The Moving Finger Writes: Mugh#ra B. Sa##d's Islamic Gnosis and the Myths of Its Rejection

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The Moving Finger Writes; and having writ,
Moves on: nor all your Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a line
Nor all your Tears wash out a Word of it.

A great turning point in Islam came in the middle of the second Islamic century.[1] A cultural divide emerged as history made its selections: the

[1] M. G. S. Hodgson did much to set this in a world-historical perspective; see his *The Venture of Islam,* vol. 1, *The Classical Age of Islam* (Chicago, 1975), pp. 3–99. See

Shīᶜa henceforth became irremediably sectarian, while the ᶜAbbāsid dynasty vanquished many contenders to become the legitimate political authority of the Muslim community.[2] "A time of adventurers and men of pluck," in Wellhausen's words, the middle decades of the second century saw the rise and fall of numerous factions led by claimants to supernatural authorization for their political assertions.[3] Of these, the so-called *ghulāt* have been universally condemned in later Islam by Sunnis and Shīᶜites alike.[4] These "extremists," frequently subsumed in later heresiography under the telling rubric of "rejectors" (*rāfiḍa/rawāfiḍ*), were, through their variously extreme teachings and rebellions, dramatic catalysts in the historic divisions that were then being institutionalized.[5] Like the Gnostics of second-century Christianity, the *ghulāt* of second-century Islam played a contrapuntal role in the self-definition of the central traditions, and like those earlier heretics, the *ghulāt* were subsequently demonized as archetypal "rebels" by the fathers of the new dispensation.[6]

The tone of much scholarly reaction to the *ghulāt* was set by Goldziher: "To this literature I refer those who wish more detailed proofs that Shīᶜism was a particularly fecund soil for absurdities suited to undermine and wholly disintegrate the Islamic doctrine of God."[7]

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also P. Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity* (London, 1971), p. 200: "The late seventh and early eighth century, and not the age of the first Arab conquests, are the true turning points in the history of Europe and the Near East"; H. Pirenne, *Mohammad and Charlemagne* (New York, n.d.), p. 285: "The Middle Ages . . . were beginning. The transitional phase was protracted. One may say that it lasted a whole century—from 650 to 750. It was during this period of anarchy that the tradition of antiquity disappeared, while the new elements came to the surface."

[2] M. G. S. Hodgson, "How Did the Early Shīᶜa Become Sectarian?" *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 75 (1955): 1–13; E. Kohlberg, "From Imāmiyya to Ithnā-ᶜAshariyya," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 39 (1976): 521–34.

[3] Wellhausen is quoted by I. Friedlaender, "Jewish-Arabic Studies, Part 1," *Jewish Quarterly Review,* n.s., 1 (1910–11): 183–214, 205; this monograph remains one of the best discussions of the *ghulāt;* see its continuation, "Jewish-Arabic Studies, Parts 2, 3," *Jewish Quarterly Review,* n.s., 2 (1911–12): 481–516; n.s., 3 (1912–13): 235–300.

[4] See, e.g., from the Sunni side, Friedlaender's "The Heterodoxies of the Shiites in the Presentation of ibn Hazm, Parts 1, 2," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 28 (1907): 1–81; 29 (1908): 1–184; from the Shīᶜī side, see Muḥammad Tāqī al-Tustarī, *Qāmūs al-Rijāl* (Teheran, 1379 A.H.), 9: 77–84 ("Mughīra ibn Saᶜīd"); for a discussion of both, see L. Massignon, *The Passion of al-Ḥallāj* (Princeton, N.J., 1982), 1:296.

[5] The texts are brought together and discussed by A. Samarrāʾi, *Al-Ghuluww wal-Firaq al-Ghālīyah fil-Ḥaḍrat al-Islāmīyah* (Baghdad, 1972); and by H. Halm, *Die islamische Gnosis* (Zurich, 1982).

[6] The role of the Gnostics themselves in influencing the *ghulāt* should not be underestimated. See V. Ivanow, *The Alleged Founder of Ismailism* (Bombay, 1946); H. Corbin, "De la gnose antique à la gnose ismaélienne," in *Convegno di Scienze, Morali, Storiche e Filologiche* (Rome, 1957), pp. 105–43; and H. Halm, *Kosmogonie und Heilslehre in der frühen Ismāᶜīlīya* (Wiesbaden, 1978), which has a useful bibliography.

[7] I. Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law* (Princeton, N.J., 1981), p. 186.

Several of those scholars who have subsequently investigated the matter, however, have attempted to understand these sectarians from other, more sympathetic perspectives. The most significant such attempt was that of M. G. S. Hodgson, who recognized that the *ghulāt* "alone in Islam at that time were dealing with problems that Sufis later took up, no doubt with greater success; certain questions about personal religious experience—about revelation, morality and spirit."[8] While Massignon, Corbin, and Widengren before him had dealt sympathetically with the *ghulāt,* it was Hodgson who observed that in the *ghulāt* speculations "we get a sense of large issues debated." Hodgson also contextualized that observation within an analysis of contemporary institutionalization, which he accomplished with sociological and psychological insight.[9]

These so-called extremists played a pivotal role in the interacting oppositions and counteroppositions that characterized Islam's second century. The fissiparous *ghulāt* represented many political and theological positions, but they were all loyal to the house of ʿAlī. The partisans of the lineage of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muḥammad, held that ʿAlī had inherited the right to the leadership of the Muslim community. Toward the end of the last years of the Umayyad dynasty (661–750), the ʿAlids were struggling to establish their party (*shīʿa*) as the legitimate Islamic authority. According to the later Sunni and Shīʿī heresiographers, certain followers of the ʿAlid leaders (*imāms*: genealogical and charismatic successors of ʿAlī) attempted to deify ʿAlī, the Imāms, and sometimes even themselves. This was rejected as "exaggeration" (*ghuluww,* "going too far, extremism"; one who does this is a *ghālī,* pl. *ghulāt*) by both Sunni and Shīʿī traditions.[10]

Hodgson's insights concerning the importance of these *ghulāt* in the process of Islamic self-definition can be extended and developed by a closer study of the *ghuluww* of the "first Gnostic of Islam," Mughīra ibn Saʿīd (d. 119/736).[11] Though many sources on his heresy are

[8] Hodgson, "How Did the Early Shīʿa Become Sectarian?" p. 5.

[9] Ibid., p. 8; and see his updated position in *The Classical Age of Islam,* p. 379. Massignon, p. 196, observed that the *ghulāt* "tried to understand the visible universe by regarding it, in the light of their new faith, through the prism, 'the stained glass,' of their ancient myths"; and G. Widengren, in *Muhammad the Apostle of God and His Ascension* (Uppsala, 1955), p. 93, noted: "In the case of the Shīʿah leaders and pretenders we could be entitled to speak of a real 'prophetical' consciousness."

[10] Hodgson, "How Did the Early Shīʿa Become Sectarian," p. 5. For an ample but still partial bibliography, see W. al-Qāḍī, "The Development of the Term *Ghulāt* in Muslim Literature with Special Reference to the Kaysāniyya," in *Akten des VII Kongresses für Arabistik und Islamwissenschaft,* ed. A. Dietrich (Göttingen, 1976), pp. 295–319, esp. pp. 318–19.

[11] The sole article devoted exclusively to Mughīra is the fine overview by W. F. Tucker, "Rebels and Gnostics: Al-Mughīra ibn Saʿīd and the Mughīriyya," *Arabica* 22

extant, they are of restricted usefulness in reconstructing his career. The salient facts, sufficient for the purposes at hand, are that he was the leader of a subdivision of the followers of the fifth Shīˁī Imām, Muḥammad al-Bāqir, and that he subsequently led his group in allegiance to another claimant to the Imamate, al-Nafs al-Zakiyya ("the Pure Soul").

A *mawlà* ("freedman") who spoke ungrammatical Arabic, Mughīra taught a doctrine that was barely Islamicized.[12] The content of those teachings was, by any Islamic standard, an exaggeration beyond the pale. On the one hand, he was a magician who described "his object of worship (*maˁbūd*)" in blasphemously graphic, anthropomorphic terms. On the other, he led an insurrection in which his followers eventually resorted to the terrorist tactics of strangling their opponents. A sorcerer, Gnostic, and revolutionary, Mughīra ended his career proclaiming his own prophethood. He was imprisoned, crucified, and burned to death by the Umayyad governor of Iraq in 736.

In the following section of this article I will look at Mughīra's continuity with the beliefs and practices of his non-Islamic milieu. I would call his amalgamation of religions "syncretistic" in Van der Leeuw's sense of "transposition": "the variation of the significance of any phenomenon, occurring in the dynamic of religions, while its form remains quite unaltered."[13] Mughīra's central teaching, for example, is an Islamicized revalorization of a quite nearly unaltered Gnostic cosmology—"a wholly Gnostic mythos," to use van Ess's phrase.[14] Mughīra emerged out of the Aramaic milieu of late antiquity, in which such Gnostic teachings and the syncretistic "transposition" of their forms were common features.

Understanding Mughīra's precise relation to that milieu is complicated by the "free borrowing of formulae" that was rife in the baptiz-

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(1975): 33–47, which constitutes a useful introduction to the primary and secondary literature.

[12] On the deficient use of Arabic by Mughīra, see ibid., pp. 33–34; on the deficient use of Arabic by *mawālī,* see J. H. A. Juynboll, "On the Origins of Arabic Prose: Reflections on Authenticity," in *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society* (Carbondale, Ill., 1982), pp. 161–77, p. 255, n. 9; on Mughīra as a *mawlà,* see Tucker, pp. 33–34. The best overview on the question of the *mawālī* is now Daniel Pipes, "Mawlas: Freed Slaves and Converts in Early Islam," *Slavery and Abolition* 1 (1980): 132–77.

[13] G. van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* (New York, 1963), 2: 610–11; and see K. Rudolph, "Synkretismus—von theologischen Scheltwort zum religionswissenschaftlichen Begriff," in *Humanitas Religiosa* (Stockholm, 1979), pp. 194–212, esp. pp. 206–10, where Rudolph provides a typology that might be usefully applied to the "taking up" of Gnosticism in early Islam.

[14] J. van Ess, "Der Name Gottes im Islam," in *Der Name Gottes,* ed. H. von Stietencron (Düsseldorf, 1975), pp. 156–76, p. 172.

ing communities of late antique and early Islamic Mesopotamia.[15]
These communities have recently been studied in depth and in their
full context as a chapter of Michael Morony's monumental *Iraq after
the Muslim Conquest*. Morony details the presence of Marcionites,
Manicheans, Mandeans, and various gnosticized pagans in seventh-
and eighth-century Iraq. He observes that it was particularly the
Gnostic traditions associated with the town of Madā'in that were
continued in groups such as Mughīra's "with a vocabulary that was
barely Islamic."[16] Morony is sensibly cautious in coming any closer to
identifying the exact group from which Mughīra emerged. Whether
Mughīra's ideas were originally cast in the mold of Christian-Aramaic
(Syriac speakers), Jewish-Aramaic (speakers of the Aramaic of the
Babylonian Talmud), or "Pagan"-Aramaic (Mandaic speakers) cannot
certainly be discerned, in part because Mughīra represents that folk
interconfessionalism of magicians who, whatever their birth and up-
bringing, self-consciously and facilely draw on all available traditions.
Both as sorcerer and as Gnostic, Mughīra was working in a line of
Aramaic syncretists who drew from teachings near and far and who
apparently considered anything from the arsenal of available numina
as legitimate ammunition for their wonder-working and for their
propaganda.[17]

[15] See J. C. Greenfield, "Notes on Some Aramaic and Mandaic Magic Bowls,"
Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University 5 (1973): 149–56,
150: "It has become almost a dogma in this field of research . . . that the use of a
particular script—Jewish, Mandaic, Syriac, etc.—indicated that the scribe and the
person for whom the bowl was written adhered to a particular religion. The occurrence
of certain formulae in a variety of script types was taken to indicate that there were
certain shared syncretic magic beliefs common to all these religions and a free borrow-
ing of formulae." Mughīra explicitly professed such an interconfessional doctrine; see
ᶜIzz Al-Dīn ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fil-Ta'rīkh* (Beirut, 1965), 5:209: "He said the
prophets did not differ in anything regarding the divinely revealed laws."

[16] Michael Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest* (Princeton, N.J., 1984), p. 501;
and see L. Massignon, "The Origins of the Transformation of Persian Iconography by
Islamic Theology: The Shīᶜa School of Kufa and Its Manichean Connexions," in *A
Survey of Persian Art*, ed. A. U. Pope and P. Ackerman (London, 1938), 5:1928–36,
1931–32: "The requisite conditions [for the Manicheization] of the Shīᶜa are to be
found in Mesopotamia, for it was an Aramean country with a social structure that had
already been subjected to strong Iranian influences"; cf. W. M. Watt, *The Formative
Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh, 1973), pp. 46–47.

[17] C. Gordon, in a letter quoted in J. Neusner, *A History of the Jews of Babylonia*, 5
vols. (Leiden, 1970), 5:217, says, "There is no way of sharply distinguishing in detail
Jewish from Christian from Mandaean magic. Magic is highly interconfessional." There
is no question that the syncretistic tendencies of Gnosticism were extremely popular
in late antiquity; see R. M. Wilson, *The Gnostic Problem* (London, 1958), p. 263:
"In short, Gnosticism in the broader sense is a general tendency of the period which
saw the birth of Christianity, and makes its presence felt in various ways in all the
thought of the time"; cf. B. Pearson, ed., *Religious Syncretism in Antiquity* (Missoula,
Mont., 1975).

The most detailed evidence we possess for this mixed milieu of
Mughīra's are the Aramaic incantation bowls, which were found in
Mesopotamia and are dated to the time just prior to the Islamic con-
quests. Many of these bowls were found buried in the corners and
thresholds of houses as prophylaxes against demons and against spells
cast by other magicians, who are explicitly cursed for this purpose in
the bowls.[18] Mughīra's own superstition about the spirits of houses
should be seen in this light: "Abū Muᶜāwiya, on the authority of
Aᶜmash, said, 'Mughīra came to me. And when he came to the
threshold of the door, he jumped into the house. So I said to him,
"What's your problem?" to which he replied, "These walls of yours are
harmful."'"[19] The bowls may also have been used for hydromancy,
which Mughīra was also said to have practiced (*tamwīh*).[20]

Mughīra's own complex relation to water suggests that he may have
originated in a baptizing community, the surviving example of which
would be the Mandeans. Like the Mandean demiurge, the Divine Man
of Mughīra's cosmogony creates both light waters and dark waters and
creates mankind out of these waters.[21] Mughīra also professed what
appear to be specifically baptismal cultic practices. Thus, the passage
cited above from al-Dhahabī continues: "Then he said, 'Blessings on
the one who drinks water of the Euphrates.' So I said, 'Do we have
anything else to drink from?' He said, 'Not if menstrual blood and
corpses are thrown into it.' I said to him, 'From where do you drink?'
to which he replied, 'From a well.' . . . I asked him, 'Where do you get
this doctrine?' He said, 'I met one of the people of the House [*ahl
al-bayt*] and he slaked my thirst with a drink of water and there
remained nothing but I knew.'"[22] Less explicitly, a frequently repeated

[18] See J. A. Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts from Nippur* (Philadelphia,
1913); C. D. Isbell, *The Corpus of Aramaic Incantation Bowls* (Missoula, Mont.,
1975). Montgomery, p. 41, says that the bowls were "primarily a domestic phylactery,
to be classed with the abundant forms of this species of magic, e.g., the Jewish
Mezuzoth"; C. Gordon, in *Adventures in the Nearest East* (London, 1957), translates a
bowl that guards "threshold, residence and house, threshold of this Farukdad" (p. 163),
where it also guards against "Aramaean spells, Jewish spells, Arabic spells, Persian
spells, Mandaean spells, Greek spells, spells of the Romans. . . ."

[19] Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Dhahabī, *Mizān al-Iᵓtidāl fī Naqḍ al-
Rijāl* (Cairo, 1963), 4:161. (All translations from non-English sources are mine.)

[20] For the arguments that they were used for hydromancy, see E. Yamauchi, *Mandaic
Incantation Texts* (New Haven, Conn., 1967), p. 55; and al-Dhababī, 4:161.

[21] On baptizing communities, see now K. Rudolph's survey *Antike Baptisten: Zu den
Überlieferungen über früh-jüdische und christliche Taufsekten* (Leipzig, 1981). See
Abul Ḥasan ᶜAlī ibn Ismāᶜīl al-Ashᶜarī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn* (Cairo, 1954), 1:72; and
nn. 23 and 53 below.

[22] al-Dhahabī, 4:161. L. Koenen, "From Baptism to the Gnosis of Manichaeism," in
The Rediscovery of Gnosticism, II: Sethian Gnosticism, ed. B. Layton (Leiden, 1981),
pp. 734–56, p. 748, points out that "in ancient Persia we find a combination of the use

tradition about Mughīra reports that he "used to forbid water from the Euphrates or any river or spring or well into which pollution had fallen."[23]

Related to the apotropaic bowls and the purity beliefs concerning waters are other purity beliefs of Mughīra's that are characteristic of the Aramaic milieu. One Abū Halāl asks Jaᶜfar al-Ṣādiq, "Do nosebleed, vomit, and armpit hair nullify ritual purity?" to which Jaᶜfar replied, "Why are you meddling in such matters? This is the doctrine of Mughīra, God curse him."[24] He also allowed the women of the house of Muḥammad to pray even when menstruating. Here again we find the mention of menstruation, which was a concern for ritual pollution in the Babylonian Talmud, among the Mandeans, and in the inscriptions on the bowls.[25] With Mughīra the ancient taboo is overridden by the superior purity of the house of Muḥammad, an example of the old ways that Mughīra transformed in his new version of Islam.

Thus, Mughīra asserted control over his followers through his pronouncements on cultic solidarity by way of extraordinary ablutions as well as by absolution from ordinary pollution. He also extended his influence through his theatrically deployed wizardry. al-Ṭabarī recounts Mughīra's attempt to lure an onlooker into participating in his mind-reading virtuosity: "A man from the people of Baṣra appeared among us looking for knowledge. He stayed with us, so I ordered my slave girl (one day) to buy me a fish for two dirhams. Then the Baṣran and I rushed off to Mughīra. Mughīra said to me, 'O Muḥammad, would you like for me to tell you why your eyebrows are parted in the middle?' I said, 'No.' He said, 'Then would you like me to tell you why your household called you Muḥammad?' I said, 'No.' He then said, 'Did you not send off your servant to buy you a fish for two dirhams?'"[26] Another more cryptic report about him is that he "used

of water for ritual purification with a prohibition of defiling the water"; for his sources, see pp. 745–54, with other useful materials on "The Living Waters and the Turbid Waters."

[23] al-Tustarī (n. 4 above), 9:81.

[24] Ibid.; cf. *The Apocryphon of John*, trans. F. Wisse, in *The Nag Hammadi Library*, ed. J. M. Robinson (New York, 1981), p. 107, where the "right armpit" is created by "Abitrion."

[25] For the Mandean concern with menstrual discharge, see W. Foerster, ed., *Gnosis*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1972–74), 2:307; E. S. Drower, *The Secret Adam* (Oxford, 1960), p. 68; so too the Sabians, according to Ibn al-Nadīm, were concerned with the impurity of menstruation (*The Fihrist of al-Nadim*, trans. B. Dodge [New York, 1970], 2:748); on the Talmudic discussion of menstruation, see tractate Niddah; in the *Sefer Ha-Razim*, trans. M. Morgan (Chico, Calif., 1983), p. 59, the "impurity" of the menstruating woman nullifies the success of the Jewish magician.

[26] Abū Jaᶜfar Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh al-Rusul wal-Mulūk* (Cairo, 1960), 7:128–29. On the theatrical aspects of the wonder-working holy man, see

to go out to graveyards and speak and was seen as something like a locust on the graves."[27] His most frequently reported claim is, "Should I wish to revive ³Ād and Thamūd and Qārūn and the generations between them, I could do so."[28] He is variously accused of performing *nīrinjāt* (feats of ledgerdemain), *makhāriq* (feats of sleight of hand), *siḥr* (sorcery), *shaᶜbadha* (jugglery), and *tamwīh* (hydromancy).[29] He is also accused of claiming to know and to be able to utilize the Greatest Name of God.[30] All these motifs are well known from pre-Islamic and non-Islamic Aramaic traditions, and Mughīra intentionally drew on them, with their advantageously hoary numinousness, as appeals from antiquity.

Mughīra's claim was not only that he could reveal things unseen or that he could communicate with the dead, for example, but that he could even reanimate the dead. His self-proclaimed powers to raise the dead can be understood as a key to his theosophical system. Here I agree with Hodgson's observation about the closely related *ghālī* Abūl-Khaṭṭāb: "But perhaps more interesting than these disputes about revelation and prophecy were the disputes recorded among several of Abūl-Khaṭṭāb's followers over the nature of death— and so of the spirit."[31] Mughīra and some of his followers claimed not to die and elaborated the then-nascent Shīᶜite theory of *rajᶜa* (the return of the Imām), that great conquest of time. He taught that the returned *Mahdī* would resurrect a certain elite: "He will restore to life seventeen men and give each one of them one of the letters of God's Greatest Name and they will rout armies and possess the earth."[32] As a professional

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P. Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," *Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971): 80–101 (now amplified in his *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* [Los Angeles, 1982], pp. 103–53).

[27] al-Ṭabarī, 7:128; cf. Muḥammad ibn al-Nuᶜmān al-Mufīd, *Irshād,* trans. I. K. A. Howard (London, 1983), p. 544: "Before the one who will arise (*al-qāʾim*) there will be red death and white death; there will be locusts at their usual time and at their unusual time like the colors of blood"; in *Mishkāt al-Maṣābīh,* trans. J. Robson (Lahore, 1964), 3:1142, locusts will be the first of one thousand species to perish at the end of days. There may be a Jewish source for these traditions; see, e.g., *IV Ezra,* trans. B. Metzger in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha,* ed. J. Charlesworth (Garden City, N.Y., 1983), 1:517–61, 530: "We pass from the world like locusts and life is like a mist."

[28] See, e.g., al-Ṭabarī, 7:128.

[29] For *nīrinjāt* and *makhāriq,* see al-Ashᶜarī, 1:72; for *siḥr,* see al-Ṭabarī, 7:129; for *shaᶜbadha* and *tamwīh,* see al-Dhahabī, 4:161.

[30] al-Ashᶜarī, 1:72; see also J. van Ess (n. 14 above).

[31] Hodgson, "How Did the Early Shīᶜa Become Sectarian?" (n. 2 above), p. 8.

[32] ᶜAbd al-Qāhir ibn Ṭāhir Muḥammad al-Baghdādī, *Moslem Schisms and Sects (al-Fark bain al-Firak),* trans. A. S. Halkin (Tel Aviv, 1935), p. 54. Widengren (n. 9 above), p. 93 and n. 4, points out that Mughīra alone of the *ghulāt* leaders, whose many tortures and executions at the hands of the authorities are well recorded in the literature, renounced his claims. On his teachings on the *rajᶜa,* see al-Baghdādī, p. 54

magician, Mughīra's self-proclaimed knowledge of and power over death was a kind of claim beyond history that was freely accessible—for a price, presumably—in the contemporary bazaar. His knowledge of *ghaib* (the unseen) and the ancient Name of God, therefore, provided him with a means not only to raise funds and to raise armies but even, so he said, to raise the dead.

All these accounts highlight Mughīra's strikingly ramified continuity with the magical and ritual beliefs of his non-Islamic milieu. This continuity can also be traced in Mughīra's appropriation of a magicoreligious appellation found in numerous non-Islamic sources, which he applied to himself. This name, in its Islamic guise, constitutes a significant hint for establishing a meaningful explication of his creation myth.

Either Mughīra himself was given or he gave to a follower the *laqab* ("nickname") "al-Abtar" ("the one with tail docked, the one cut off, the childless"). The sect descending from this al-Abtar, the Butrīya, was later classified as among the earliest Zaidīya.[33] None of the conflicting etymologies of the nickname, however, is convincing.[34] None of these Arabic etymologies, naturally, refers to the most likely source of the name, which was in fact a widespread, variously employed religious appellative.

It is in this context that we would understand the association of Mughīra with the various forms of the name *abtr*. There is a British Museum incantation bowl that is meant to drive off, among others, Satan, "Abtur-Tura," and Lilith, while another Aramaic bowl against

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and also p. 55, where his follower claims not to die; see P. Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān* (Cairo, 1942), 2:199ff., on the number seventeen, and p. 222, esp. n. 9, on other sources; and see Henry Corbin, "La Science de la balance et les correspondances entre les mondes en gnose islamique," in *Temple et contemplation* (Paris, 1980), pp. 67–142, p. 119, n. 86.

[33] Mughīra bestows this nickname on his follower Kathīr, a founder of the Butrīya (see Abu Saʿīd Nashwān al-Ḥimyarī, *Al-Ḥūr alʿAyn* [Cairo, 1948], p. 156); in an account cited by al-Tustarī (9:83), which al-Tustarī attempts to discredit, Mughīra's *laqab* is "al-abtar." This group seems to have retained certain gnosticizing features (see Watt [n. 16 above], pp. 162–63 and 349, nn. 44–47). A later Butrite is condemned for his use of the terms *nūr* ("light") and *ẓulma* ("dark") (see Massignon, *The Passion of al-Ḥallāj* [no. 4 above], 1:315). In his bureaucratic secretary's manual, *Mafātīḥ al-ʿUlūm* written ca. 977, al-Khwārizmī lists the first of the Zaidīya as the "*Abtariyya*, stemming from Kuthayyir al-Nūbī who had the name al-Mughīra b. Saʿd and the *laqab* al-Abtar ("the childless")" (this translation is by C. E. Bosworth in his "Al-Ḥwārazmī on Theology and Sects: The Chapter on Kalam in the Mafātīḥ al-ʿUlūm," *Bulletin d'études orientales* 29 [1977]: 85–95, 90).

[34] See the traditions collected in Faḍīlah ʿAbd al-ʾAmīr al-Shāmī, *Taʾrīkh al-Firqah al-Zaydīyah bayna al-Qarnayn al-Thānī wal-Thālith lil-Hijrah* (Najaf, 1975), pp. 297–302; al-Shāmī agrees with the traditions deriving Butrīya from a *laqab* rather than from any apocryphal use of the root *btr*.

Lilith from sixth-century Nippur lists fourteen names of Lilith, begin-
ning "Lilith, Abitar, Abiqar. . . ."[35] In Thamudic, *abtr* was a divine
epithet.[36] But it was the Mandeans who apotheosized this sometimes
demonic, sometimes divine potency. Friedlaender has recognized that
the image of Mughīra's Divine Man looking down into the dark waters
to create is an echo of such Mandean imagery as: "When Life . . . had
thus spoken, Abatur rose and opened the gate. He looked into the
Dark Water and at the same hour was formed his image in the Dark
Water."[37]

In eighth-century Mesopotamia, the Audians, a sectarian family
relation of the Mandeans, held a belief markedly similar to statements
both of Mughīra and of the Mandeans themselves, a relationship
important for tracing the passage of the name *abtr*. According to
Theodore Bar Khonai, the Audians quote the *Apocryphon of John* on
the angelic creators of the body: "My Wisdom has made the hair; the
Intelligence has made the skin; Elohim has made the bones; my
Royalty has made the blood; Adonai has made the nerves; Zeal has
made the flesh, and Thought has made the marrow."[38] This is a
synopsis of the passage in the *Apocryphon of John* that includes the
creation of the "right underarm" by an angel called "Abitrion."[39] The

35 E. A. Wallis Budge, *Amulets and Talismans* (New York, 1970), p. 285; see also
R. Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess* (New York, 1978), pp. 188–89, and p. 217, where
he gives a later version, which survived into Jewish communities of medieval Europe.
It is a strange coincidence that both Lilith and Mughīra come to be known as
"stranglers" (see A. Dupont-Sommer, "L'Inscription de l'amulette d'Arslan-Tash,"
Revue de l'histoire des religions 120 [1939]: 133–59, 156–58; and Tucker [n. 11 above],
p. 45).

36 See A. Van den Branden, *Les Inscriptions thamoudéennes* (Louvain-Heverle,
1950), p. 327, and *Histoire de Thamoud* (Beirut, 1960), p. 90; G. L. Harding, *An Index
and Concordance of Pre-Islamic Arabian Names and Inscriptions* (Toronto, 1971), s.v.
ᵓabtr.

37 Friedlaender, "The Heterodoxies of the Shiites in the Presentation of ibn Hazm,
Part 2" (n. 4 above), p. 84. On Abatur, see R. Macuch, *Zur Sprache und Literatur der
Mandäer* (Berlin, 1976), pp. 110–11; and E. S. Drower and R. Macuch, *A Mandaic
Dictionary* (Oxford, 1963), p. 2, which summarizes the etymological possibilities; for
more on the figure, see E. S. Drower, trans., *Diwan Abatur, or Progress through the
Purgatories* (Vatican City, 1950), and notes therein.

38 Theodor Bar Khonai is quoted in J. Doresse, trans., *The Secret Books of the
Egyptian Gnostics* (New York, 1960), p. 56.

39 *The Apocryphon of John* (n. 24 above), p. 107; in 1936, Puech demonstrated that
the Audians, eighth-century Mesopotamian Gnostics, used the *Apocryphon of John*
(see H.-C. Puech, "Fragments retrouvés de l'Apocalypse d'Allogène," in *En quête de la
gnose,* 2 vols. [Paris, 1978], 1:271–94). In an appendix to *En quête de la gnose* (1:295–
98), Puech conclusively demonstrates this connection with four new Nag Hammadi
texts (see S. Giversen, *Apocryphon Johannis* [Copenhagen, 1963], p. 77 and the com-
mentary on pp. 245–48; and cf. R. Van den Broek, "The Creation of Adam's Psychic
Body in the Apocryphon of John," in *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions*,
ed. R. Van den Broek and M. J. Vermaseren [Leiden, 1981], pp. 38–58).

Mandeans are similarly graphically physiological: "The First Semen is thus glorified and a force more sublime than any of the forces which develop from it, for it is marrow, it is that which is formed before all other mysteries, and then seven [*sic*] others follow, the bone, flesh, sinews, veins, skin and hair."[40] These may explain a statement of Mughīra's: when asked by al-Shaᶜbī, "How does the love of ᶜAlī operate?" Mughīra answered, "In the bone and the nerve and the sinew."[41]

This allegorizing of the physical body, which can be traced back in this form at least to the second-century *Apocryphon of John* and which is developed by the Mandeans, can be seen as homologous with the cosmogonic potency of the Divine Man of Mughīra, especially in regard to his phallic symbolism. Werblowsky has commented on its relation to Jewish mystical tradition and has observed that the phallic symbolism of Mandean gnosis is significantly not attached to the Primal Adam but to the "Abatur of the Scales."[42] With the Mandean Abatur, as in the *Apocryphon of John,* and in Mughīra's doctrine, the divine anthropomorphization's "cosmogonic potency" also carries with it eschatological implications. The Mandean Abatur, then, is associated both with the demiurge's dualistic creation of a good versus evil universe and with the judgment of the dead—"Abatur . . . weighs and unites the soul with the spirit."[43]

The fullest mythological framework provided by Mughīra for all these practices and claims was his notorious cosmology—with its crowned Man of Light creating mankind out of two waters and writing their future acts of belief and unbelief on his palm with his finger—all of which abounds with echoes of Mandean cosmological themes. The striking representation of his "Object of Worship" has drawn more attention from scholars than any other aspect of his doctrine. While it has been frequently cited, however, no scholar has utilized the full battery of available sources for a comprehensive analysis of this late survival of classic *gnostica.* When reconstructed, the full cosmology is

[40] Drower (n. 25 above), p. 76. The symbolic homology of body and cosmos, in which the seven planets create seven parts of the body, was taught in Edessan Hermetic circles and by the Sabians of Harran (see H. Drijvers, "Bardaisan of Edessa and the Hermetica," *Jaarbericht Ex Orient Lux* 21 [1969–70]: 190–210, 200).

[41] al-Dhahabī (n. 19 above), 4:160. There may also be a continuity with a certain pentadic symbology, covered well in Halm, *Die islamische Gnosis* (n. 5 above), and *Kosmogonie und Heilslehre in der frühen Ismāᶜilīya* (n. 6 above), on the "Mukhamissa"; on these "Fivers," see also Massignon, *The Passion of al-Ḥallāj,* 1:300–303; al-Dhahabī, 4:160–61, cites Mughīra's allegorization of Muḥammad, ᶜAlī, Ḥasan, Ḥusain, and Fāṭima.

[42] R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, review of *The Secret Adam,* by E. S. Drower, *Journal of Semitic Studies* 8 (1963): 129–33, 132–33; and see also n. 13 above.

[43] Drower, pp. 42, 29.

actually a tripartite teaching: a description of the Divine Man, a cosmogony, and an anthropogony.[44]

While Goldziher, Massignon, Corbin, and Tucker did link Mughīra's cosmology with Gnostic teachings, it has not been hitherto noticed that Mughīra's description of his "Object of Worship," with its famous depiction of a Man of Light with the letters of the alphabet corresponding to his members, employs a Gnostic technical term.[45] Mughīra is quoted as saying, " 'If you behold it (the letter *Hā*), you will see a Great Power [*ʾamran ʿaẓīman*],' and he implied that it was in the place of the genitalia [*bil-ʿaura*] and that he had seen it."[46] "Great Power" was a Gnostic technical term associated with the divine figure, widely used as such in a variety of related gnosticizing literatures.[47] The locus classicus of those usages refers to Simon Magus, in Acts 8:10: "To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, 'The man is the great power of God.' "[48]

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[44] I. Goldziher already commented on it; see his *Kitāb maʿānī al-nafs* (Berlin, 1907), pp. 26–27; and also L. Massignon, "Die Ursprünge und die Bedeutung des Gnostizismus im Islam," *Eranos Jahrbuch* 5 (1937): 55–77; and H. Corbin, *Histoire de la philosophie islamique* (Paris, 1964), p. 112: "Pour Moghīra, le plus ancien peut-être des gnostiques shīʿites."

[45] On the background of letter mysticism, see A. Dupont-Sommer, *La Doctrine Gnostique de la lettre 'Wāw'* (Paris, 1946), esp. chap. 3.

[46] al-Ashʿarī (n. 21 above), 1:72; the Arabic sources refer to the alphabet on the divine body either as the "Abjad" or as the "Abū Jād," which is the Arabic characters arranged in the order of the Hebrew and Aramaic alphabets; the Mandeans also use their alphabet in their physiological allegoresis (see Drower, pp. 17–19, esp. p. 19, on the letter H, "which is where the mysteries expressed themselves defectively" [the alphabet in these treatises is referred to as *abgd*]); in most of the Mandaic bowls, the Mandaic language does not distinguish between *Heh* and *Ḥet* (see Baruch A. Levine's appendix "The Language of the Magical Bowls," in Neusner [n. 17 above], pp. 343–76, p. 345, n. 1); it should also be noted that Jewish Merkabah physiognomic texts "refer to certain letters of the alphabet the shape of which is believed to be inscribed in various parts of the human body" (I. Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkabah Mysticism* [Leiden, 1980], pp. 222–23).

[47] A good overview of the instances of its usage is J. Fossum, "Jewish-Christian Christology and Jewish Mysticism," *Vigiliae Christianae* 37 (1982): 260–87. H. Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston, 1963), p. 106, characterizes the Gnostic hypostasis: "The upper principle, the Great Power, is in the combination the Mind of the All, governing everything and male."

[48] For a discussion of Simonian and Samaritan gnosis, see R. Pummer, "The Present State of Samaritan Studies, Part 2," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 22 (1977): 27–47, 27–33; H. H. Schaeder, "Die Kantäer," *Welt des Orients* 1 (1949): 288–98; W. Madelung, "Abū ʿIsà al-Warrāq über die Bardesaniten, Marcioniten und Kantäer," in *Studien Zur Geschichte und Kult des Vorderen Orients,* ed. H. R. Roemer and A. Noth (Leiden, 1981), pp. 210–24; and G. Widengren, *Ascension of the Prophet and the Heavenly Book* (Uppsala, 1950), pp. 40–57; see also the important comments of Gershom Scholem concerning "Great Power" in his *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition* (New York, 1965), pp. 67–68; on the hypostatized "powers" of God, see A. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven* (Leiden, 1977), p. 247; and Wilson (n. 17 above), pp. 200–202.

It happens that the coincidence of the name "Abatur" and the term "Great Power" is attested to in an eighth-century account. In his scholia, Bar Khonai describes the doctrines of the Dosteans, of whom he states that "in Mesene they were called the 'Mandeans,'" using their own books as his sources for so doing.[49] Their cosmology is a drama of creation starring the potencies Ptahil and Abatur, whom he specifically names. The eighth-century Syriac doctor begins his description this way: "They said that before the heaven and the earth were there were great powers resting on the waters. They had a son whom they would call Abitour."[50] The coincidence of name, doctrine, place, and date would all support a possible connection with Mughīra.[51]

I am not arguing that the variants of the root cognomen *abtr* and the term "Great Power," found in different languages and religions over a period of several centuries, were all understood in the same way by each of these communities. But I would argue that the wide distribution of these religious designations throughout the Aramaic milieu out of which Mughīra emerged, a milieu that was notably syncretistic and that freely transmitted ideas and images through translations, would have been the likely source of his own use of these terms.

Mughīra's repertoire, then, was drawn from a baptizing, gnosticizing Aramaic community, closely resembling if not identical with the Mandeans, from whom he extracted useful materials for his ritual beliefs, his sorcery, his thanatosophy, his cosmology, and his very name.[52] The kind of community from which he emerged has recently

[49] Theodor Bar Khonai, *Scholies,* trans. R. Hespel and R. Draguet, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, vol. 432, Scriptores Syri, Tomus 188 (Louvain, 1982), p. 258.

[50] Ibid. G. Quispel, "Demiurge in the Apocryphon of John," in *Nag Hammadi and Gnosis,* ed. R. M. Wilson (Leiden, 1978), pp. 1–34, p. 8 discusses the motif of "looking down into the dark water"; cf. Quispel's "Judaism, Judaic-Christianity and Gnosis," in *The New Testament and Gnosis,* ed. A. H. B. Logan and A. J. M. Wedderburn (Edinburgh, 1983), pp. 46–69, on this motif in relation to creation and to the creation of a mirror image or shadow. See also H. Jonas, p. 162: "The mythic idea of the substantiality of an image, reflection, or shadow as representing a real part of the original entity from which it became detached. We have to accept this symbolism as coming to those who used it for a crucial phase in the divine drama"—the looking into the waters and the creation of shadows are of course essential to Mughīra's creation drama.

[51] The passage from language to language did not seem to be an insurmountable problem for those in gnosticizing circles, who sometimes hypostatized what they misunderstood: Scholem has pointed out that, in the Hekhalot texts, "one of their more unexpected features is the recurrence of rudiments of certain Greek formulae and standing expressions, which the editors in Babylonia were no longer capable of understanding and apparently regarded as magical names of the divinity" (*Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* [New York, 1972], p. 53).

[52] Friedlaender, "The Heterodoxies of the Shiites in the Presentation of ibn Hazm, Part 2" (n. 4 above), pp. 80–85; and Tucker (n. 11 above), pp. 39–43, collect a number of the more striking parallels.

been studied in some detail. This work was stimulated by the discovery of the Cologne Mani Codex, written in such a community some four centuries before Mughīra. One of the editors of this text, Albert Henrichs, has synthesized a typology of such a community. It is interesting to note that Mughīra's background coincides with six of the eight points of agreement that Henrichs has elaborated between the Elkesaites, the Mesopotamian baptists, and the community evidenced in the Manichean Cologne Mani Codex.[53]

What, then, was Mughīra's original religion? While Mandean elements predominate—and it was precisely in these years that the Mandean reformers were organizing their community—the coincidences with Henrichs's typology lead me to hesitate in too strongly identifying Mughīra as Mandean. Other factors militate against such an identification. The most problematic of these factors are the Manichean, Jewish, and Gnostic material that can also be discerned in the doctrines and activities of Mughīra.

It is true that, like Mandeanism, which was achieving its definitive character in these years, Mughīra's religion is an amalgam that comprises demonstrable elements of Jewish, Gnostic, Manichean, and native Mesopotamian mythologies, in a baptist context. Mughīra's Islam is meaningless without understanding Mughīra himself, not only as a Mesopotamian baptist, but also as a Mesopotamian prophet: like the Mesopotamian prophets Elkesai and Mani before him, Mughīra brings a Gnostic message linked with, but ultimately lying outside, the established schools of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Mughīra's imaginal "syncretism," based on letter elementalism and cosmogony, derives from the Aramaicized multicultural matrix of late antique Mesopotamia, one of whose distinguishing features was this kind of transposition of forms. His overt continuation of such features resulted in the creation of his infamous cosmological myth. This aggressively Gnostic mythologizing, true to its own past, was revolutionary for Islam.

The extent to which this gnosticizing was extensively propagated in the eighth century is only now coming to be fully appreciated. Students of early Islamic gnosis, indeed all historians of religions, therefore have reason to rejoice over the recent publication of Heinz Halm's *Die islamische Gnosis*.[54] If one compares the many texts concerning the

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[53] Albert Henrichs, "Mani and the Babylonian Baptists: A Historical Confrontation," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 73 (1973): 23–59, 47–56. There is at least some evidence of Mughīra's coinciding with all but number two (Eucharist) and number four (Sabbath), both elements that were rejected by Islam.

[54] Halm, *Die islamische Gnosis* (n. 5 above).

ghulāt translated and annotated by Halm in that excellent work with the elaborate descriptions of the eighth century gnosticizers found in Bar Khonai and ibn al-Nadīm, one cannot escape the impression of extensive Gnostic sectarian activity in the eighth century. Mughīra, certainly, was far from alone in his efforts to gnosticize Islam. As one of the more powerful rebellions, however, his is a useful example of the *ghulāt*'s politicization of gnosis within the medium of Islam.

The *ghulāt* are the first—and, in significant ways, the least Islamic— of the Gnostics of Islam. As the full extent of their continuity with non-Islamic gnosticizing movements is coming to be appreciated, we are only now beginning to sort out these various currents as they were manifested in the *ghulāt*. Morony, for example, details the intensive reformations taking place among such Gnostic groups as the Mandeans, the Manicheans, and the *ghulāt* in eighth-century Iraq. Considered as a whole, these assertive reorganizing movements constitute a virtual failed takeover of Islam by what Hans Jonas calls the "Gnostic Religion." I would be so bold as to suggest that the history of the "Gnostic Religion" should be reevaluated with this acute eighth-century politicization in mind.

It is only with this gnosticizing background in mind that the Islamicizing of Mughīra makes sense. In the following discussion I hope to explain how Mughīra applied his non-Islamic mythos to Islam. The reception of his gnosticizing alloy resulted in a spectacular debacle: a closer examination of this near-total rejection should help us understand the failure of Islamic gnosis as a political force.

Mughīra's group, by definition, followed their mercurial leader's direction. He started out, so far as the evidence allows us to judge, as a proponent of the Imamate of al-Bāqir. At some point after his rejection by that Imām—which may have been precipitated by his declaring the Imām a god—he proclaimed the Imamate of al-Nafs al-Zakiyya and may even have declared him to be the *Mahdī*. I agree with Tucker that Mughīra must also have declared himself to be a prophet of the *Mahdī* al-Nafs al-Zakiyya. This means that Mughīra probably claimed to be both the rightful Imām and a prophet: the Mughīriyya after his death were characterized, in part, by their recognition of his prophetic Imamate. The evidence, then, suggests that Mughīra began as a follower of the Imām al-Bāqir, switched allegiance to the Imamate of al-Nafs al-Zakiyya, and ended his career claiming the Imamate for himself as a prophet of the *Mahdī* al-Nafs al-Zakiyya.

This brief outline of his allegiances is sufficient background for proceeding, now, to show how Mughīra interfused his myth with the political materials at hand. Though the full myth is tripartite, I will discuss here only the description of his "Object of Worship" with which

it begins and the anthropogony with which it concludes. The former shows that, for Mughīra, the very body of the creator, encoded with letters, was a symbol to be deciphered. He then applied a similarly radical symbology, by means of allegorically understood Qurʾānic proof texts, in his anthropogony. Thereby, he wrote his sect into the origins of humankind.

The centerpiece of Mughīra's revelation is the figure of the creator. Here, reconstructed from several reports, is one description: "He is a man of light, with a crown of light on his head, He has the body and limbs of a man. His body has an inside, within which is a heart, whence wisdom flows. His limbs have the shape of the letters of the alphabet [*abjad*]. The *mīm* represents the head; the *sīn* the teeth; the *ṣād* and *ḍād* the two eyes; the *ʿain* and *ghain* the two ears; as for the *hā*, he said, You will see in it a Great Power, and he implied that it was in the place of the genitalia and that he had seen it; the *alif* was in the place of the foot."[55]

It is beyond the purview of the present study to analyze fully the important associations that can be drawn between this representation and certain others.[56] For the moment, I would only want to indicate

[55] A full description of Mughīra's demiurgic, crowned Man of Light must be reconstructed from scattered reports, esp. Mutahhar ibn Ṭāhir al-Maqdisī, *Al-Badʾ wal-Taʾrīkh* (Tehran, 1942), 5:140; al-Ashʿarī, 1:72; and al-Baghdādī (n. 32 above), pp. 49–50. Ibn Ḥazm (see Friedlaender, "The Heterodoxies of the Shiites in the Presentation of ibn Hazm, Part 1" [n. 4 above], p. 59) and al-Athīr ([n. 15 above], 5:208) shy away from even reporting the specific blasphemy. For a related Gnostic description of the divine figure, see Irenaeus's *Adversus haereses* (on Marcus the Magician), trans. in Foerster, ed. (n. 25 above), 1:205; and for a related Jewish example, produced roughly contemporary with Mughīra, see M. S. Cohen, *The Shiʿur Qomah: Liturgy and Theurgy in Pre-Kabbalistic Jewish Mysticism* (Washington, D.C., 1983), passim, and p. 217, n. 6, for the genitalia; cf. *The Apocryphon of John* (n. 24 above), p. 108; and for an important discussion of the iconography of divine sexuality, see now L. Steinberg, "The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion," a complete issue of *October* (25 [Summer 1983]: 1–222).

[56] To do this properly one would need to start by closely comparing this text with such related "visions" as that of Marcus's "Body of Truth" in Irenaeus, the Mandeans' Primal Adam, the several surviving "lettered man" gems, and the Jewish visionary materials, esp. the *Shiʿur Qomah*. Mughīra's vision has several features in common with the *Shiʿur Qomah*: both visions begin from the feet and move upward (by contrast, Marcus's vision shows the Alpha on the head); the heart is the only internal organ mentioned; the genitals are specified. These important differences also should be noted: the *Shiʿur Qomah*'s godhead is covered with names, not letters, and is not a demiurge, as is Mughīra's. But Cohen's locating the *Shiʿur Qomah* in sixth- to seventh-century Babylonia at least places it in Mughīra's milieu. Two other Jewish texts stand in some uncertain relation to these depictions of the divine body. In *Sefer Yetzirah*, some versions state that the organs of the body are assigned letters, as discussed in D. Cohn-Sherbok, "The Alphabet in Mandaean and Jewish Gnosticism," *Religion* 11 (1981): 227–34, 231. In *Sefer ha-Bahir*, para. 42, the letter *he* is linked with Prov. 10:25, which may be an adumbration of the later Sefirotic symbolism of *yesod*. It seems certain now that Heinrich Graetz ("Die mystische Literatur in der gaonischen Epoche," Parts 1, 2,

that Mughīra's "Object of Worship" points—with his finger, as it were—to the alphabet mysteries of his sect. The body of the divine potency is a system of esoteric symbols. This apotheosis of the figurative powers of language has especially important implications, I believe, for the development of *ta ʾwīl*, the allegorical interpretation of the Qurʾān.

Some of the earliest examples of this allegorical interpretation can be found in the last section of Mughīra's myth. This section follows after a cosmogonic middle section that shows all the elements of the universe being created out of dark waters and light waters. The anthropogony proper then describes the creation of ʿAlī, Muḥammad, and the Caliphs Abū Bakr and ʿUmar. These Caliphs are depicted as demons who rebel against God and plot to undermine the rightful glory of ʿAlī.[57]

This full-blown Gnostic origins myth is indeed, in Corbin's phrase, the "prologue in heaven," but twice over, for the implicit rebellion of the sun and moon in the cosmogony is recapitulated in the explicit rebellion of the Caliphs Abū Bakr and ʿUmar in the anthropogony. Mughīra thus manipulates traditional Gnostic cosmological motifs to form a new polemically tendentious drama. The three stages of this cosmology can in fact be seen as reflections of his real innovation: the migration from Gnostic preoccupation with origins so long prevalent in late antiquity to the momentous sectarian division underway in second-century Islam. He retains these traditional motifs—the King of Light and the creation of waters—usefully lit with an ahistorical numinosity, and redirects them in the interests of the hour, thereby shedding old light on the new struggle.

His ʿAlid allegory rests on his mystic vision of the primordial creation of Muḥammad and ʿAlī. This vision mandates the divine authorization and empowerment of ʿAlī, whose shadow is created alongside that of the Prophet himself as the first of men. This divinizing of ʿAlī—and thereby of his lineage—is balanced with a requisite demonizing of the Caliphal opposition to ʿAlī's line. Mughīra was said to be the first to abuse the Caliphs ʿUmar and Abū Bakr.[58] Mughīra, indeed, goes so far as to imagine, in his myth, that the anti-ʿAlid forces are

3, *Monatschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judenthums,* o.s., 8 [1859]: 67–78, 103–18, 140–53) was incorrect in assigning priority to the Muslim anthropomorphic texts. As for the "lettered man" gems, see Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition,* pp. 130, 41n. (on line 17); and A. A. Barb, "Three Elusive Amulets," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute* 27 (1964):1–9, 5–6.

[57] Compare Tucker, p. 41, where he translates the cosmogony and anthropogony in al-Ashʿarī's version.

[58] al-Dhahabī (n. 19 above), 4:161.

precisely the universal forces of evil: he concludes his myth with the "revelation" that the Caliph ᶜUmar is Satan.

This reaching for extreme examples is typical of Mughīra's symbolizing procedure. The same can be seen in his several allegorical readings of the Qurʾān, some of the earliest surviving examples of allegorical exegesis in Islam. The report of the ninth-century Muᶜtazilite al-Nāshiʾ stresses that this allegorizing was a distinguishing feature of Mughīra's innovations: "Mughīra published [*waḍaᶜa*] an interpretation of the Qurʾān that he called 'knowledge of the esoteric' and that diverged from what Muslims accept. He asserted that the Qurʾān is entirely composed of symbols [*amthāl*] and cryptic hints [*rumūz*] and that mankind cannot learn anything of its mystical meanings but through him because of the power invested in him by the Imam."[59] Mughīra's allegorizing, the ultimate "text" of which is the alphabetic Powers on the divine body, was applied to the Qurʾān and to the political divisions of second-century Islam with equal impunity.

As I have tried to show, Mughīra's most complex interfusion of symbol techniques and political doctrines is found in his transformation of non-Islamic cosmogonic materials into "Islamic" myth. The desire that can be read in that story—to extend the import of his message into the very origins of things, to "primordialize" his message— is a gauge of his marked inclination to resort to "ultimate" referents for his metaphors. His projecting of his immediate situation into the first cosmic *kairos* was seen to be an excessive extension of metaphor (*al-taʾwīl al-ghālī*).[60]

The heresiographers often point to a particularly blatant form of such a reading when they characterize the heresy of *ghuluww*. The distinguishing characteristic that they frequently specify is *tafwīḍ* ("entrusting, turning over to").[61] *Ghulāt* used this term to cast Muḥammad and/or ᶜAlī as demiurges, who were "entrusted" with the creation of the world after the initial creation was begun by God. ᶜAlī was especially favored for this demiurgic role—and not only in the conception of the Sunni heresiographers, for whom the *ghulāt* were ᶜAlid loyalists run amok. Mughīra may have held such a doctrine. In

[59] Josef van Ess, *Frühe muᶜtazilitische Häresiographie* (Beirut, 1971), p. 41 (text).

[60] Samarrāʾī (n. 5 above), pp. 149–50.

[61] A large bibliography concerning *tafwīḍ* is provided by M. Mashkur in Saʾd ibn ᶜAbd Allāh al-Qummī, *Kitab al-Maqālāt wa al-Firaq*, ed. M. Mashkur (Tehran, 1963), pp. 238–39. In the *ghulāt* revision of the Gnostic demiurge, one is reminded of the observation made by Jorge Luis Borges: "It may be that universal history is the history of the different intonations given a handful of metaphors" (*Labyrinths* [New York, 1962], p. 192); see, on this notion, the index of Halm's *Die islamische Gnosis*, s.v. "Tlön," "Uqbar."

addition to the testimony of his myth, it is also reported that Mughīra claimed to have ascended to heaven, where God anointed him on the head and said to him, "Go, my son, to earth, and tell its inhabitants that ʿAlī is my right hand and my eye."[62] This may be the absolute extreme to which Mughīra went in order not only to Islamicize his gnosis but also to take the demiurge of gnosis and turn him into the First Imām.[63] This was ledgerdemain that could not go undetected.

Mughīra's transmutation of the myths and techniques of his milieu was not mere spellbinding but a threatening revision of the fundamental materials of earliest Islam. In the following section I will analyze the consequent rejection of this "transformation" by the Islamic leadership of his day. To do this I will first review the Imāmī reaction to Mughīra as a "Satan" and as a false prophet and will then conclude with a discussion of the ways in which Mughīra's schism came to be associated with that of the Islamic Antichrist, the "Dajjāl."

A few citations from the extensive and vehement refutations of Mughīra in Imāmī literature will suffice to show that Mughīra was seen there as subversive of the true Imāmī tradition. One such report, related by the sixth Imām Jaʿfar, the son of Muḥammad al-Bāqir, describes the way Mughīra tried to insinuate his teachings into those of the Imāms. "Mughīra used deliberately to lie against my father. He studied the books of the companions of my father. Mughīra's followers, whose identities were concealed from my father's companions, studied my father's books and turned them over to Mughīra. Mughīra would then smuggle *kufr* [unbelief] into them as well as *zandaqa* [generally used for dualism, sometimes used specifically for Manicheanism], which he would attribute to my father. Mughīra then turned these back over to his followers and ordered them to promulgate them to the Shīʿa."[64]

The Imāmī reports are usually couched in terms of denunciation. There are many variants on the tradition that Jaʿfar said, "Mughīra lied about my father: May God make Mughīra feel the heat of iron."[65] A frequently repeated curse of the Imāmīs answers the Qurʾānic question (26:221–22), "Shall I tell you on whom the Satans come down?"

[62] al-Maqdisī, 5:140. Cf. J. Texidor, *The Pagan God* (Princeton, N.J., 1977), p. 12, on the officers of the Persian emperor called "the eyes of the King."

[63] There is an apparently demiurgic quotation from the followers of Mughīra cited in al-Qummī, p. 77: "They say 'We only call Him Creator [*Khāliq*] when He creates; Provider [*Rāziq*] when He provides; and Knower [*ʿālim*] when He knows." One is reminded here of the Gnostic trinity of Father, Mother, and Son. (See A. Böhlig, "Triade und Trinität in den Schriften von Nag Hammadi," in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism,* ed. B. Layton [Leiden, 1981], 2:617–34.)

[64] al-Tustarī (n. 4 above), 9:79.

[65] Ibid., pp. 77–78.

with the names of seven of the *ghulāt,* one of whom is Mughīra.[66] A similar recourse to the Qurʾān as a proof text is the report that al-Bāqir said, "Do you know to whom Mughīra is akin? . . . He is like Balaam, 'to whom We gave Our signs, and he departed therefrom, and Satan followed him, and he was of those who were beguiled.'"[67] It is instructive to note that these last two traditions are themselves examples of the allegorical exegesis of the Qurʾān turned against Mughīra.

The Imāms, in these reports, are particularly aggrieved over Mughīra's corruption of their traditions. But this was only one aspect of his sin in their eyes. They were undoubtedly angry at him for at least two other reasons.

The first is that he openly deified ʿAlī and his descendants. In the midst of the delicate political situation of the Imāms in the second Islamic century, this is a doctrine that they would naturally have discouraged. Indeed, they actively repressed any form of this "fanaticism." Mughīra's fellow *ghālī* Bayān ibn Samʿān, who rebelled alongside Mughīra, sent a message to Muḥammad al-Bāqir proclaiming himself a prophet: al-Bāqir made the messenger eat the message.[68]

The other reason is related to the first. Mughīra, in promulgating his myth, must have revealed certain "secrets." The Imāms' renunciation of Mughīra may have been so vociferous because the schismatic published *(wadaʿa)* what was intended to remain "knowledge of the esoteric" (*ʿilm al-bāṭin*). This must have been the case with Mughīra's use of allegory, the books containing the secrets of which were in the possession of the Imāms. And these transgressions may be what lies behind the statement that "Mughīra and his followers considered all the taboo [activities] permissible."[69] It was particularly during the "crisis of Jaʿfar" that the Imāms began to enforce secrecy: "No one is truly a Shiʿite of Jaʿfar but he who has sewn up his tongue [i.e., who observes the discipline of initiatic secrecy; the *kitmān*]."[70]

[66] Ibid., p. 81. The translation of the Qurʾan is taken from A. J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted* (1955; reprint, New York, 1970), 2:75. It is perhaps not surprising that this demonizing condescension should have affected the tone of Orientalists. Thus the nineteenth-century Dutch scholar de Goeje is approvingly quoted by E. G. Browne concerning an extremist Shīʿī agitator just subsequent to Mughīra: "To attain [his ends] a conjunction of means was devised which may fairly be described as Satanic" (*A Literary History of Persia* [London, 1902], 1:394).

[67] al-Tustarī, 9:80.

[68] W. F. Tucker, "Bayān b. Samʿān and the Bayāniyya: Shiʿite Extremists in Umayyad Iraq," *Muslim World* 65 (1975): 241–53, 245, citing al-Qummī.

[69] M. Ghālib, ed., *ʿUyūn al-Akhbār* (Beirut, 1973), 4:249.

[70] Henry Corbin, citing a manuscript, "The Ismāʿīlī Response to the Polemic of Ghazālī," in *Ismāʿīlī Contributions to Islamic Culture,* ed. S. H. Nasr (Tehran, 1977), p. 88.

Whatever the immediate sources of his heretical ideas—Jaʿfar accuses Mughīra of learning magic from a Jewish woman—there are clear indications of the effective force that these practices must have possessed as tools for propagandizing.[71] Al-Dhahabī's account in particular picturesquely describes Mughīra's "act," his "performance."[72] No doubt Mughīra was a traveling *jongleur* of sorts. Several reports indicate that his *firqa* must have accumulated a substantial amount of wealth. One of the pretenders to the leadership, Bakr al-Aʿwar al-Hijrī Qatāt, "lived on the wealth of the Mughīriyya, making fools of them."[73] Perhaps the clearest indication of his "revealing hidden things" as a kind of fund-raising technique can be found in this report from al-Athīr: "Mughīra went to Muḥammad al-Bāqir and said to him, 'Admit that you know hidden things [*al-ghaib*] so that I may raise taxes for you in Iraq.' He rebuffed him and drove him off. So Mughīra went to Bāqir's son Jaʿfar and said the same to him, to which he replied, 'God forbid!' "[74] The Imāms were loathe to endorse Mughīra's "public works."

For all these reasons, Mughīra's career shows how the Gnostics were violently rebuked in attempting to infiltrate Islam. I have demonstrated above that the *ghulāt* were abominated by the Imāms. I should also want to emphasize that, as a result of this, the powerful extremist revolts had the indirect effect of drawing the Imāmīs closer to the Sunnis. It is true that the Imāms' utter repudiation (*barāʾa*) of the first Caliphs (reflected in Mughīra's myth) was retained as Shīʿī doctrine. And yet the Imāms, in rejecting undesirables such as Mughīra, implicitly united with the Sunnis against a common enemy. Thus the Shīʿīs, to prove that they were not so "far out" as the Sunnis accused them of being, could quote the tradition that the Prophet said, "The religion of

[71] al-Tustarī, 9:79; Jewish magical traditions flourished in Mesopotamia, esp. in the sixth to the eighth centuries (see Ira Robinson, "Jacob al-Kirkisani on the Reality of Magic and the Nature of the Miraculous: A Study in Tenth-Century Karaite Rationalism,": in *Truth and Compassion,* ed. H. Joseph, J. N. Lightstone, and M. D. Oppenheim [Waterloo, Ont., 1983], pp. 41–55, p. 43; J. C. Greenfield, "Prolegomenon" to the reprint of Hugo Odeberg's *3 Enoch* [New York, 1973], pp. xi–xlvii; P. J. Alexander, "The Historical Setting of the Hebrew Book of Enoch," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 28 (1977): 156–80, esp. 167–73.

[72] al-Dhahabī (n. 19 above), 4:161: "Mughīra was an agitator (literally, 'lighter of fires') in Kufa, using *tamwīh* (hydromancy) and *shaʿbadha* (jugglery) to such effect that a number of the people responded to him."

[73] al-Ashʿarī (n. 21 above), 1:73; al-Baghdādī (n. 32 above), p. 55.

[74] al-Athīr (n. 15 above), 5:209; al-Dhahabī relates the scene in which Mughīra's inability to raise the dead is revealed: the general Khālid ibn ʿAbd Allāh a-Qasrī confronts Mughīra and demands that he raise a dead companion, which Mughīra is forced to admit he is incapable of doing (4:162).

God lies between the one who goes too far [*ghālī*] and the one who does not go far enough [*muqaṣṣir*]."[75]

Mughīra was rejected by both major parties of Islam. His execution came little more than a decade before the fall of the Umayyads, during the critical tenures of the fifth and sixth Imāms. Other than in small enclaves, his creation of a new Islam was repudiated by all Muslim groups. Perhaps because his rejection comes at a turning point in Islamic history, Mughīra is mirrored in much of the polemic and counterpolemic, myth and revisionary myth, that went along with the dynastic battlings. As the very image of one who rejects "the true religion"— variously defined—Mughīra's fate can be traced throughout the valorizations and revalorizations of rejection.

According to some of the most reliable early sources, Mughīra himself is said to have coined the opprobrious term "rejectors" (*rāfiḍa/rawāfiḍ*).[76] The sources clearly describe how the gulf widened between Jaʿfar and Mughīra between 732 and 737.[77]

By the early 730s, the term "Rāfida" was already being used derogatorily against the ʿAlids. This term, as Kohlberg has brilliantly demonstrated, though indeed originally a *nomen odiosium,* was by the time of Jaʿfar also used by the Shīʿīs as an honorific meaning "those of the Shīʿa who rejected evil."[78] In later centuries, as Kohlberg shows, the Shīʿīs elaborated this revaluated use of the term by writing it into ancient history: the spiritual ancestors of the Shīʿa, in these stories, had always rejected evil. This hierohistory, its older torsions so much like those of the moment, was created to revaluate already loaded terminology, as was commonly being done in many other connections in the eighth century. As Mughīra did in his anthropogony, the Imāms also revalorized and "primordialized" *rafḍ.*

Another dimension of this revaluation and mythicization can be detected in certain reports concerning Mughīra and Jaʿfar. At the time of al-Bāqir's death, "the party of Jaʿfar utterly repudiated the Mughīriyya from the Shīʿa, and the party of Jaʿfar rejected [*rafaḍū*] Mughīra and cursed him: and so Mughīra said that the party of Jaʿfar

[75] Ghālib, ed., 4:249.

[76] M. Mashkur, "An-Nawbakhtī: Les Sectes Shīʿites," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 154 (1958): 67–95, 92–93, n. 8, gives sources. "Rāfida" in Sunni usage was a pejorative epithet referring to the sin of rejecting Abū Bakr and ʿUmar and came to be extended to refer to various Shīʿī groups, particularly the *ghulāt,* the Imāmīs, and the Zaidīs. For an overview of the Sunni use of the term, see W. M. Watt, "The Rāfiḍites: A Preliminary Study," *Oriens* 16 (1963): 110–21.

[77] al-Qummī, p. 77.

[78] E. Kohlberg, "The Term Rāfiḍa in Imāmī Shīʿi Usage," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 99 (1979): 677–79, 678.

were Rejectors [*rāfiḍa*]. He, Mughīra, was the first one to have called them by this name."[79] The Shīʿīs, then, not only inverted the meaning of this charged term in their hierohistory but also, and in yet another sense, ascribed its origin to their archenemy Mughīra.

A use of the term from the time of the schism of Mughīra adds a final twist to its torsions, a third way that the Imāms warded off this calumny. The Imāms deflected this derogation toward the *ghulāt,* thereby, again, implicitly locating themselves closer to the Sunnis. An example of this manipulation can be found in a Shīʿī chronicle. Discussing al-Bāqir's relations to Mughīra, the author details al-Bāqir's fury at Mughīra's deification of him. Al-Bāqir would have killed him, the author says, had he but the authority (*sulṭān*) to do so: "So al-Bāqir cursed Mughīra and his companions and dissociated himself from him and from his doctrine. He wrote to his supporters and to his party and ordered them to repudiate Mughīra's followers and to dissociate themselves from them, taking refuge in God [from them]. Al-Bāqir went to great lengths in cursing them, and he called them the Mughīriyya al-Rāfiḍa because of their [the Mughīriyya's] rejection [*rafḍ*] of him and because of their [the Mughīriyya's] acceptance of what Mughīra said, *and these were the real rāfiḍa* [*rāfiḍa bi-al-ḥaqīqa*]."[80]

The Imāms were at pains to show that the *ghulāt,* and not they, were the real rejectors of true Islam. But the Imāmī demonizing of that rejection was not the only weapon used in the battles of the imaginal that accompanied those of the sword. Islamic self-definition was achieved in part in a war of metaphors, and both major parties at times inflated their opposition with cosmic dimensions.

It should therefore not be surprising to find that, just as Mughīra dared to identify ʿUmar as the Devil, so did ʿUmar's successors, the Sunnis, call Mughīra and his ilk something worse than "Rāfiḍa." The Sunnis, in fact, evolved a mythic response that was more durable, and probably more effective, than straightforward opprobrium. I refer to the conceptual conflation of the *ghulāt* with the image of the ultimate "rejector," the Dajjāl.

The Dajjāl is the Muslim counterpart of the Christian Antichrist and the Jewish Armilos.[81] An "anti-Messiah" who emerges in the eschatological battles (*fitan*) that mark the coming of the *Mahdī,* he resists

[79] al-Qummī, p. 77; and Mashkur, "An-Nawbakhtī," pp. 92–93 and, esp., 99, n. 8, for other sources.

[80] Ghālib, ed., 4:248.

[81] D. Halperin, "The Ibn Ṣayyād Traditions and the Legend of al-Dajjāl," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 96 (1976): 213–25; and A. Morabia, "L'Antéchrist (Ad-Dajjāl) s'est-il manifesté du vivant de l'envoyé d'Allah?" *Journal asiatique* 267 (1979):81–99, 92.

that redeemer and is finally defeated by him. Traditions about the Dajjāl are included in all collections of *hadīth*. These traditions contain elements—his wonder-working, pretense to divinity, and militarism—that reflect to some extent characteristics of movements contemporary with the collector/authors of these traditions.

Images of rebels of the first Islamic centuries do survive in both Imāmī and Sunni collections of *fitan* and *malāhim*, in some cases rather unassimilated. Thus, some chiliastic *hadīth* contain such details as "another ruler whose name is Jahjāh, a man of the *mawālī*, who will usurp the leadership at the end of days."[82] The traditionist Muslim relates many traditions about those in Iraq not paying their taxes, because non-Arabs prompted them not to, as a sign of the last hour.[83] Another standard feature is the aforementioned *hadīth* in *fitan* that the Dajjāl will be followed by seventy thousand Jews of Isfahan, wearing Persian shawls.[84] The temporary supremacy of non-Arabs is emphasized repeatedly in *fitan hadīth* as being characteristic of these last conflicts.[85]

All these concerns represent the fears of the eighth-century ᶜAlid and Sunni *hadīth* traditionists, as Goldziher demonstrated.[86] Those employed in building the then-emerging institutional consensus undoubtedly rejected subversions such as Mughīra's. It may be due, in part, to this reaction that there came to be incorporated in both Sunni and Shīᶜī traditions numerous reflections of the uprisings. Goldziher cites, as an example, a Shīᶜī rebel who said, "The Prophet did not fail to mention one single leader of rebellions, he named 300 chieftains who will appear up to the end of the world."[87] These traditions, and many more like them, associate the last days with the dramatic increase in the number of militant enemies of Islam.

The first place to look for the specific conflation of the imagery of the rebel Mughīra with that of the "anti-Messiah," the Dajjāl, is in the early, curious linkage of the Dajjāl with the name "Abtar." A number of old traditions, beginning with one in the Qurʾān itself, do make this association, and this may indicate that this ancient name already possessed eschatological overtones in earliest Islam. Since the state of source-critical analysis of early Islamic texts does not yet allow precision in terms of chronology, I can only hope to show that Mughīra was

[82] I. Goldziher, *Muslim Studies* (London, 1971), 2:123.

[83] A. H. Siddiqi, trans., *Sahih Muslim* (Lahore, 1975), 4:1508.

[84] Ibid., p. 1525. See the sources collected in my "Species of Misbelief: A History of Muslim Heresiography of the Jews" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1985).

[85] Siddiqi, trans. 4:1507, 1525.

[86] See Goldziher's chap. "The Hadīth in Its Relation to the Conflicts of Parties in Islam," in his *Muslim Studies*, 2:89–126.

[87] Ibid., p. 123.

at some point apparently conflated with the association of Abtar and the Dajjāl.

The shortest *sūra* in the Qurʾān, al-Kauthar ("Abundance," a stream in paradise), comprises an allusion to a heavenly vision with eschatological overtones. In the recent translation of Mahmoud Ayoub it reads in its entirety: "We have surely given you abundance! / Pray, therefore, to your Lord and offer your sacrifice. / Surely he who hates you, he shall be cut off [*hūwa al-abtar*]."[88] I would argue that this *sūra* refers in fact to the confrontations recorded in *ḥadīth* between Muḥammad and ibn Ṣayyād, a Jewish youth whom Muḥammad accused of being the Dajjāl, in which the Prophet attempts to defeat his adversary with questions about hidden things.[89] Ibn Ṣayyād is acknowledged by the Prophet to be correct in describing "the Dust of Paradise" as "white flour, pure musk."[90] Muḥammad had seen this Kauthar on his *miʿrāj*; ibn Ṣayyād had seen his vision also on a heavenly ascent. That Sūrat al-Kauthar refers to these visions of paradise seems certain: that its *Sitz im Leben* is the Muḥammad–ibn Ṣayyād encounter would seem to be confirmed if the last *āya* (verse) refers to ibn Ṣayyād. We know, though, that ibn Ṣayyād denied Muḥammad's accusation that he, ibn Ṣayyād, was the Dajjāl because, like the Dajjāl, he was childless.[91] It would appear, then, that the *al-abtar* as a *hapax legomenon* in the Qurʾān is in fact an epithet indirectly referring to the Dajjāl.

Another eschatological use of "Abtar" is found in ibn Kathīr's *Nihāyāt al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya*, which is rich in chiliastic traditions. "ʿAlī said, concerning the Dajjāl, 'He is Ṣāfī ibn Ṣayyād who will emerge from the Yahūdīya of Isfahan on an ass, Abtar.'"[92] This report would seem to be an early conflation of, if not the *Vorlage* for, on the one hand, the association of Dajjāl with ibn Ṣayyād and, on the other,

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[88] Mahmoud Ayoub, trans., *The Great Tiding, Interpretation of Juz ʿAmmā, the Last Part of the Qurʾān* (Tripoli, 1983), p. 146; for the eschatological context, see "The Pond and Its Intercession," in *Mishkāt al-Maṣābīh* (n. 27 above), 3:1179–95; for some of the *tafāsīr* on the meaning of *al-abtar*, see Ismāʿīl ibn ʿUmar ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al ʿAẓīm* (Cairo, 1347 A.H.), 9:312–18; and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* (Cairo, n.d.), 32:132–35.

[89] See Halperin, pp. 216–17.

[90] "The Pond and Its Intercession," p. 1179.

[91] Halperin, p. 222.

[92] Ismāʿīl ibn ʿUmar ibn Kathīr, *Nihāyāt al-Bidāya wal-Nihāya* (Riyadh, 1968), 1:161; and cf. the encounter with the Dajjāl ibn Ṣayyād in the *Saḥīḥ Muslim*, when he produced a "sound like a braying donkey" (Siddiqi, trans., 4:1515); that the tradition in ibn Kathīr is weakly supported strengthens the case for its sectarian origins; another parallel with Mandean traditions in this *ḥadīth* is the dark and the white mountains (see G. Widengren, "Iran and Israel in Parthian Times with Special Regard to the Ethiopic *Book of Enoch*," in Pearson, ed. [n. 17 above], pp. 85–131, p. 117, n. 4).

the association of Dajjāl with the Jews' quarter of Isfahan.[93] In Shīʿī collections ʿAlī is frequently named as the transmitter of such traditions, as he is of the tradition of the Dajjāl on the ass "Abtar."[94] Likewise, Isfahan may be specified as the location of the event in the Shīʿī sources because, as al-Maqdisī suggests, it was the site of opposition to ʿAlī. An explicitly ʿAlid association of *abtr* and the Dajjāl can be found in a major Twelver Shīʿī history of the Imāms, the *Irshād* of al-Mufīd. Here, there would seem to survive distant if still clear echoes of al-Bāqir's rejection of Mughīra: "Al-Bāqir said, 'When the Qāʾim ("Resurrector") rises, he will go to Kufa and some 10,000 persons called the Batriyya (Butriyya) who will be bearing arms will come out (against him).'"[95]

In addition to these associations of *abtr* with the Dajjāl, numerous other resemblances can be found between the stories about Mughīra and those about the Dajjāl. Thus, the Dajjāl bears letters—*k, f, r,* for Kāfir (or Kufr)—on his forehead, a possible echo, with inverted valence, of Mughīra's lettered Divine Man's figure.[96] Mughīra describes eschatological battles, seventeen resurrected men empowered with the seventeen letters of the Greatest Name of God: Mughīra claimed to be able to revivify the dead, as did the Dajjāl, as a proof of his powers.[97] Mughīra also describes the *Mahdī*'s reappearance exactly as it is described in *ḥadīth*.[98] One of Mughīra's disciples is described as Aʿwar, blind in one eye, as is the Dajjāl.[99] Mughīra frequently is

[93] Abū Nuʿaim, *Dhikr Akhbār Iṣfahān,* ed. S. Dedering (Leiden, 1931), 1:22–23, reports a strange tradition about the Jews of Isfahan joyously greeting the Arab conquerors, who, mysteriously, are led by "ibn Saʿīd."

[94] Morabia (n. 81 above), p. 92; for the Shīʿī texts, see, e.g., ʿAlī ibn Mūsà ibn Tawūs, *Al-Malāḥim wal-Fitan* (Najaf, 1972), p. 174; and Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Qummī ibn Bābūya, *Ikmāl al-Dīn wa-Itmām al-Niʿma* (Tehran, 1959), 2:491.

[95] al-Mufīd (n. 27 above), p. 552; Howard here transliterates "Butrīya" as "Batriyya."

[96] Siddiqi, trans., 4:1515. The writing of the name "Antichrist" on the forehead of the Antichrist is found in Christian apocalypses (see J.-M. Rosentiehl, "Le Portrait de l'Antichrist," in *Pseudépigraphes de l'ancien testament et manuscrits de la mer morte,* ed. M. Philonenko et al. [Paris, 1967], pp. 45–60).

[97] al-Baghdādī (n. 23 above), p. 54; *Mishkāt al-Maṣābīh,* 3:1148–49. Some Christian apocalypses deny that the Antichrist can raise the dead. See, e.g., "The Apocalypse of Elijah," trans. O. S. Wintermute, in Charlesworth, ed. (n. 27 above), 1:721–53, p. 745: "He will do the works which the Christ did, except for raising the dead alone. In this you will know that he is the son of lawlessness, because he is unable to give life." (I would like to thank Bernard McGinn for pointing out this reference.) For an attempt to demonstrate that the Dajjāl stories were "borrowed" from the Christian apocalyptic accounts of the Antichrist, see A. S. Tritton, "Ed-Dajjāl, Antichrist," *Proceedings and Transactions of the Fifth All-India Oriental Conference,* vol. 2 (Lahore, 1930), pp. 1117–27.

[98] al-Baghdādī, p. 54 and n. 5.

[99] On the blindness of the Dajjāl, see Halperin's discussion, esp. p. 222; for Mughīra's follower, see al-Ḥimyarī (n. 33 above), p. 168; on Mughīra as blind, see Tucker, "Rebels and Gnostics" (n. 11 above), p. 33.

accused of being a liar, especially in the Shīᶜite traditions: so is ibn Ṣayyād by Muḥammad, and this also is a feature of the Dajjāl.[100] Like ibn Ṣayyād, Mughīra claims prophetic status, divine visions, and heavenly ascent and is seen doing strange things in isolated places (a palm grove, a graveyard).[101] Finally, it is only a coincidence, but a useful assonance for creative mythologists (for whom phonetic similarity is sufficient for establishing their folk etymologies), that in many traditions both figures possessed the *nasab* ("sonship name") "ibn Saᶜīd."

All this is not to say that Mughīra was alone the model for the Dajjāl. The ibn Ṣayyād stories predate his rebellion. Nor is he the only rebel to provide a prototype for the Endtime antagonists—Abu ᶜIsā al-Isfahānī, ibn Ṣayyād, ibn Jahjāh, the Butriyya, and others do so as well. But the imagery of Mughīra is conflated with that of the Dajjāl/ibn Ṣayyād on so many levels that he must have been imagined as a consciously echoed "twin" of the Dajjāl. The armed rebellion of a wonder-working half-blind liar, a forerunner of the final defeat at the hands of the *Mahdī*, a manical rejector and extremist—all are features shared in the family resemblance between those two enemies of Islam.

Thus, the *ghulāt*, among the most militant factions of eighth-century Gnostic revolutionaries, were subsumed, half-disguised, into that great roman à clef in progress, the eschatological drama of the Dajjāl. As such, the implicit identification of contemporary revolutionaries with Endtime factions has long been ensconced in the assumptions of Muslim theologians. Such assumptions lay behind the perceptions of the prosecutors of al-Ḥallāj, the tenth-century Sufi saint who was executed as a Dajjāl.[102] A millennium later, a modern Shīᶜī historian of religions, writing a biobibliographical notice on Mughīra, begins by saying that he was an "innovator-deceiver" (*dajjāl mubtadiᶜ*).[103] Mughīra has survived as a kind of Dajjāl, then, both implicitly, in myth, and explicitly, in the assumptions of the tradition.

*   *   *

Attempts to gnosticize Islam did not end with the mid-eighth-century defeats of Mughīra and his fellow *ghulāt*. Halm has studied the ramified survivals of Gnostic motifs in later Islamic groups such as the Ismāᶜīlīs and the Nuṣayrīs. The politically dominant traditions of Islam did unequivocally define Islamic gnosis out of their consensus.

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[100] al-Tustarī (n. 4 above), vol. 9, passim; Halperin, p. 218; al-Dhahabī (n. 19 above), 4:161.

[101] Halperin, pp. 219–20; and, e.g., al-Athīr (n. 15 above), 5:209.

[102] Massignon, *The Passion of al-Ḥallāj* (n. 4 above).

[103] al-Qummī (n. 61 above), p. 184.

This self-definition frequently made use of the powers of mythicization, portraying one's own group or one's opposition as acting at the beginning or end of history. However effective this device was, enclaves of Islamic Gnostics do remain a part of ongoing Islamic history. Some Ismāʿīlīs of the upper Oxus still revere the *Umm al-Kitāb* (Mother of the book), a scripture containing markedly Mughīrite teachings.[104]

Ghulāt such as Mughīra are therefore particularly instructive cases to be studied for a better understanding of the conceptual and institutional dialectics through which Islam defined itself. Both in mythicized polemics—the institutionalization of *ghulāt* as the archetypal nemesis of both the Shīʿa and the *sunna*—and in polemical mythos—the projections of the *ghulāt* into the imagery of Satan and the Dajjāl—the successfully dominant definers of Islam projected second-century struggles into the timeless categories of perpetual, inevitable, and ultimate opposition. It is precisely in this negative institutionalization, this mythologizing of the primal enemy, that the case of Mughīra is especially illuminating. Mughīra, in his smuggled Gnostic traditions, himself mythicizes a cosmogonical rebellion, his "prologue in heaven." Muslim traditionists, both Sunni and Shīʿī, seem to have been aware of attempts of Mughīra's, which they projected as an eschatological rebellion, as the "epilogue on earth," an ultimate confrontation of the faithful mythologically homologized with that of Satan and even the Dajjāl himself. Mughīra and the Islamic Gnostics took up a pre-Islamic mythos and attempted to Islamicize it: authoritative Muslim traditions, in effect, invert this failed attempt at Islamicization and mythicize it as the last, worst enemy of Islam itself.

Mughīra's Islamic gnosis was only revered in sectarian enclaves, while he himself came to be submerged in the general loathing reserved for the final rejector of the Divine Will in history. The Finger of Mughīra's demiurge writes the actions of all future humankind on his palm: this act is overcome by superior history, the advancing, self-defining history of Islam. In the last act of its own millennarian myth, the victory of the *Madhī* over the Dajjāl is foreseen and accomplished at once. Mughīra and the Islamic Gnostics of the eighth century, portrayed as extremists and rejectors, Satans and Antichrists, are defeated simultaneously in the timeless conflicts of the *ḥadīth*. That they should lose is foreordained, not subject to alteration, and it is established in perpetuity, in these Shīʿī and Sunni *ḥadīth*. But these traditions

[104] See the important discussion in Halm, *Die islamische Gnosis* (n. 5 above), pp. 113–98.

represent not the will of some demiurge with a body like that of a man but rather that of the God whose Prophet is Muḥammad: "Nor all your Piety nor Wit / Shall lure it back to cancel half a line / Nor all your Tears wash out a Word of it."

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