

A TREATISE ON THE IMAMATE
DEDICATED TO SULTAN BAYBARS I

Wilferd Madelung

The University of Oxford

MS Or 579 of the Bodleian Library contains an otherwise unknown short treatise (*risāla*) on the imamate. The title page of the manuscript is missing, but the title is mentioned in the text as *Misbāḥ al-hidāya fī tariq al-imāma*¹. The author, apparently a member of the religious class with strong Ṣūfī leanings, is not named. The ruler for whose service (*li-hidma*) the treatise was composed is addressed with a long series of flowery epithets and titles. Decisive for his identification as the Baḥrī Mamlūk sultan Baybars aṣ-Ṣāliḥī (658-676/1260-1277) are the titles Rukn al-Islām wa-l-Muslimīn ... as-Sulṭān al-Malik az-Zāhir. Baybars was the only Sulṭān al-Malik az-Zāhir who bore the title Rukn ad-Dīn. The several sultans of the later Burġī Mamlūk dynasty also named al-Malik az-Zāhir, beginning with Barqūq, combined this royal name with the title Sayf ad-Dīn.

The Ṣūfī outlook of the author raises an intriguing question. Might he be identical with the sinister Ṣūfī guide and soothsayer of Baybars, Ṣayḥ Ḥaḍīr b. Abī Bakr b. Mūsā al-ʿAdawī al-Mihrānī, whose career and relationship with the sultan have recently attracted some attention²? There is apparently nothing in the *Risāla* which would speak

¹ My thanks are due to Professor T. Nagel for having drawn my attention to al-Ġuwaynī's *K. Giyāṭ al-umam* with the suggestion that the *Risāla* might be largely based on it. This is, however, not the case. Comparison of the two works has revealed no evidence that the author of the *Risāla* was acquainted with al-Ġuwaynī's book.

² See L. Pouzet, "Ḥaḍīr ibn Abī Bakr al-Mihrānī", *BEO* XXX (1978), pp. 173-183; P. M. Holt, "An Early Source on Shaykh Ḥaḍīr al-Mihrānī", *BSOAS* XLVI (1983), pp. 33-39; P. Thorau, *Sultan Baibars I von Ägypten*, Wiesbaden 1987, pp. 267-273. Ṣayḥ Ḥaḍīr's close relationship with Baybars probably began only in 661/1263, although the later sources speak of a meeting between them even before Baybars' accession to the sultanate

against this possibility. The biographical reports about the sheikh, however, are silent about the *Risāla* and any other treatises and books by him. His *kutub* which, according to them, were obeyed throughout the Mamlūk territories³, were obviously letters of instruction sent to local governors and officials. If he should be the author, it deserves to be noted that he was expressly described “a Muslim of sound belief (*ṣaḥīḥ al-‘aqīda*)” in spite of his satanic states⁴. There were, however, other Ṣūfīs besides Ṣayḥ Ḥaḍīr in the entourage of Sultan Baybars, though not much is known about them beyond the names of a few of them⁵. The question thus must remain open.

The special interest of the *Risāla* lies in the date of its composition during the early phase of the Mamlūk sultanate. Although formally only the fourth Mamlūk sultan, Baybars may well be considered the true founder of the Mamlūk regime. It was also he who in Raḡab 659/June 1261, less than a year after his accession, restored the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate, after its overthrow in Baghdad by the Mongols, in the Mamlūk capital Cairo and had the newly-established caliph, al-Mustanṣir, formally confirm his sultanate. When al-Mustanṣir was killed in battle with the Mongols in Muḥarram 660/November 1261, Baybars, after some hesita-

(Holt, pp. 35-36). He gained great influence on Baybars which he abused for his personal benefit. In 671/1273 his conduct was officially investigated and he was permanently imprisoned. Even in prison, however, the sultan looked after him with special favours. He died in 676/1277 shortly before Baybars.

³ Ibn ad-Dawādārī, *Kanz ad-durar*, VIII, ed. U. Haarmann, Cairo 1391/1971, p. 222.

⁴ Ibn Ṣākīr al-Kutubī, *Fawāt*, ed. Iḥsān ‘Abbās, Beirut 1973, I 405. If Ṣayḥ Ḥaḍīr was the author, the loss of the title page which presumably contained the author's name may well have been intentional. The condition of the manuscript is otherwise good.

⁵ Ibn ‘Abdazzāhir mentions that many pious sheikhs accompanied Baybars during his campaigns in 663 and 664/1265-66 and names, besides Ṣayḥ Ḥaḍīr, Ṣayḥ ‘Alī Maḡnūn, Ṣayḥ Ilyās, Ṣayḥ ‘Alī al-Bakkā, and Ṣayḥ Nabḥān. Baybars bestowed gifts and endowments on the former two after the conquest of ‘Arsūf in 663/1265 and that of Ṣafad in 664/1266 (Ibn ‘Abdazzāhir, *al-Rawḍ az-zāhir fī sirat al-Malik az-Zāhir*, ed. ‘A. Huwayṭīr, al-Riyād 1396/1976, pp. 238, 263; on ‘Alī Maḡnūn see also pp. 241-242). He made a gift of money to ‘Alī al-Bakkā after the conquest of ‘Arsūf and visited him not much later in al-Ḥalīl (pp. 238, 250). Ṣayḥ Nabḥān was killed in battle in 664/1265 (p. 260).

tion, installed another 'Abbāsīd, al-Ḥākīm, as caliph in Muḥarram 661/November 1262⁶. The *Risāla* may thus be expected to throw light on the significance of these events in the political thought of this sultan and the Egyptian 'ulamā' backing him.

In the introduction, the author of the *Risāla* sets forth a theological basis for the need for the imamate. The ultimate purpose of creation, he argues, is for God to become known and then to be worshipped. There is indeed a consensus among the Muslims that all obligations of the religious law depend on the knowledge of God. While the Aš'arites, however, derive the obligation to know God from the revealed law (*šar'*), the Mu'tazila derive it from reason, since this knowledge, according to them, affords the warding-off of the presumed harm inherent in the fear of punishment in the hereafter. The path to this knowledge is through self-purification (*taṣfiya*) among the Ṣūfīs and through rational investigation (*nazar*) and deduction (*istidlāl*) among the Aš'arites and the Mu'tazila. Knowledge and worship are possible only through the revealed law and the rational mind which require a substrate capable of accepting and combining them. This substrate is man.

The ranks of mankind differ, however, and not all men are able to acquire this happiness and to obtain this nobility independently without the mediation of a most saintly presence (*ḥaḍrat al-aqdas*). Divine wisdom thus necessitated the mission of prophets and the revelation of scripture, so that each prophet would in his time summon the people to the knowledge of God and call to his worship in accordance with the pronouncements of the scripture. After the demise of the prophets, there remains a pressing need for someone to replace them in taking charge of the maintenance of civilization (*ta'mīr*) of the countries and the adjustment of the religious and worldly affairs of men so that their livelihood is assured and their hearts find the leisure (*farāġa*) for rational investigation and deduction leading to knowledge and worship of the Creator. For as long as man does not find some leisure from his worldly

⁶ About the circumstances see P. M. Holt, "Some Observations on the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate of Cairo", *BSOAS* XLVII (1984), pp. 500-503.

occupations, he is not free to acquire this knowledge and its concomitants. This leisure, however, is provided only through someone capable of warding off evils (*dafʿ al-mafāsīd*) and of attracting benefits and advantages (*ǧalb al-manāfiʿ wa-l-maṣāliḥ*) by ordering what is proper and prohibiting what is reprehensible. That person is none other than the imam who is devoted to religion (*al-imām al-mutaḍayyin*) and the sultan who lays down the laws (*as-sultān al-mutaṣarriʿ*).

Although the author mentions here imam and sultan side by side, it becomes quickly clear that he means one and the same person. It is thus obligatory (*waǧāba*), he continues, to set up a forceful imam and powerful sultan (*imām dī šawka wa-sultān dī quwwa*) in every age and in every country so that civilization is maintained and leisure is obtained for the service of the Lord of Lords, that civil unrest should subside (*taskīn al-fitna*) and that usurpers and oppressors be warded off. With these primary tasks, forcefulness and power indeed seem to be the most important attributes of the imam. The establishment of an imam is a communal obligation (*fard kifāya*) unless there is only a single person suitable for the imamate, when it becomes a personal obligation (*fard ʿayn*). The imamate is legally contracted (*tanʿaqid*) only through appointment by the previous imam or the consensus of the people of binding and loosening (*ahl al-ʿaqd wa-l-ḥall*). It cannot be legally contracted to two persons at a single time and in a single place.

The further conditions (*šarāʿit*) of the imamate, enumerated by the author in the first chapter (*maqāla*), seem at first conventional enough. The imam must be male, because it is his duty (*fard*) to rectify religion and worldly affairs, for which ample reason and perfect faith are indispensable. Since women are deficient (*nawāqis*) in both faith and reason, religion and worldly affairs could not be properly ordered under their reign. The imam must be of sound mind and must have reached maturity, since an insane man and a minor are absolutely incompetent to hold office in view of their inability to judge affairs and to manage public interests. The imam must be a free man, since a slave is occupied with the service of his master which is a personal obligation (*fard ʿayn*). He must possess probity (*ʿadl*) since the morally depraved (*fāsiq*) does not

mind committing injustice and thus corruption will not be warded off. He must have knowledge of the rule of the religious law and be competent to carry out his responsibilities with regard to the affairs of the subjects and in providing fairness to the wronged against the wrongdoer.

Here, however, the author begins to deviate from the traditional positions. It is not a condition, he continues, that the imam be of Qurayš in the view of some legal scholars (*fuqahā*). Evidently himself backing this view, he does not mention that the requirement of the imam being of Qurayš had been a matter of consensus among Sunnite scholars until the recent overthrow of the 'Abbāsīd caliphate in Baghdad⁷ and that the only deviants had been the Hārīgites and a few aberrant Mu'tazilites. The traditional view is then quickly further discredited by associating it with Šī'ite doctrine. The imam need neither be of the Banū Hāšim nor of the descendants of 'Alī, nor is it a condition that he be impeccable, contrary to the opinion of the Šī'a. There are thus evidently no impediments to the Qipčaq Turk Baybars being the legitimate successor of the Prophet as supreme imam of the Muslims. That this is indeed the implicit intent of the author's deviation from Sunnite tradition is corroborated by the concluding point of the chapter. If these conditions, he continues, are missing and a forceful Muslim assumes the imamate and the people follow him, his imamate is effective (*naḥadāt*) out of necessity, even if he is incompetent to derive legal norms (*ġayr muġtabid*) and is morally depraved. For in our age a *muġtabid* is missing and probity (*'adāla*) is hard to find.

⁷ This consensus was not broken by al-Ġuwaynī in his *K. Ġiyāṭ al-umam*, where he insists that descent from the Qurayš is a condition of the valid caliphate. He merely discusses, in quite theoretical terms, the possibility that a qualified Qurayšite candidate might not be available. In this case the choice of a qualified non-Qurayšite would be valid, who, however, should be replaced as soon as a qualified Qurayšite would appear. The interpretation of the *Ġiyāṭ al-umam* by Wael B. Hallaq that al-Ġuwaynī wanted to encourage Niẓām al-Mulk to overthrow the 'Abbāsīd caliphate and to establish a Salġūq or himself as the legitimate imam ("Caliph, jurists and the Salġūqs in the Political Thought of Juwaynī", *MW* LXXIV (1984), pp. 26-41) goes far beyond what may be reasonably inferred from al-Ġuwaynī's discussions.

The second chapter, on the reality (*ḥaqīqa*) of the imamate, contains more sermonizing admonishment than legal exposition and reflects the author's Ṣūfī propensities. At the same time he continues to stress, however, the need for compelling power of the imam in religion and worldly matters. He defines the imamate as a guardianship (*ḥarāsa*) of religion together with governance of the soul (*siyāsat an-nafs*) and management of the affairs of the people on the basis of right. There are two kinds of imams, one an imam in religion only and the other an imam in both religion and worldly matters. The first takes the key of the *ṣarī'a* with the hand of the Ṣūfī order (*bi-yad at-tarīqa*), opens the gate of the treasures of the hidden, and perceives the stored secrets and concealed attributes in the worlds of humanity, of the heavenly spheres, and of vegetation. He witnesses with the light of faith the secret of the saying: Whoever knows himself knows his Lord. He sits on the throne of the sultanate occupied with worship of the Lord and is the image of kindness (*ṣūrat al-luṭf*). He is called the saint who guides to the straight path (*al-walī al-muršid ilā tarīq ar-rušd*). The second kind is he through whom, in addition to the perfection of this Ṣūfī saint, the sultanate over the surface of the earth and the power of guardianship over those on it is obtained through repulsion of the causes of perdition and corruption and through attraction of the causes of public welfare and benefit suitable for religion and worldly life. This is the highest aim and the ultimate purpose in respect to the imamate.

The guardianship in religion is possible only through someone who is able to preserve religion by carrying through the coercive summons (*da'wa qahriyya*) to the religion of our prophet Muḥammad and by pressing for compliance with it without any neglect, by governing the people, which consists in preserving them from whatever causes their perdition and cuts off their off-spring, by fending off the enemy through *ḡihād* and fighting him and cutting of his hands and feet, and through repelling him from the property of the Muslims, their persons, and their women (*ḥaram*), by bringing prosperity to the lands through care for their public welfare, by improving their roads, by appropriating the moneys in his charge without injustice in taking and spending them, by

redressing grievances and carrying out legal judgments, meting out equal treatment to all parties in them, and applying fairness in settling them, and by executing the Qur'anic punishments (*hudūd*) against those deserving them without either excess or deficiency. All of these tasks, the author adds, can be carried out only by someone who has the power to do so.

The purpose of the imamate is to bring about the soundness of religion and of the world, that is the integral ordering of the affairs of both of them, which entails the salvation and rescue from punishment in the other world as well as the escape from temptation (*fitna*) in this world, because the soundness of religion diverts the souls from their lusts and inclines the hearts from their desires, so that it comes to conquer the secret longings and to restrain the inner urges and becomes a guardian over the souls in their state of solitude. Likewise the soundness of the affairs of the world rectifies the hidden motives of its people, so that their trustworthiness becomes ample and their devotion to religion apparent, while their corruption corrupts the hidden motives of its people because of the lack of trustworthiness and the weakness of their devotion to religion.

The causes of the soundness of the world are religion which is followed, a sultan able to coerce (*sulṭān qāhir*), comprehensive justice, universal security, ample prosperity, and wide hope. If the sultan is able to coerce, discordant aspirations are stymied through dread of him, divided hearts become united through awe of him, transgressing hands are withdrawn before his conquering power, refractory souls are curbed through fear of him, and those who would isolate themselves from him in rebellion and corruption are restrained. Thus the affairs of religion and the world become orderly organized, and from this results the execution of legal judgments, the infliction of the Qur'anic punishments, the protection of the border towns, the mobilization of armies, the curbing of transgressors like thieves and highway robbers, and the performance of Friday Prayers and feasts. If it were not for a just imam with coercive power, none of these matters which effect the order of the world would be accomplished.

The author then quotes Qur'an XVI 90: "Verily God commands justice and kindness, and giving to kindred, and forbids indecency and disreputable conduct and greed; He admonishes you, perhaps you will be reminded." He explains that each of the three matters commanded or forbidden in this verse apply to man in three different respects, in relation to himself, in relation to his subjects (*ra'iyya*) or family, and in relation to God. Then he interprets the significance of these aspects for the conduct of the imam at considerable length in a fanciful manner with a strong element of Şūfī concepts and terminology. In spite of the predominantly moralizing nature of his discussions, he also keeps stressing the practical aspects. Following the Aristotelian tradition, he maintains that it is impossible to suppress the traits of passion (*hawā*) and anger (*ḡadab*), as some people erroneously advocate, since they are indispensable for the survival of the soul. Passion is the power through which the soul attains benefits and anger is the power through which it repels harm. The desirable purification of the soul is rather brought about by a moderate balance of the forces between excess and deficiency.

Know, he says, that worship of the sultan does not consist in his occupying himself with supererogatory⁸ prayers and fasting and seclusion in solitude, while the interests of the subjects and the people with needs are disregarded, while the subjects are left in the hands of oppressors, and the defense of the border towns is neglected. Rather his worship consists, after performance of the obligatory religious duties (*ba'd adā' al-farā'id*) in occupying himself with the interests of the subjects and their condition, and in endeavouring to preserve and benefit the kingdom, in taking care of the trusts of the Muslims and their rights, in order that this may be a step on the path of the truth and may raise him to a rank and high level towards the presence of the Lordship and to the degree of attaining paradise, and that it may be a means to the vision of God the Exalted and a cause of salvation from the wrath of the Lord and His punishment in hellfire, and a sample of the inter-

⁸ Reading *nāfila* for *nāfida*.

cession of the most excellent of creation, Muḥammad al-Muṣṭafā, in the abode of permanence with the Almighty King.

The conclusion (*ḥātima*) contains a brief discussion of the vizierate, the office of *qāḍī*, and the rôle of the 'ulamā' and Ṣūfī sheikhs. Just as the sultanate follows prophethood, the vizierate is a necessary complement of the sultanate. The sultan must inevitably have a decent vizier, of sound opinion, concerned, competent, shrewd, learned, active, and just, so that when the sultan forgets something, the vizier will remind him, and when he reminds him, the sultan will take heed of his word. The prominence given to the position of the vizier reflects its traditional importance not yet affected by the great decline of its significance in the course of the Mamlūk age.

Equally indispensable for the kingdom is the *qāḍī*, because lack of a *qāḍī* is a cause of temptation (*fitna*) and injustice. Thus there must be in every town and district a *qāḍī* in order to bring about safety in the most perfect manner and highest condition. The *qāḍī* must be qualified for the judgeship, for rendering legal opinions, and must have the rank of independant derivation of legal norms (*iğtibād*). He must have a perfectly sound mind, a pure soul, a heart enlightened by the light of faith, a high spirit, and a sane conscience. He must not covet the rule, be partial in his judgment, or give the powerful precedence over others. Unsited is the *qāḍī* who either lacks the knowledge required for the judgeship or who has it but fails to judge in accordance with it and rather judges according to his inclination, is partial, accepts bribery, disposes arbitrarily over the property of orphans, endowments, and mosques, fails to promote the people of religion, neglects the proper supervision of the markets (*iḥtisāb*), and gives preference to the powerful. His judgments are not valid and the sultan must prevent him from judging.

Knowledge (*ilm*) is the most noble means to the recognition of God and nearness to Him. It is the attribute of truth, and through it the highest grade and the greatest rank are attained if fear and reverence are associated with it. There are two kinds of knowledge, the first the useful knowledge which the Companions took from the words and acts of the

Prophet and which was studied, taught, and acted upon by the imams after them. This is the knowledge of the Book, the *sunna*, the exegesis of the Qur'an, traditions, law (*fiqh*), and related matters. The second is knowledge of the esoteric (*bāṭin*), that is recognition of the (Ṣūfī) states. This consists of knowledge of the meaning (*ma'ānī*) which is attained by the pure ones without mediation from the Ultimate Mystery (*ḡayb al-ḡuyūb*). It is of many kinds, faith, submission (*islām*), kindness, asceticism, piety, fear of God, sincerity, knowledge of the attributes and the diseases of the soul, of the heart and its phases, of self-purification and purgation, of the acquisition of praiseworthy traits, of confession of the unity of God and its stages, of the names, the attributes and the acts (of God), etc.

There are three classes of scholars, those who know the exoteric sciences, those who know the esoteric sciences, and those who know both. This last class is rare, and if there are only five or three of them in any age on the whole earth, the world will be filled with their blessings and righteousness, and they will be the poles of the age. They are the ones about whom the Prophet said with pride: "The 'ulamā' of my community are like the prophets of the Banū Isrā'īl". Among the 'ulamā' of the exoteric knowledge there are the true *muftīs* who know with their tongue and their heart and act in accordance with this knowledge. Their aim in acquiring knowledge is salvation, not the vanities of the world, closeness to the sultan, and acceptance by the common people. Their token is modesty, knowledge of the law (*fiqh*) and *hadīṭ*, and they are the select (*ḥawāṣṣ*) among the servants of God. There are others who know with their tongue and are ignorant in their heart, who have neither ear nor reverence. Their aim in acquiring knowledge is only gain of money, position, and acceptance among the common people. Their token is investigation, controversy, learning, harming people, lack of fairness, dressing up of falsehood as truth. They are the scholars of evil and should be shunned.

Among the 'ulamā' of the exoteric sciences are also the preacher (*wa'āz*) and the mercenary eulogist (*fassāl*), who memorize some words from the tongue of the scholars which they use in speaking on the

pulpits. The preachers are also of two kinds. The aim of the first kind is mere self-aggrandizement among the common people and grabbing money and a good fortune under the pulpits. They, too, belong to the evil '*ulamā*'. The aim of the other kind is to seek the benefit of the people and to summon them to the straight path, to prevent them from going astray, and to identify the road of right guidance. They belong to the '*ulamā*' of the religion, and it is obligatory to follow them and to accept their word.

As for those who have the esoteric knowledge, they are the sheikhs of the Šūfī orders. Their token is withdrawal from the world, seclusion, and separation from the creation, practice of self-control and self-observation, rise to fighting the soul and the devil, and submission to the order of God and His Messenger. They are the freedmen of God and the select of the select. The author does not mention a negative counterpart to this group. His clear preference for the Šūfī sheikhs over the conventional '*ulamā*' reflects the progressive rise of the Šūfī orders in public esteem, shared by Sultan Baybars, as much as it reflects the author's own inclination⁹.

The imam, heir of the political authority of the Prophet Muḥammad, is fully identified in the *Risāla* with the ruling Mamlūk sultan. The author uses in fact more often the term *sultān* to refer to him than the traditional term imam. The sultan's reign does not need to be legitimized by a caliph of Qurayšite descent. It is legitimate because the sultan is the holder of the coercive power, the most basic requisite of the imam. He is admonished to rule his subjects justly and to protect them against external and internal transgressors. But even if the sultan were lacking in justice and proper qualifications in the religious law, his reign would be legitimate under the rule of overriding necessity (*darūra*).

⁹ See D. P. Little, "Religion under the Mamluks", *MW* LXXIII (1983), pp. 176-177. U. Haarman has kindly reminded me that regular patronage of Šūfī sheikhs and convents began only under Baybars II (784-809/1309-1399). See *Geschichte der arabischen Welt*, ed. U. Haarman, Munich 1987, pp. 244-245.

The *Risāla* goes in this respect a step further than the Šāfi'ite jurist Badr ad-Dīn Ibn Ġamā'a did writing about half a century later. Like the author of the *Risāla*, Ibn Ġamā'a transferred all the traditional functions and powers of the caliph to the sultan, yet he retained the notion of a Qurayšite representative head of the Muslim community who would legitimize the sultan's reign. This Qurayšite imam obviously was, in his view, the 'Abbāsīd shadow caliph first established by Baybars. For the author of the *Risāla*, such a Qurayšite imam was superfluous.

It is uncertain in what phase of Baybars' sultanate the *Risāla* was written, in the absence of a caliph or during the caliphate of either al-Mustanşir or al-Ĥākīm. If the Šayḥ Ḥadīr was its author, it was most likely composed after the establishment of al-Ĥākīm as caliph¹⁰. The date of its composition, however, is not very important in regard to its political significance. As P. M. Holt has pointed out, Baybars' reign was still insecure when he set up al-Mustanşir, and one of his purposes was certainly to gain legitimation of his rule vis-à-vis his rivals. In the case of al-Ĥākīm, this was no longer needed, and Baybars, having hesitated for a time to recognize him, kept him narrowly confined from the beginning. al-Ĥākīm was to play a certain political role in Baybars' alliance with Berke, the ruler of the Golden Horde newly converted to Islam¹¹. Baybars' restoration of the 'Abbāsīd caliphate thus was essentially an act of defiance towards the pagan Mongols and a means of strengthening his prestige among Muslims abroad. Internally, it was no political or legal necessity. Public opinion in Egypt, represented by the *ulamā'* and Šūfī sheikhs, recognized him, once he was firmly in power, as the legitimate imam without regard to his confirmation by a Qurayšite caliph who was merely his own creature.

¹⁰ It is, in any case, unlikely that the *Risāla* was written before the establishment of the caliph al-Mustanşir since Baybars is named in it with the title al-Sulṭān al-Malik az-Zāhir. Baybars formally adopted the title of Sulṭān only after al-Mustanşir conferred it upon him. See M. L. Bates, "The Coinage of the Mamluk Sultan Baybars I, Additions and Corrections", *ANSMN* XXII (1977), pp. 164-166.

¹¹ Holt, "Some Observations", pp. 501-503.