the
banner of the world,
So that it can sail the boat of salvation for
Muslims.

حوزه علمی قم را، علم فرما به عالم

تا کند فُلک نجات مُسلمین را بادبانی

Grant ‘Abd al-Karim a long life and respect, so
that, by blessing him,
God’s mercy may rain like pearls.

بس کرم کن عمر و عزّت بر «کریمی» کز کرامت

کرده بر ایشان چو ابر رحمت حق، دُرِ فشانی

Give his well-wishers eternal life.

نیکخواهش را عطا فرما بقای جاودانی

Give his ill-wishers every moment heavenly
affliction.

بهر بدخواهش رسان هر دم بلای آسمانی

In this passage Ayatollah Khomeini reflects a contemporary discussion that took place in Sunni Egypt about Islamic governance. Ayatollah Khomeini first makes it clear that governance belongs to God, introducing the topic of *velâyat* in the political sense of the word, which is usually translated as ‘temporal authority.’ Ayatollah Khomeini does not use the

literal term *velâyat* in couplet 39, but rather *hokmrâni* ('governance'). Immediately after, he moves his attention to the Islamic institution that his teacher Abd al-Karim Hâ'eri had established one year earlier in Qom, hoping that God will make it "the banner of the world." Then Ayatollah Khomeini adds a second transitional passage, introducing Hâ'eri in the following couplet. The sequence of subjects in this passage implies that Ayatollah Khomeini connects his teacher Hâ'eri to governance, to *velâyat*, a topic that has been the cause of ongoing debates between Islamic scholars since the Major occultation of the twelfth Imam in 940.⁵⁵⁹

Velâyat has particular meanings in the Shiite world. In Islamic law, *velâyat* is used to refer to 'the power of an authorized person to perform an action,' such as having custody of a child or a disabled person. In the religious and political sphere, *velâyat* is used to denote spiritual or temporal authority. In the Shiite world, the term is also used to describe the devotion that is due to the Twelve Imams, whom they believe to have been the rightful successors to the Prophet. It is one of the pillars of the Shiite faith, proclaiming that God will only grant access to Paradise to those who acknowledge the authority of the Twelve Imams.⁵⁶⁰

In mysticism, the term *velâyat* is used to refer to the spiritual authority or sainthood of a mystic who has reached perfection. Such a mystic is called a *vali*, a 'friend' or person who is close to, and therefore protected by, God. However, mystics do not agree on this matter. The famous ninth-century scholar and mystical writer Hakim-e Termedhi (d. ca. 910) paid an important tribute to the development of the mystical interpretation of *velâyat*. In his treatise *Sirat al-awliâ*, he elaborates on the distinction between two sorts of friends of God. First, there is the *vali haqq Allah* ('The Friend of the Truth of God'). Second, there is the *vali Allah* ('The Friend of God'). Both are travelling the mystical path (*tariqat*) towards God. They do this on the one hand by exploring their inner self, and on the other hand by making an ascension (*me'râj*) through the macrocosms. While the *vali haqq Allah* has to endure all sorts of difficulties on his journey towards God, the *vali Allah* is exempted from all these hardships

⁵⁵⁹ For different stances see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Islam in Iran x. The Roots of Political Shi'ism; S. Akhavi, "Contending Discourses in Shi'i Law on the Doctrine of Wilâyat al-Faqih," in *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 34, 1996, pp. 229-237; A. Kazemi Moussavi, "ANew Interpretation of the Theory of Velayat-e Faqih," in *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 1, Abingdon: Taylor & Francis Ltd, 1992, pp. 101-107; B. Moin, "Questions of Guardianship in Iran," in the *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 10, No. 1, Abingdon: Taylor & Francis Ltd, 1988, pp. 191-200; A. Zysow, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Ejtehad.

⁵⁶⁰ For consultation see M.Y. Izzi Dien and P.E. Walker, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Wilâya; B. Radtke, "The Concept of Wilâya in Early Sufism," in *Classical Persian Sufism: from its Origins to Rumi*, ed. L. Lewisohn, London: Khaniqahi Nimatullahi Publications, 1993, pp. 483-496.

because he is ‘chosen by God.’ While the ascension of the *vali haqq Allah* stops at the end of the created cosmos, the latter is able to reach the spheres of light of the divine Names of God and is able to know all the Names of God. When he has traversed all His names, his soul (*nafs*) will disappear since he is now one with God’s Essence.⁵⁶¹

Couplets 38 to 42 of Khomeini’s third *qaside* support the thought that in his young years, Ayatollah Khomeini was engaging with the question of the ideal form of governance, an on-going discussion in Twelver Shia Islam since the occultation of the Mahdi in 940 and which experienced an upheaval both inside and outside of Iran, to be particular Egypt, during the early 1920s. According to Twelver Shiites, only the immaculate Shiite Imams had the right to temporal and spiritual authority and, contrary to Sunnite Islam, this has become one of the principles (*osul*) of the Twelver Shiite religion, as we will see below.⁵⁶² However for centuries the Shiite community left the discussion as an abstract question, and accepted the temporal rule under which they lived.

In the eighteenth century the discussion on *velâyat* rose again, after the adoption of the *ejtehâd*-practice in the early modern times.⁵⁶³ According to this concept, only specific high-ranking Islamic jurists (and not the Shah) are allowed to interpret Islamic law by issuing independent jurisprudential opinions. Moreover every member of the Shiite community was supposed to choose one of the *mojtaheds* as a ‘model of imitation’ (*marja’-e taqlid*), following him in religious, social, political and private affairs. The *ejtehâd* practice greatly affected the hierarchy within the Twelver Shiite community, enlarging the authority of some Islamic jurists enormously. Although the *ejtehâd* practice had been a point of discussion since the ninth century, the change of rulership in Iran in the eighteenth century provided an immediate reason for adopting this practice. Safavid rulers, who had ruled Iran since the sixteenth century, had claimed to be descended from Imam Ali. This blood linkage to Imam Ali made their rule divinely inspired and unquestionable.⁵⁶⁴ The clergy accepted the Safavid kings as rulers on both earthly and spiritual levels. In 1722, the Safavid Dynasty fell apart and gave way to other Persian dynasties, such as the Afshar Dynasty (1736-1796) and the Zand

⁵⁶¹ B. Radtke, “The Concept of Wilāya in Early Sufism,” pp. 483-496.

⁵⁶² See M. Momen, *An Introduction to Shi’a Islam*, pp. 147-160.

⁵⁶³ See further A. Zysow, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under *Ejtehād*; W.L. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, Boulder: Westview Press, 2000, pp. 30, 108-109; M. Momen, *An Introduction to Shi’a Islam*, pp. 194-195 and W.L. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, pp. 30, 108-109. See also my discussion of this position in chapter 1.3 of this study.

⁵⁶⁴ See M. Momen, *An Introduction to Shi’i Islam*, p. 101.

Dynasty (1750-1794) who ruled in different parts of Iran.⁵⁶⁵ When the Qajar dynasty came to power in 1785, the clerics questioned the religious authority of the Qajar rulers because they did not descend from the Shiite Imams. The majority of the clerics supported the opinion that only certain Islamic jurists were authorised to interpret Islamic law, and not the Qajar Shah. Shortly after, the *ejtehâd* practice was again adopted by the Iranian clergy.⁵⁶⁶ The Qajar rulers did not object since they needed the approval of the Iranian clergy, to implement their own political authority. The rulers and the clerics accepted each other in return for certain privileges. The Qajar rulers dominated the political arena, while the clergy dominated the religious, educational and judicial domains.⁵⁶⁷ Another, possibly indirect, reason for again adopting the *ejtehâd* practice was to respond to social and political change.⁵⁶⁸ This is also evident in section 6a of article 2 of the 1979 constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran which states that the *ejtehâd* practice “is one of the means of securing human dignity and freedom along with progress in science and technology and opposition to tyranny”.⁵⁶⁹ One important event that prompted the nineteenth-century discussion on what role the Islamic jurist should play was a fatwa issued by Sheikh Ja‘far al-Kabir Kâshef al-Ghetâ (d. 1813), giving the ruling monarch Fath ‘Ali Shah (d. 1834) the right to proclaim a ‘holy war’ against the Russians. Not long after that fatwa, Ahmad b. Mohammad-Mahdi al-Narâqi (d. about 1831/2) wrote a book in which he supported the idea that the *marja’-e taqlid* could represent the Imam on both a legislative and a political level.⁵⁷⁰ According to Vanessa Martin “Naraqi argued that only a qualified jurist could be the legitimate ruler in the absence of the Imam,

⁵⁶⁵ R. Matthee, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Safavid Dynasty

⁵⁶⁶ See S.A. Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown*, pp. 13-15.

⁵⁶⁷ As Arjomand states the Qajar ruler kept the right to appoint the most important prayer leaders and the leading cleric (sheikh al-Islam). See S.A. Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown*, p. 15.

⁵⁶⁸ W.L. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, p. 30.

⁵⁶⁹ A. Zysow, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under *Ejtehâd*.

⁵⁷⁰ Although many disagreed with Naraqi, this idea of the Islamic jurist as the general deputy (*nâ‘eb-e amm*) of the Mahdi was not new. Sachedina claims that the idea of the *faqih* as the ‘general deputy’ prevailed right after the Mahdi disappeared in 874, although his claim has been heavily critiqued because of lack insufficient proof. In the sixteenth century, Zayn al-Din al-‘Amili al-Jaba‘i (d. 1558/9) wrote an important book in which he stated that the jurist could represent the Imam on all matters, except in the case of declaring *jihâd* (‘holy war’) merely to expand territory. Many scholars disagreed with Amili al-Jaba‘i and supported the idea that the temporal *velâyat* could only be exercised by the Imams, and not by the jurists. See further S. Akhavi, “Contending Discourses in Shi‘i Law on the Doctrine of Wilâyat al-Faqih,” pp. 229-268. On Naraqi, see V. Martin, *Creating an Islamic state*, pp. 117-118.

and that government by the jurist was the only legitimate kind.”⁵⁷¹ Martin says that Narâqi “argued that the foqahâ had authority in all the same matters as the Prophet and the Imams, except in a few instances specifically excluded by the Sharia on the grounds of consensus or established texts.”⁵⁷² Despite a few instances of support for the concept of *velâyat-e faqih*, the general stance of the Iranian clergy vis-à-vis both legislative and authoritative power for the Islamic jurist was negative. Most nineteenth-century Islamic scholars disagreed with the ideas of Narâqi and al-Ghetâ. Furthermore, at the beginning of the twentieth century, many great ayatollahs such as Mohammad Hoseyn Nâ’ini (d. 1936), and Mohammad Kâzem Khorâsâni (d. 1911) rejected the idea that Islamic jurists could represent the Imam on all matters.⁵⁷³

The connection that Ayatollah Khomeini makes in couplets 38 to 42 of *qaside* III, between his teacher Hâ’eri and governance, implies that from his early years Ayatollah Khomeini, like Narâqi, supported ideas similar to what he would later present as the principle of *velâyat-e faqih*. It is as if Ayatollah Khomeini had a temporal leadership role for the Islamic clergy in mind from his early twenties. As in the previous panegyric, Ayatollah Khomeini ascribes the most wonderful qualities to Hâ’eri, even comparing his teacher to the Mahdi, which implies that Ayatollah Khomeini saw in Hâ’eri a perfect man. Thus Ayatollah Khomeini is combining the views of Shiite clerics such as Narâqi, on governance, with the mystical doctrine of the *ensân-e kâmel*. While the rule of clerics in political matters remains an open question in Shiism, and controversial, in mysticism the ‘perfect man’ is considered to be the source of inspiration in all matters. It is not specified whether or not a ‘perfect man’ is allowed to engage in political affairs. The fact that Ayatollah Khomeini connects the term *velâyat* to the perfect man in his 1929 mystical work *Mesbâh al-hedâyat* therefore implies that Ayatollah Khomeini may have had the position of the *vali-ye faqih* in mind for his teacher Hâ’eri, although the possibilities for free religious discussions had been narrowed under Pahlavi rule, and although most Islamic scholars rejected the idea of *velâyat-e faqih*.

Although Ayatollah Khomeini presented his ideas on *velâyat-e faqih* to the larger public in 1969, this panegyric demonstrates that he was entertaining ideas on the representative role of the Islamic jurist during the Mahdi’s absence in his early years. This panegyric, together with his early mystical work *Mesbâh al-hedâyat* and his descriptions of the ideal *vali-ye faqih* in *Islamic Governance* indicate that Ayatollah Khomeini has imported mystical views on perfection and on *velâyat* into Twelver Shiite thought. Ayatollah

⁵⁷¹ V. Martin, *Creating an Islamic state*, p. 117.

⁵⁷² Ibid.

⁵⁷³ S. Akhavi, “Contending Discourses in Shi’i Law on the Doctrine of Wilâyat al-Faqih,” pp. 229-237.

Khomeini's later description of *velâyat-e faqih* in *Islam and Revolution* shows that his political ideas were influenced by '*erfân*'.⁵⁷⁴ Although this is not immediately clear, it becomes obvious in his description of the qualities of the ideal *vali-ye faqih*:

government evolves ... upon one who possesses the qualities of knowledge and justice".⁵⁷⁵ "whoever wishes to assume such a weighty responsibility to administer the affairs of the Muslims and to act as the deputy of the Commander of the Faithful (upon whom be peace)...such a person must be totally disinterested in the world and devoid of worldly ambition".⁵⁷⁶ "*fuqaha* ... are just and austere and ... fight in God's way to implement the laws of Islam." ⁵⁷⁷ "it is the *faqih* who refuses to submit to others or fall under the influence of foreigners, and who defends the rights of the nation and the freedom, independence, and territorial integrity of the Islamic homeland, even at the cost of his life. It is the *faqih* who does not deviate either to the left or to the right."⁵⁷⁸

Ayatollah Khomeini's description of the *vali-ye faqih* appears to be based on a combination of qualities from both a Shiite and a mystical context. In order to see this connection, it is necessary to explain the term *vali* in both settings. A. Schimmel defines a *vali* in the Shiite context as a 'saint,' a 'friend,' or "someone who is under special protection", from God.⁵⁷⁹ The term also means 'guardian.' As I mentioned in my analysis of Ayatollah Khomeini's *qaside* on Fâteme Ma'sume, before the introduction of the doctrine of *velâyat-e faqih* in Iran, most Ayatollahs believed that only the twelve imams may be called *vali*, since only they are authorized to represent God and guide or govern the Islamic community, however mystics also use the title *vali* to refer to a mystic who has attained to spiritual perfection. The qualities of the ideal *vali-ye faqih* that Ayatollah Khomeini describes in *Islamic Governance* are inherent not only to the Imam but also to the *ensân-e kâmel* of Islamic mystical thought. In Ayatollah Khomeini's eyes, the ideal *vali-ye faqih* is knowledgeable and just. He leads a simple and ascetic life and is wary of worldly status and position. The *vali-ye faqih* does not bend to the demands of anyone but God, and is willing to defend Islamic values with his life. According to Ayatollah Khomeini, he has full control of his *nafs* or lower desires, which tempt man into worldly interests and ambitions. Ayatollah

⁵⁷⁴ See also J.G.J. ter Haar, "Heiligheid en Politiek Gezag...", pp. 90-102.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 62.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 143.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 149.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 137.

⁵⁷⁹ See A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 199.

Khomeini maintains that such ideal qualities are also attainable by ordinary men and are not reserved for the Imams.⁵⁸⁰ All the qualities that Ayatollah Khomeini describes here are also applicable to the mystic who has attained to perfection: a mystic does not care for worldly status, he leads a withdrawn life and focuses on disciplining the soul. The influence of Ayatollah Khomeini's mystical background on his political ideology is therefore evident. From a mystical perspective, Ayatollah Khomeini considered perfection to be attainable for everyone, and not just for the Prophet, his daughter Fâteme Zahrâ and the twelve Imams. And Ayatollah Khomeini believed that the perfect man, in the absence of the twelfth Imam, was allowed to represent the Mahdi.

The two *qasides* about the Mahdi that I have analysed thus far imply that Ayatollah Khomeini saw a perfect man in his teacher Hâ'eri, and that initially he had a position like *vali-ye faqih* in mind for Hâ'eri, the position he was to hold himself, from 1979 to his death in 1989. This thought is further confirmed by his last panegyric, *qaside* IV, which dates from 1924 and is titled *On the Description of Spring and the Praise of Abâ Sâleh Emâm Zamân and his name who is Named Ayatollah Hâjj Sheikh Abd al-Karim Hâ'eri Yazdi Qoddisallah Serru-hu*.⁵⁸¹ For convenience, I will refer to it as the panegyric for Imam Zamân.⁵⁸² This last panegyric is important since it clearly shows a development as regards the leading role Ayatollah Khomeini ascribes to clerics, particularly his teacher Hâ'eri, in politics. In *qaside* II and III, Hâ'eri is named only towards the end of the poems, but in *qaside* IV Ayatollah Khomeini mentions Hâ'eri in the heading, and the contents differ greatly from the previous *qasides* to the Mahdi. While nature scenes dominate in *qaside* II and III, in this panegyric themes of war constitute most of the poem. Ayatollah Khomeini is much more assertive and direct than in the previous two *qasides*, while all three describe the celebrations surrounding

⁵⁸⁰ In his book *Islamic Governance*, Ayatollah Khomeini emphasizes the fact that the authority of the Islamic jurists is slightly different from that of the Shiite Imams, since according to him the authority of the jurist is a function while the authority of the Imams is a status (*maqâm*). See J.G.J. ter Haar, "*Heiligheid en Politiek Gezag...*," pp. 90-102.

⁵⁸¹ *Qaside* IV appears on pages 263-267 in Ayatollah Khomeini's *Divân*. Its form differs completely from *qasides* I, II and III. The poem belongs to the genre known as *mosammat* poems, which has a different rhyme scheme, in this case bbbba/cccca/dddda. Moreover each couplet in consists of five hemistiches instead of two. Ayatollah Khomeini has written the panegyric in the metre *ramal-e mothamman-e sâlem*: - 0 - - / - 0 - - / - 0 - - / - 0 - -.

⁵⁸² According to the editors (the organization for collecting and spreading The works of Imam Ayatollah Khomeini), the poem was composed between 1930 and 1945. However Hâ'eri died in 1937, and internal evidence suggests a date around 1924.

the birthday of the Mahdi. In 1924, the birthday of Imam Mahdi on the fifteenth of Sha'ban, took place on the second day of Nowruz, i.e. 2 *Farvardin* 1303 and in the Gregorian calendar on March 22nd 1924.

Unlike *qaside* II and III, Ayatollah Khomeini starts the introduction of *qaside* IV with a war scene. Ayatollah Khomeini compares the Persian month *Farvardin* to an army's commander whose "army has conquered the world from the West to the East."⁵⁸³ His empire, stretching from Antwerp to Ethiopia to Bulgaria, has become glorious like the state of "the Sassanids."⁵⁸⁴ The comparison to the glory of pre-Islamic Persia is interesting, as Ayatollah Khomeini was against the reign of Reza Shah, who claimed descent from pre-Islamic kings. Another pre-Islamic element can be found in couplet three, in which Ayatollah Khomeini says: "It gave the commanders of the army a banner made of the radiant sun, giving the thunder the order 'be ready,' as King Jamshid would order." In these couplets Ayatollah Khomeini compares the army commander to Persian mythical kings, who also gave audience for the New Year. Every created being is in service of this army commander. Even thunder plays a role in this violence:

Blood flows on the dark earth due to the army's shootings;	از شلیک لشکری بر خاک تیره خون بریزد
Hearts are pierced, shedding blood on the deserts' soil.	قلبها سوراخ و اندر صفحه‌ی هامون بریزد
He will bring down two hundred million heroes on the dark earth,	هم به خاک تیره از گردان دو صد میلیون بریزد
tearing Caesar's guts, tearing Napoleon's heart.	زهره‌ی قیصر شکافد، قلب ناپلئون بریزد
Yet these bombardments make the world an eternal Paradise.	لیک زین بُمباردمان، عالم بهشت جاودان شد.
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The word 'bombardments' would be out of place in classic Persian poetic diction, but it is found in other modern Persian poems. From the beginning of the twentieth century, Iran's parliament and other political and religious sites were bombarded by Russians. Ayatollah Khomeini hopes that the bombardments will "make the world an eternal Paradise." Ayatollah Khomeini describes how the world is again "rejuvenated" and how "sun and moon are in joy, the Pleiades are dancing, making pleasures."⁵⁸⁶ It is as if Ayatollah Khomeini is saying that unjust rule and the killing of innocent people would generate new resistance to the enemy,

⁵⁸³ *Qaside* IV, couplet 1.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid., couplet 2.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid., couplet 5.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid., couplet 6.

and when the Mahdi, the just ruler comes, he will exact revenge and rule with justice over the whole world. Then Ayatollah Khomeini introduces erotic elements by describing how all the trees and flowers become fructuous and eventually give life:

The virgins of the orchard are all like newlywed girls,	سر به سر دوشیزگان بوستان چون نو عروسان
Seizing a moment of the gardener's absence,	داشته فرصت غنیمت در غیاب بوستان بان
Sharing a private moment with the fresh rains in the rose-garden	کرده خلوت با جوانهای سحابی در گلستان
Going together into one shirt like a lover and the Beloved.	رفته در یک پیرهن با یکدگر چون جان و جانان
I do not know exactly what happened there.	من گزارش را نمی دانم دگر آنجا چسان شد ⁵⁸⁷

This erotic imagery fits perfectly in the classical Persian poetic tradition. The passage functions as a metaphor for the burgeoning of the world. Ayatollah Khomeini calls the period after the bombardments, the beginning of “the time of joy” and the end of mourning.⁵⁸⁸ Every created being is “having a joyful feast, because this New Year coincides with the birthday of the Mahdi.”⁵⁸⁹ The state of war that Ayatollah Khomeini describes at the beginning of the poem should be read as the battle at the end of times. According to Twelver Shiites, once the Mahdi has come out of occultation, he and his army will put an end to all injustice in the world. Ayatollah Khomeini describes the role that the Shiites will play after the coming of the Mahdi, and how they will sacrifice themselves for Islam. The Mahdi will save the Shiite faith from its enemies. As explained earlier, the most important task of the Mahdi is to put an end to the injustice in the world and to take revenge for the maltreatment of Twelver Shiites that began with the killing of Imam Hoseyn at Karbalâ in 680. Although many Shiites will be killed during these ‘last battles,’ Ayatollah Khomeini calls the world during this time “an eternal Paradise”.⁵⁹⁰ Just as the flowers will flourish, the Twelver Shiites will enjoy victory. ‘Victory’ however includes the belief that dying at the side of the Mahdi makes one a martyr and ensures eternal salvation. The end of the world also entails the fulfilment of the Twelver Shiite religion, which has attained to its perfection just as the cycle of nature has reached completion.

A change of focus can be seen from couplet eighteen, in which Ayatollah Khomeini introduces Hâ'eri, whom he characterises as “The mirror of the lights of God, the place where

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid., couplet 7.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid., couplet 8.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid., couplet 14.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid., couplet 5.

the Prophet's qualities are manifest," and then compares his manners to those of Imam Mahdi. Ayatollah Khomeini describes how all Muslims accept his decrees and orders. Ayatollah Khomeini then turns to the socio-political situation in Iran, saying:

O king [i.e., the Mahdi]! Islam and Muslims are dispirited
In a feast in which everyone is supposed to cheerfully recite love poems.
If I look, I see people in all directions, who have lost their hearts, holding their heads in their collars.
O king! Rise from your place and help the people of the faith.
Especially this miracle that has become the support and refuge for the Muslims.

Surely, if this 'miracle of God' (Ayatollah) were not in this world,
the boat of Islam would not have a loving Captain.
If the enemies did not have the sword of splendour in their soul,
no name of the Muslims, no tradition of the faith would remain.
Happily that from Yazd, the sun rose and became the soul of this sun.

It is right if heaven wants to place her face on his resting-place.
The army of victory and triumph always sacrifices herself for him.
The greatest light (Sun) and his planets come to serve him.
The nine heavens will become servants at his royal court and slaves of his command,
for he has become the only captain of the ship of Islam.

The domain of Islam was weak because of the tyranny of the oppressors.
The body of Islam was without spirit and her holy spirit had left her body.
Her soul was depressed because of the injustice of the ill-minded tyrant.
And the hearts of the Prophet and 'Ali were in grief because of this oppression.
Then out of favour for him the soul once again went to his friend.

پادشاهها! کار اسلام است و اسلامی پریشان
در چنین عیدی که باید هر کسی باشد غزلخوان
بنگرم از هر طرف، هر تبدیلی سر در گریبان
خسروا! از جای برخیز و مدد کن اهل ایمان
خاصه این آیت که پشت و ملجأ اسلامیان شد
راستی! این آیت الله گر در این سامان نبودی
کشتی اسلام را، از مهر پُشتیان نبودی
دشمنان را گر که تیغ چشمش بر جان نبودی
اسمی از اسلامیان و رسمی از ایمان نبودی
حَبْذا از یزد، کزوی، طالع این خورشید جان شد

جای دارد گر نهد رو آسمان بر آستانش
لشکر فتح و ظفر، گردد هماره جانفشانش
نیبر اعظم به خدمت آید و هم اخترانش
عبد درگه، بندهی فرمان شود نه آسمانش
چون که بر کشتی اسلامی یگانه پُشتیان شد

حوزهی اسلام کز ظلم ستمکاران زیون بود
پیکرش بیروح و روح اقدسش از تن بُرون بود
روحش افسرده ز ظلم اندیشان دون بود
قلب پیغمبر، دل حیدر ز مظلومیش خون بود
از عطایش باز سوی پیکرش روح روان شد.⁵⁹¹

⁵⁹¹ Qaside IV, couplets 21-24.

As in *qaside* II and III, oppression and tyranny play an important role in this *qaside*. As the first of these couplets indicates, Ayatollah Khomeini blames the Islamic community for ‘holding their heads in their collars,’ meaning they are passively watching how Islam is threatened. Instead of adopting this passive stance in the Mahdi’s absence, Ayatollah Khomeini suggests that his teacher Hâ’eri is the one who should lead the community, since he is the “mighty possessor of his [the Mahdi’s] splendour” and “the continuer of the holy grace”.⁵⁹² In this couplet Ayatollah Khomeini implies that the Mahdi transmits divine knowledge in the form of the Mohammadan Light to Hâ’eri, just as the twelfth Imam had inherited it, through the previous Imams, from the Prophet Mohammad. By projecting the concept of the Mohammadan Light onto an ‘ordinary’ person, in this case Hâ’eri, Ayatollah Khomeini again breaks with orthodox Shiite doctrine. Like in the panegyric on Fâteme Ma’sûme, Ayatollah Khomeini is drawing on a Shiite mystical interpretation of the Mohammadan Light, in which the *ensân-e kâmel* is in constant contact with the Hidden Imam. As couplet 18 indicates, where Ayatollah Khomeini refers to the spiritual power of Hâ’eri in terms of his “limitless favours of mercy”, he considers this power to have been inherited personally from Imam Mahdi, who on his turn inherited it from Prophet Mohammad. Ayatollah Khomeini sees Hâ’eri as “the only captain of the ship of Islam” who has made an enormous contribution to the Islamic world.⁵⁹³ Not only has he brought justice to the Muslims worldwide. According to Ayatollah Khomeini, Hâ’eri also provides people with spiritual and divine knowledge just as his ancestors the Imams had done. Hâ’eri was a *sayyed*, a male descendant of the Prophet Mohammad. *Sayyeds* are often asked for their blessing during marriage or at the birth of a child because they are said to possess supernatural powers.⁵⁹⁴ Although they are not necessarily religiously educated, they share in the profit of the religious tax (*khoms*) because of their link to the family of the Prophet. The way in which Ayatollah Khomeini speaks of Hâ’eri in this panegyric implies that in Ayatollah Khomeini’s eyes, Hâ’eri had inherited spiritual knowledge from the Mahdi. There are many stories of clerics and mystics receiving messages from the Mahdi in their dreams.⁵⁹⁵ In 2004, the President of the Assembly of Experts, Ayatollah ‘Ali Meshkini (d. 2007) declared that in a

⁵⁹² *Qaside* IV, couplet 18.

⁵⁹³ *Ibid.*, couplet 23.

⁵⁹⁴ See M. Momen, *An Introduction to Shia Islam*, pp. 199, 207, 235; See also A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, pp. 82, 199.

⁵⁹⁵ See *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 20th 2004.

dream the Mahdi had approved his list of parliamentary candidates.⁵⁹⁶ This panegyric supports the assumption that Ayatollah Khomeini believed that his teacher Hâ'eri was also in contact with the Mahdi.

Conclusion

What can be concluded from these four *qasides* is that Ayatollah Khomeini was strongly engaged in combining mysticism with Shiite doctrines and with social and political events of the 1920s. His *qasides* also demonstrate that he was very concerned with Iran's socio-political well-being and well aware of the threat that European powers and institutions and those who supported them could pose for Iran and its Islamic institutions. Already at this early period, it turns out, Ayatollah Khomeini was looking for ways to protect Islam from secular and modernist ideas, coming from the West. Ayatollah Khomeini found his solution in the return of the Mahdi, but since the time of his return was unclear, Ayatollah Khomeini imported the mystical concept of the 'perfect man' into orthodox Shi'a Islam, promoting the idea that any 'perfect man' could represent the Mahdi during his absence, by taking on in his role as the religious and political leader of the community. His *qasides* show that Ayatollah Khomeini applied the idea of perfection, which according to orthodox Shiite tradition is only applicable to the fourteen immaculate persons, to the female city-patron of Qom. His last three *qasides* show that he applies this same state of perfection to his own teacher, Abd al-Karim Hâ'eri. Most importantly the *qasides* show how Ayatollah Khomeini, interpreted Hâ'eri's personality in a mystical sense, according him the rank of a perfect man. In this capacity, he could represent the Mahdi during his absence and lead the Islamic community on both a spiritual and political level. Ayatollah Khomeini's *qasides* demonstrate that his revolutionary ideas on the governance of the jurist (*velâyat-e faqih*) which he presented to the public from 1969, were already present in his early years as a student in Qom. His *qasides* contain strong evidence that Ayatollah Khomeini initially did not have the role of *vali-ye faqih* in mind for himself but for his teacher Abd al-Karim Hâ'eri. The active stance against oppression, which Ayatollah Khomeini promoted during the Islamic revolution and for which he became famous, can already be noticed in these poems of the 1920s. While Ayatollah Khomeini in his second *qaside* is rather prudent about naming his teacher as the representative of the Mahdi, one sees a development of his thoughts in his poems. In his last panegyric he openly connects

⁵⁹⁶ See M. Ourghi, "Ein Licht umgab mich ..." – Die eschatologischen Visionen des iranischen Präsidenten Maḥmūd Aḥmadīnēžād," in *Die Welt des Islams*, Vol. 49, Leiden: Brill, 2009, p. 177.

Hâ'eri to Islamic governance, even calling him the “pseudonym” of the Mahdi. In 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini’s unorthodox ideas on the perfect man, in these *qasides* of the 1920s and in his later works and speeches, ended the long-running discussion on whether Islamic jurists could represent the Imams, for Ayatollah Khomeini accepted the position of *vali-ye faqih*. These *qasides* show that Ayatollah Khomeini mixed mystical theories with Twelver Shiite ones and by so doing has politicized Islam. By importing mystical concepts into the Twelver Shiite religion, Ayatollah Khomeini changed the course of Iran and of the Shiite faith dramatically. In his eyes, this was all done to save the Shiite community from its oppressors and from all forms of injustice. According to others, it was to draw the power towards himself.