



The Institute of Ismaili Studies

‘Ayn al-Qudat Al-Hamadani

Prof. Hermann Landolt

‘Ayn al-Qudat Al-Hamadani, Abu ‘l-Ma‘ali ‘Abdallah [or Muhammad] b. Abi Bakr Muhammad b. [Abi ‘l-Hasan] ‘Ali b. al-Hasan b. ‘Ali al-Mayanaji [or al-Miyanaji] was an influential Sufi and important author of original works on mystical theology and spiritual practice in both Arabic and Persian; famous as a Sufi martyr. He was publicly executed (crucified or hanged - more cruel details as depicted in some sources probably belong to the imagination of a later age) by order of the Saljuq Sultan Mahmud b. Muhammad b. Malikshah at Hamadan, on 6-7 Jumada II 525 AH / 6-7 May 1131 CE. Until recently, it has been commonly assumed that he was born in 492/1099, so that he would have reached the age of thirty-three lunar years only. This, however, is inconsistent with a number of other data, as was convincingly shown by ‘A. N. Munzawi, ed., *Namaha-yi ‘Aynulqudat-i Hamadani* III, Tehran 1377 Sh./1998, intro, 25 and passim. As Munzawi also points out, ‘Ayn al-Qudat’s year of birth as given by Ibn al-Fuwati (d. 723/1323), the only historical source to mention it explicitly, is in fact 490/1097, not 492/1099 (*Talkhis majma‘ al-adab fi mu‘jam al-alqab*, ed. M. Jawad, Damascus 1963, IV, 2, 1131). Ibn al-Fuwati also mentions (ibid., 1132) that he himself paid a visit to ‘Ayn al-Qudat’s tomb at Hamadan, which was then a frequently visited sanctuary; it was demolished only in Safawid times.

When he was thirty-three years old, ‘Ayn al-Qudat had been provisionally sent to prison in Baghdad, where he was nevertheless given a chance to write an *Apologia*, the *Shakwa al-gharib* (first ed. with French trans. M. Ben Abdel-Jalil in *Journal Asiatique* (Janv.-Mars 1930), 1-70 and *Journal Asiatique* (Avril-Juin 1930), 193-297; also ed. A. Osseiran [‘Afif ‘Usayran] in *Musannafat-i ‘Ayn al-Qudat-i Hamadani*, Tehran 1341 Sh./1962, nr. 3; trans. A.J. Arberry, *A Sufi Martyr. The Apologia of ‘Ain al-Qudat al-Hamadani*, London 1969). In this work, which is a masterpiece of Arabic literature, he eloquently defends himself against charges of heresy amounting to an assimilation of his teaching on the necessity of the spiritual master to the Isma‘ili doctrine of the “infallible Imam” (*imam ma‘sum*), and of his thoughts on God and existence (*wujud*) to theologically incorrect doctrines of the Philosophers. Such



The Institute of Ismaili Studies

charges, which were of course serious ones given the religio-political climate of the Saljuq state, were apparently built up by the *'ulama'* on the sole basis of 'Ayn al-Qudat's early work on mystical theology, the Arabic *Zubdat al-haqa'iq* (ed. A. Osseiran in *Musannafat*, nr. 1; trans. O. Jah, *The Zubdat Al-Haqa'iq of 'Ayn Al-Qudah Al-Hamadani*, Kuala Lumpur 2000), which he had written at the age of twenty-four. In his defence, in addition to quoting selected passages from the *Zubda* to prove his doctrinal innocence, and referring to the mystical works of the illustrious Muhammad al-Ghazali (d. 505/1111) where similar statements on God as the "source of existence" and the like could indeed be found as well, he also provides a list of no less than eleven writings that he had composed even earlier on various subjects, including theology, Arabic grammar and literature, Indian mathematics, and an incomplete Qur'anic commentary (cf. *Shakwa*, ed. Osseiran, 40-5). Among these eleven, only one, a collection of nearly 1000 Arabic verses titled *Nuzhat al-'ushshaq wa-nuhzat al-mushtaq*, appears to be extant (see 'A. N. Munzawi, ed., *Namaha III*, intro, 28-9). What the list does not include is his unquestionably authentic Persian work on core themes of *Sufism*, known as *Tamhidat* (consisting of ten long chapters each called *tamhid* but confusingly titled *Zubdat al-haqa'iq fi kashf al-khala'iq* [or ... *al-daqa'iq*] at the beginning; ed. A. Osseiran in *Musannafat*, nr. 2; French trans. C. Tortel, *'Ayn al-Quzat Hamadani, Les tentations metaphysiques*, Paris 1992). This highly personal series of mystical and poetic thoughts, which was completed (according to Osseiran's calculation) on or soon after 9 Rajab 521/21 July 1127, differs considerably in style and content from the more systematic Arabic works. Partly inspired by the *Kitab al-tawasin* of Al-Hallaj (exec. 309/922) and its fascination with the figure of *Iblis*, it indeed challenges established religious norms in more than one respect. Also unmentioned in the above list, but referred to in *Tamhidat*, 15, is a large collection of letters written to personal friends and disciples. This invaluable source for 'Ayn al-Qudat's life and thought, which still awaits a thorough study, is now available in three volumes containing 159 letters all in all ('A. N. Munzawi and A. Osseiran, ed., *Namaha-yi 'Aynulqudat-i Hamadani*, vols I and II, Beirut/Tehran 1969 and 1972; vol. III, 'A. N. Munzawi, ed., Tehran 1377 Sh./1998).



A number of additional Persian works have been variously ascribed to ‘Ayn al-Qudat and to others. Among these, the *Risala-yi Yazdan-shinakht* and the *Ghayat al-imkan fi dirayat al-makan* are now generally considered spurious. No such consensus appears to have been reached with regard to the *Risala-yi Lawa’ih* (ed. R. Farmanish, *Ahwal wa athar-i ‘Ayn al-Qudat*, Tehran 1338 Sh./1959, appendix 2), although it too can hardly be regarded as authentic, not least because it contains quotations from later poets such as Sharaf al-Din-i Shufurwa (d. ca. 600/1204) and Awhad al-Din-i Kirmani (d. 635/1237-8; cf. *Lawa’ih*, 30 and 41).

‘Ayn al-Qudat was born at Hamadan into a learned family originating from Miyana in Adharbayjan but settled at Hamadan. Both his grandfather Abu l-Hasan ‘Ali (who also met a violent death, see Sam’ani, *Ansab* s.v. Mayanaji and Yaqut, *Buldan* s.v. Miyana) and his father Abu Bakr Muhammad (who was evidently a Sufi sympathiser; cf. *Tamhidat*, 250-1) had been well-known judges at Hamadan. Hence probably ‘Ayn al-Qudat’s nickname, “Substance of the Judges”, or simply “the Judge”, which he frequently uses to refer to himself, though it is not clear whether or not he too actually exercised this profession. He must have received a broad education in his early youth and turned to Sufism while as yet an adolescent, certainly before 510/1116-7 (cf. *Namaha* II, 205). According to ‘Ali b. Zayd al-Bayhaqi’s *Tatimmat siwan al-hikma* and other sources, one of his teachers was the famous ‘Umar al-Khayyam (d. 517/1123), which seems entirely possible, especially given his early interest in mathematics. However, he himself mentions only his Sufi teachers. In the Arabic *Zubda*, while acknowledging that it was by studying Muhammad al-Ghazali’s works during a period of nearly four years that he had been “delivered from error”, he insists that the decisive Sufi influence on his spiritual development had been al-Ghazali’s younger brother Ahmad (d. 517/1123 or 520/1126), whose presence while on visit at Hamadan had changed his fundamental outlook completely in “less than twenty days” (*Zubda*, 5-7); and an extant corpus of letters addressed by Ahmad al-Ghazali to ‘Ayn al-Qudat (available in N. Pourjavady [Purjawadi], ed., *Mukatibat-i Khwaja Ahmad-i Ghazali ba ‘Ayn al-Qudat-i Hamadani*, Tehran 1356 Sh./1977 and A. Mujahid, ed. *Majmu‘a-yi athar-i farsi-yi Ahmad-i Ghazali*, Tehran 1358 Sh./1979, 461-509) would seem to confirm, if authentic, their ongoing master-disciple relationship. In any case, he also associated with other Sufis, before and after the memorable meeting with Ahmad al-Ghazali. He occasionally



The Institute of Ismaili Studies

mentions Muhammad b. Hamuya al-Juwayni (d. 530/1135-6), more frequently a certain Shaykh Barakat, whom he served for many years, admiring him as an illiterate saint whose knowledge of the Qur'an was in his view much deeper than that of the learned scholars (cf. e.g. *Namaha* II, 51 and N. Pourjavady, *'Ayn al-Qudat wa ustadan-i u*, Tehran 1374 Sh./1995, 95-133). Interestingly, he also mentions that he consulted a Jewish pir on the interpretation of a visionary experience (*Tamhidat*, 322-3) and occasionally cites a passage from the Gospel as a piece of spiritual advice (*Namaha* II, 169, with full citation of Matth. VI, 3-4 in Arabic, but substituting “He who” for “thy Father”).

'Ayn al-Qudat's early admirer, the 6th/12th century historian 'Imad al-Din al-Isbahani, who regards him as a “second Ghazali” and suggests that his celebrity among the people aroused the jealousy of the “pseudo-*'ulama*”, nevertheless attributes the real responsibility for his imprisonment and execution exclusively to the machinations of the wazir Qiwam al-Din al-Dargazini, a well-known pro-Nizari player in Saljuq power politics (executed in 527/1132-3, perhaps a secret convert to Isma'ilism, see F. Daftary, *The Isma'ilis. Their history and doctrines*, Cambridge 1990, 363-4), who at that time had managed to outrival 'Ayn al-Qudat's friend and disciple, the *mustawfi* Abu Nasr 'Aziz al-Din (who was also 'Imad al-Din's own uncle; see *Kharidat al-qasr wa-jaridat al-'asr*, ed. 'A. M. Al Tu'ma, Tehran 1378 Sh./1999, III,137-9). 'Ayn al-Qudat is also said to have had close ties with the atabeg Anushtagin Shirgir, a fighter for the Sunni ('Abbasid) cause known for his unsuccessful attempts to reduce Nizari strongholds, who was also executed at or about the same time upon the instigation of Dargazini (L. Massignon, *The passion of al-Hallaj* II, Princeton 1982, 167). Some caution is, however, indicated against reports tending to make Dargazini the arch-villain. The same wazir was also capable of entertaining friendly relations with Sufis, notably the great poet Sana'i (d. 525/1131; see J.T.P. De Bruijn, *Of piety and poetry*, Leiden 1983, 69ff.); and the latter, it should be noted, is frequently quoted by 'Ayn al-Qudat in his own works. Nor is it certain that 'Ayn al-Qudat himself shared the anti-Nizari preoccupations of some of his friends in the Saljuq administration. In fact, he himself explains his position vis-à-vis the doctrine of the *ahl-i ta'lim* (Nizari Isma'ilis) in a long letter presumably written to 'Aziz al-Din (*Namaha* II, 113-26). While he clearly rejects the notion of “infallibility” of the Imam (or of



The Institute of Ismaili Studies

any religious leader for that matter, including Prophets and Sufi Shaykhs), suggesting that what counts in a true master is the experience of the Path leading to God, he also signals his dissatisfaction with the “inadequate” (*muqassir*) way Ghazali had dealt with the question and even quotes seven verses (with variations) from a famous poem of the Isma‘ili poet Nasir Khusraw (d. 465/1072-3 or later), of course without naming him; cf. Nasir-i Khusraw, *Diwan*, ed. N. Taqawi et al., Tehran, 1348 Sh./1969, 439-41.

The suspicion of the ‘*ulama*’ that ‘Ayn al-Qudat’s teaching concerning the necessity of a spiritual instructor was “in line with the doctrine of the Ismailis” (*Shakwa*, trans. Arberry, 34), can certainly not be justified on the basis of his Arabic works. It becomes, however, more understandable as soon as certain passages in his Persian writings are being considered. There is a marked difference, for example, in what he has to say on “sainthood” (*walaya*), or the quality and status of a spiritual master, in the two types of writing. According to the Arabic *Zubda* (30-1), *walaya* is above reason (*al-tawr alladhi wara’ al-‘aql*) but below prophethood - which is, in fact, the Ghazalian point of view (see H. Lazarus-Yafeh, *Studies in Al-Ghazzali*, Jerusalem 1975, 297-307); but in *Tamhidat* (42-7) it is clearly placed above even prophethood. Similarly, ‘Ayn al-Qudat seems to have considerably modified his position with regard to Avicennian philosophy within the seven years that passed between the writing of the Arabic *Zubda* and the completion of the *Tamhidat*. While he shows himself critical of emanatistic philosophy in the earlier work, and defends the idea of God’s knowledge of the particulars (though not necessarily in the sense of an ordinary *kalam*-doctrine), he has nothing but praise for Ibn Sina’s teachings on the life after death in the *Tamhidat* (see Arberry, trans., *Shakwa*, intro, 15). Moreover, he refers to the famous (if spurious) correspondence between Ibn Sina and the great Sufi Abu Sa‘id b. Abil Khayr (d. 440/1049), citing an obscure passage on the virtue of “true unbelief” (*al-kufr al-haqiqi*), and presents their relationship in such a way that it is the Philosopher rather than the Sufi who comes out as the true master (*Tamhidat*, 349-50) - a point which certainly indicates a clear distance not only from the “orthodox” establishment, but from normative Sufism as well. No wonder, then, that the *Tamhidat* ends on the suggestion of a dream in which the Prophet himself tells the author to stop writing at this point (*Tamhidat*, 353-4) - a topos of self-censure that recurs later with



The Institute of Ismaili Studies

another spiritual master of questionable orthodoxy, ‘Aziz-i Nasafi (7th/13th century; cf. H. Landolt, Nasafi, ‘Aziz b. Mohammad, in *EncyclopaediaIranica*, online).

Bibliography (additional):

F. Meier, Stambuler Handschriften dreier persischer Mystiker: ‘Ain al-Qudat al-Hamadani, Nagm ad-din al-Kubra, Nagm ad-din ad-Daja, *Der Islam* 24 (1937), pp. 1-42.

T. Izutsu, Mysticism and the linguistic problem of equivocation in the thought of ‘Ayn al-Qudat Hamadani, *Studia Islamica* 31 (1970), pp. 153-70 [repr. Ashland, Oregon, 1994].

Idem, Creation and the timeless order of things: A study in the mystical philosophy of ‘Ayn al-Qudat, *The Philosophical Forum* 4 (1972), pp. 124-40 [repr. Ashland, Oregon, 1994].

H. Landolt, Two types of mystical thought in Muslim Iran. An Essay on Suhrawardi *Shaykh al-ishraq* and ‘Aynulqizat-i Hamadani, *Muslim World* 68 (1978), pp. 187-204 and 70 (1980), pp. 83-84.

G. Böwering, ‘Ayn-al-Qozat Hamadani, in *EncyclopaediaIranica* 1 (1983), pp. 140-143.

P.J. Awn, *Satan’s tragedy and redemption. Iblis in Sufi psychology*, Leiden 1983; C. W. Ernst, *Words of ecstasy in Sufism*, Albany 1985.

H. Landolt, *Ghazali and “Religionswissenschaft”*. Some notes on the *Mishkat al-anwar*, AS 45 (1991), pp. 19-72.

L. Lewisohn, In quest of annihilation. Imaginalization and mystical death in the *Tamhidat* of ‘Ayn al-Qudat Hamadani, in L. Lewisohn, ed., *Classical Persian Sufism. From its origins to Rumi*, London 1993, pp.285-336.

F. Jahanbakhsh, The Pir-Murid relationship in the thought of ‘Ayn al-Qudat Hamadani, in S. J. Ashtiyani et al, ed., *Consciousness and reality. Studies in memory of Toshihiko Izutsu*, Tokyo 1998, pp.129-47.

H. Dabashi, *Truth and narrative. The untimely thoughts of ‘Ayn al-Qudat al-Hamadani*, Richmond 1999.



The Institute of Ismaili Studies

This is an edited version of an article that was originally published in *[The Encyclopaedia of Islam](#)* (Third Edition), 2009, Brill Online, ed. Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas and Everett Rowson. (E.J. Brill).