

CRYPTO -MANICHEISM IN THE 'ABBASID EMPIRE

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In 1908 in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, E.H. Whinfield quoted a version (from the *ManÇiq al-ñair*) of one of the many statements attributed to ʿĀllakj before his execution in Baghdad in 857/922 and asked if anyone could explain the meaning of the “seven-headed dragon” (seven-headed because stretching across seven constellations). In 1910 Whinfield printed in the journal the result of suggestions he received and his own research. He thought that the dragon was not the Babylonian Tiamat, but the Iranian Azhi Dahhaka. In keeping with the times, the suggestions centered around Biblical and Hebraic allusions; without the benefit of research that has since taken place in Manicheism, he sensed a profound secret hidden in the words but missed the greatest clues: the drinking of a cup offered by the Host, and the real meaning of Tammēz, not only as a lamented god, but a god *who returns to life after his death*. Looking at a somewhat fuller quotation than that accessible at the time to Whinfield we find:

The account of Abē ʿl-ʿĀsan al-ʿĀlw«nâ who says:

I was present that day which was the downfall of al-ʿĀllakj, when he was brought bound in chains. And he walked happily under the chains, and he laughed, and I said to him: “Master, whence comes this state? - This is the coquetry of the Beauty, which draws its elect to meet it”, and then he said:

My drinking companion is beyond all suspicion, As to his intention to betray me:

He invites, and greets me, as the host does to his guest;

But as soon the cup will go around, he calls for the mat and headsman....

This is destiny of he who drinks the wine in summer with the dragon.¹

Massignon says Karaus emphasised the line: “He gives me to drink the cup from which he [the host] drank himself”. Or, in the translation of Eric Shroeder:

A crowd beyond counting was assembled. I was there (says Abē Hasan of ʿĀlw«n) the day they executed ʿĀllakj. They brought him

from his cell bound and chained; but he was laughing. Master, said I, why are you like this? He answered only with a verse:

*My Host, with His own ruthless courtesy,
Passed me His Cup, and bade me drink. I drank
Round went the wine: sudden I heard Him cry:
Headsmen! the Mat and Sword! This is the end
Of drink with Liödragon [tinnân] in July [tammëz]*².

Tammëz, besides meaning July, is the Canaanite vegetation god, like Adonis, who dies and comes back to life. *Tinnân* is a sea monster, and a venomous dragon, according to ‘Attar, a blasphemous image used for God, also quoted in some texts as *nathrayn*, the two stars of the constellation of Leo³.

The drinking of the cup offered by the host, from “which he drank himself” is martyrdom, as Mani himself was martyred, and then returned to life and became the “host” of the Bema feast, the main ritual celebration of Manicheism. By referring to Tammëz Åalkj thus also expects to return to life again, in the invisible, as does Mani in the Bema. “Kill me”, Åalkj is quoted, “for my death will be life”, as indeed Manicheism means “Mani lives”⁴. Also it should be noted that in Turkey and Central Asia, there are many Sufi and popular rituals which invoke Åalkj and do so to the chanting of the Divine Name (*al*) *Āyy* (“The Living”).

The coquetry of “Beauty” which draws the “elect” is also comprehensible with the keys of Manichean doctrine: “Beauty” is the emblematic aspect or personification of the “living soul”⁵ and it is also God Himself. The elect of course are one of the two categories of participants in the Manichean church, those who “filter” the food given them. Through the elect the light contained in the special food which constituted their diet, certain “light bearing” vegetables such as cucumbers and lettuce, returns to its source, the Father of Greatness. (We shall see later that the followers of Åalkj were vegetarians who ate lettuce.) “Beauty” is the “living soul” or light particles lost in creation seeking to return to God Himself who is also light and can also be designated as “Beauty”. Beauty is the common denominator between the soul (in Zoroastrianism the *dæen* of the saved is beautiful), light, and the Creator. Perhaps this doctrine is the source of the *hadith* which says “God is beautiful and loves beauty”.

*On the gibbet, Shiblâ [a close disciple and intimate] called to him and asked
“What is Sufism?” He [Åalkj] answered: “the lowest degree one needs for*

attaining it is what you behold” [i.e. martyrdom]. Shiblâ asked further: “What is the highest degree?” Aalkj responded: “It is out of reach for you: but tomorrow you will see; for it is part of the (divine) mystery that I have seen it and that it remains hidden to you” .⁶

This is probably the return of the martyr to life in the invisible, not accessible to all, nor even visible to all, but like the Emperor’s new clothes, only to the elect. It was of course widely rumoured that Aalkj did return after his death, and sightings of Aalkj were reported with pride. Elsewhere, according to the Aalkjian tradition, Aalkj used the symbolism of the burning of aloes wood (*aquilaria muscaria*) for its marvellous incense [the wood from India and Cambodia, called in Arabic *‘ed al-qim‘arâ*, “the wood of the Khmers” and also called *yanjuj*, is the result of a resinous defence on the part of trees attacked by a fungus] to mean something very like the release of light particles liberated by the elect by eating light containing vegetables:

If only because the smallest particle (of my ashes), a grain of aloes (burned in this way to Your glory), assures to the (glorious) body of my transfigurations a more imposing foundation than that of immovable mountains.⁷

Throughout the corpus of utterances attributed to Aalkj there runs a secret thread, at first glance mysterious and enigmatic, but which jumps out at the eyes when the light of Manichean studies shines on them:

We were with al-Aalkj at Nihawand - it was the day of the year (Nawrëz) - when we heard the sounding of the trumpet. Al-Aalkj said: “what is happening?” I told him: “Today is Nawrëz”. Then he sighed and said: “Ah! when will it come, our Nawrëz!” And I said: “What do you mean by when?” He said: “the day when I will be set up on the gibbet”.

Now, the day when he was set up on the gibbet - thirteen years later - he looked at me from the height of the pillory and cried out: “AÁmad, now our Nawrëz has arrived!” And I said: “O master, have you received the gifts of the holiday?” He said to me: “indeed, I have received them: revelation and certitude, so much so that I am shamed! But it is too early for me to rejoice”.⁸

By “our Nawrëz” (“new year”, literally “new light”) Aalkj means the Manichean Nawrëz, different and later than the Zoroastrian Nawrëz; but he also means the day when Manicheism would be able to arise from its outcast state, its need to disguise itself and hide from Muslim banning and persecution. He also alludes to this need to hide in the following: he says

“abnegation is keeping the coals glowing under the vicissitudes of destiny”.⁹ This is not abnegation, but disguise. By this he means keeping the fire from going out while it is being hidden; the sacred fire, of course of Zoroastrianism, but especially, in the light of his other statements, the symbolic fire of Manicheism, preserved as embers under the ashes of the world in the same way that Manichean particles of light themselves are hidden. Islam is the ashes or vicissitudes that covers like a pall what for him is the true religion.

The discerning eye will have no difficulty in seeing what Àallk̄j is driving at here:

Change speech, forsake the phantom world. Use neither measure nor harmony with God! Let passion soar; be lost and follow your love. Follow upward, fly between mount and hill, all mounts of thought and hills of certainty, till at last you are enabled to contemplate what you see. And that will be the Night of Plenty which ends the Fast.¹⁰

The “Night of Plenty” which ends the fast, is of course nothing other than the Bema, the central ceremony of Manicheism which ends the Manichean month of fasting; the Muslim fast ends in a feast by day. Fasting, it has often been pointed out, symbolizes the keeping of a secret; this is the interpretation of the meaning of Fast as pillar of the faith by Ism̄«âlās (namely keeping the secret of the divinity of the Imam). The declaration of the ‘Abbasid revolt by Abu Muslim was symbolized by the breaking of the fast of Ramadan, the dropping of pretence of being Muslims by the Ism̄«âlās of Alamut in 1164 was a feast which interrupted Ramaâ«n in the middle, which they called the “Festival of the Resurrection”. What Àallk̄j is saying is be the “son of the moment” (*ibn al-waqt*, a term perhaps coined by BisÇ«mâ, who belongs to the school of “drunken Sufis”) and in disguise be yourself. The fast of disguising one’s Manicheism will lead to its fulfilment more surely than not hiding it or not disguising it. In other words, that the disguise is freedom to practice Manicheism under the noses of those who persecute it. He also says:

I climbed a peak without setting my foot down; I plunged into the ocean to the bottom without putting my foot in it ... I am an orphan, but I have a Father in whom I have a recourse; ... Blind, I am seeing; simple of spirit, I am wise (QaÂdah, *Li ’l-’ilmi ablu*).¹¹

Plunging to the bottom of the ocean is a reference to Gilgamesh, but the main points of interest here are: “I am an orphan but I have a Father in

whom I have a recourse”. Being an orphan (like the frequent claim he made to being an apostate) means being a Manichean cut off from his church and from openly practicing his religion, by virtue of being forced to pretend to be a Muslim; the Father is the “Father of Greatness” who looked after the Manichean Adam cast off into the despised “clothing” and disguise of manifestation in creation. The orphan theme will show up also in his trial, which will be quoted shortly.

Àalkj celebrates this hiding of secrets on his sleeve where anyone who has eyes can see:

O secret d'un coeur, secret si tenu [in an earlier edition: si fin]

Qu'il échappe à la perception de tout vivant!

A la fois apparent et caché, et qui se manifeste

A toute chose en toute chose!¹²

“Secret of a heart held so close that it slips past the sight of all the living; at once apparent and hidden it shows everything in everything.” But of course, some people, whom Àalkj did not want to see, did see:

Àalkj went to Ispahan while 'Alá ibn Sabl was in favour with the inhabitants.

'Alá ibn Sabl was discoursing on Knowledge when al-Àusayn ibn Man-Äër said to him: “impudent one, you allow yourself to speak of Knowledge while I am alive!”

'Alá ibn Sabl cried out: “that is a dualist!” A crowd soon gathered around and he was chased out of town.¹³

Hujwârâ, speaking of al-Àalkj, does not wish to damn him too categorically so as not to stir up enmity, but he damns Àalkj by mixing praise with scorn. In the process he also fingers the physician Abë Bakr MuÁammad b. Zakariyya al-R«zâ as also being a Manichean in disguise, something which one could guess by R«zâ's extreme rationalism and avoidance of Islamic protocols in his writings:

... But of all these Shaykhs only a handful deny the perfection of his [Àalkj's] merit and the purity of his spiritual state and the abundance of his ascetic practices. It would be an act of dishonesty to omit his biography from this book. Some persons pronounce his outward behaviour to be that of an infidel, and disbelieve in him and charge him with trickery and magic, and suppose that Àusayn b. Man-Äër Àalkj is that heretic of Baghdad who was the master of MuÁammad b. Zakariyya and the companion of Abë Sa'âd the Carmathian; but this Àusayn whose character is in dispute was a Persian and native of Bayda, and his rejection by the Shaykhs was due not to any attack on religion and doctrine, but to his conduct and behaviour.

In the end he accuses Ḥallāj quite openly by saying that many others called him a *ẓindāq* (a dualist, a Manichean), and that clearly many of his followers are *ẓindāqs*. Between the lines he lets his own opinion, namely contempt, show through¹⁴. It will be pointed out that being accused of being a *ẓindāq* was a common accusation and even a form of abuse, as much as saying that someone is a scoundrel; but just as it must be pointed out to Freudians that sometimes a cigar is a cigar, sometimes a scoundrel really is a dualist.

So it was not uncommon that Ḥallāj be called a *ẓindāq*, a Manichean, during his lifetime and soon after in public and in private. And, of course, the authorities hounded him and finally executed him. The execution was not, as the spin doctors and propagandists from Central Asia a century later made out to be, a punishment for a philosophical point, a theoretical heresy of saying “I am Reality” but rather because Ḥallāj clearly was linked to a revolutionary underground movement which included the Ism‘ā‘īlīs and the Qarmatians. These revolutionary movements and the attendant persecution on the part of the ‘Abbasids earlier resulted in the Archegos, or head of Manicheism from leaving Baghdad around the year 908. And when the apologists said that Ḥallāj had let out “too much” of an “esoteric” secret, they were not wrong; Ḥallāj’s disguise was too thin and his hints too blatant.

As was noted in the final internment and investigation of Ḥallāj:

By and by, Ḥamid [one of the prosecutors] turned up a letter by Ḥallāj which contained the following passage:

If a man would go on Pilgrimage and cannot, let him set apart in his house some square construction, to be touched by no unclean thing, and let no one have access to it. When the day of the Pilgrimage rites comes, let him make his circuit round it, and perform all the same ceremonies as he would perform at Mecca. Then let him gather together thirty orphans, for whom he has prepared the most exquisite feast he can get; let him bring them to his house and serve them that feast; and after waiting on them himself, and washing their hands as a servant himself, let him present each of them with a new frock, and give them each seven dirhams. This will be a substitute for Pilgrimage.

My father (says Ibn Zanjā) was reading this letter in evidence at the hearing; and as he finished this passage, Judge Abu Omar turned to Ḥallāj.

“Where did you get that doctrine?” he asked.

“From Hasan of Basra’s Book of Devotion”, Ḥallāj replied.

“That is false”, said the Judge. “Outlaw! We ourselves heard Hasan of Basra’s Devotion when we were studying at Mecca, and there is nothing like that in it”¹⁵.

This finding of the thirty orphans (i.e., Manicheans cut off from the open practice of their religion) to invite to a feast, is probably coded instructions on how to hold a Bema ceremony while appearing to be a pious Muslim.

*Àmid now set spies to hunt down Aalkj’s disciples. In their houses were found a great number of documents written on Chinese paper, some of them in gold ink. Some were mounted on satin or silk, and bound in fine leather. Among other papers were curious files of letters from his provincial missionaries, and his instructions to them as to what they should teach, how they should lead people on from stage to stage, how different classes of people should be approached according to their level of intelligence and degree of receptiveness.*¹⁶

These fine Chinese papers (*waraq sánâ*) and documents on silk were due to Àalkj’s travels to the Central Asian centres of Manicheism. As Massignon relates:

*Àalkj’s apostolic method in non-Arab countries was to approach a ruling elite whose attention he could get only through the help of educated translators; thus of the scribal class [who were Manicheans] ... Since Àalkj surely did not go into Turkish lands in search of Christians (he had Christians as neighbours right in Iraq), he must have concentrated on establishing contacts with the Manicheans*¹⁷.

We also know that some of his books were in a very small format (small writing and small books were a hallmark of the Manicheans; this permitted Manichean writings to be easily smuggled where scrolls would have attraction). These were seized in Baghdad in 309 in the homes of his disciples, including among them letters his Turkish friends wrote him “after his journey calling him *Muqât* (=vegetarian provider, a rather Manichean allusion—says Massignon—to some miracle)”¹⁸. But there is no need for allusions to miracles; it is quite enough to take the words here at their face value. Àalkj was a provider in a very real sense for it recorded that “Bahr◀m b. Marzob◀n, a Mazdean” gave Àalkj a large sum of money which he immediately distributed to the poor¹⁹. One could ask, what was a “Mazdean” doing giving large sums of money to ... a Muslim?

Besides his contacts with Manichean Uyghurs, one of Àalkj’s close intimates in Baghdad was Shiblâ, called often a *majdhëb* or holy fool by Sufis, but a common thief by the police authorities of Baghdad; he was a Turk

from Ushrushana, who declared that “Àalkj’s way is the same as mine”. Shiblâ is often referred to as a disciple but in this quote Shiblâ refers to Àalkj as being rather as the same school as himself; in other words, Àalkj’s way is not unique to Àalkj but something a Turk might already be following.

In addition to Àalkj’s travels to Central Asia (which his sympathisers credited him with “Islamicising”), he is also said to have gone to India. In other words, his life imitated Mani’s and his journeys imitated Mani’s journeys. Like Mani, Àalkj also professed to be a healer; he is credited with healing the Caliph (and his mother) of fever attacks— Massignon calls Muqtadir, a hypochondriac and his Greek mother “turbulent” - and, among others, a child in a famous case at a party in Baghdad on the Tigris. The latter event was clearly staged; no one actually saw the small child at death’s door, but everyone saw it cured immediately and in the pink of health. The miraculous healing was accompanied by a staged “retrieval” of a purse of gold from the Tigris, bearing the unmistakable marks of pure stage magic. (The purse which was thrown in the river was similar but had no gold; the purse which was shown as coming out of the Tigris with the gold was another.)

Like Mani, Àalkj also made allusions to the arcane science of astrology and alchemy:

The recall, then the silence, the speechlessness;

And the study, then the discovery, then the committal

The clay, then the firing, then the glowing,

And the grey cold, then the shadow, then sun.

The stony ground, then the meadow, then the desert ...

(Qa’âdah: *Sukëtu thumma Äamtu*)²⁰

Massignon over and over again cites evidence which should convince an objective observer, that if anything, Àalkj was not a sincere Muslim, and that most probably Àalkj was a Manichean or an Ism‘âlâ or a Qarmatian (the latter two being really Manicheans having taken two separating roads of evolution as a result of their need to co-exist with Islam, philosophically being branches which existed within Manicheism already before the advent of Islam). But Massignon is so sympathetic to his subject and his philosophy, that Massignon prefers to believe Àalkj’s lies, and wants the deceit to be true. Not only does Massignon call Àalkj’s fake miracles “innocent sleight of hand”, according to Massignon, Àalkj also used Manichean technical terms “in order to ‘purify’ them”(!).

Massignon speaks of Àalk«jjan “centers” in Khurasan. This would have been quite a feat for someone like Àalk«j, with a very checkered history, including a number of arrests, to have created such a vast network in his lifetime. Massignon also speaks of Àalk«jians from Balkh who “delivered themselves voluntarily to the executioner in the time of ‘Attar’. (Again a vast network and here the martyrdom theme in imitation of Mani.²¹) These far flung and dedicated Àalk«jians, scattered throughout the lands touched by Manicheans, appear to have arisen at the wave of a wand. But they are in fact long established Manicheans who have merely taken on a certain chameleon colouring. But Massignon does not admit to the obvious; and this is because studying Manicheism, the “Black Box” as it was called in the First World Conference on Manicheism, is like studying one’s own unconscious; it’s there, obvious like the statue of Liberty in the harbour of New York, but everyone sees what they want to see. The ego has an innate sympathy with the unconscious which leads to denial rather than to betrayal. For example, there is ample evidence that Àalk«j lived with Qarmatis, visited Qarmatis, sympathized with them, and eventually was pilloried by the police with a sign around his neck which said “A Qarmati Agent”. But for Massignon, who cited the evidence himself, the reaction is shock. Qarmatis? what Qarmatis? This sign, Massignon says, was “dreamed up” by the police²². (This is reminiscent of the myths of communism in which there were only “good” revolutionaries and always “bad” police.)

But Massignon’s net catches all: he sees there are traces of influences on Àalk«j from Abë Nuw«s - who was at one time accused of being a Manichean²³. Massignon says that Àalk«j has a particularly rich vocabulary in Arabic; that he uses technical terms drawn from Aramaic - which was a major language of the Manicheans²⁴; and gives as an example the use of the words *l«bët*, *n«sët*, *h«këil*. He notes that Àalk«j strikes compelling metaphors, such as describing the melody of a melancholic flute as “Satan crying for the loss of the world”; the poet Al-Ma‘arrâ was also admiring in his criticism (although he had, poetry apart, an animosity for Àalk«j, perhaps the animosity of a conservative in regards to an ultra-liberal)²⁵. Al-Ma‘arrâ used similar themes as Àalk«j did, namely the “two sects of mankind” (Al-Àalk«j spoke of two races, one “filled”, and one “deprived”²⁶, in a similar - rather un-Islamic - vein, which would require remarkable stretching to see as an allusion to the saved and damned of Qur’an.) With Al- Ma‘arrâ this is:

The Muslims are mistaken and the Christians are on the wrong road

*And the Jews are all astray and the Magians are in error.
Mankind falls into two classes - the intelligent
Without religion, and the religious without intelligence.*

The two classes are, of course, the Elect and the Hearers. But then Al-Ma'arrâ (d. 447/1057) played the same game as ʿĀllakj, but not as a Sufi, rather as a philosopher and poet. A vegetarian himself (the Manicheans were vegetarians), Al-Ma'arrâ was very anti-Islamic in his teachings and extolled rationalism. And he was very conspiratorial: in his own words:

*Society compels me to play the hypocrite. I raise my voice to pronounce absurdities,
but I only whisper the truth ... Conceal thy thoughts even from the friend at thy side.*

But he used Iranian themes of travel to the next world in the *Risalat al-Ghufrān* where “in paradise the opinions of the *zanadiqab* are discussed”, and toying again with the word, and flirting with danger, he wrote *SaqÇ min az-Zand*, a play on words meaning “Spark from the Flint”. He repeated that human nature was evil, but preached against increasing the “sum of evil” in the world. In his vegetarianism Al-Ma'arrâ not only did not eat meat but he also avoided eggs, milk and honey²⁷.

Massignon, who painstakingly reconstructed the social milieu of Hallaj, says that the ʿĀllakjians were lettuce eaters (which the Manicheans ate as a prime source of light particles) and in his characteristic fashion gives statistics for lettuce production for Baghdad²⁸. He also says that ʿĀllakj habitually disguised himself as the group with which he was dealing:

He [ʿĀllakj] maintains the appearance of an ascetic (nāsik) ... if he learned that the inhabitants of a city or the members of a group professed Mu'tazilism, he became a Mu'tazilite for their sake, and assiduously; if he saw a group inclining toward Imamism, he became an Imamite, telling them how to recognize the signs of the Imam whom they were awaiting; if he saw a group of Sunnites, he became Sunnite...He had practiced medicine; he had experimented with alchemy and with the results that one expects from it...He travelled from town to town.²⁹

So Massignon explicitly found in the “ʿĀllakjians” the Manichean practice of vegetarianism, and that ʿĀllakj was...an impostor who readily took on any appearance and any colouring and became a teacher of any doctrine a given audience was disposed to hear all the while inserting his own ideas under the guise of other teachings. Behind the appearances what we have is a Manichean whose most consistent *persona* is that of a, Muslim under the sign of mysticism. And, as a Muslim, he is a first generation Muslim only.

Manicheism was also known classically by its hallmarks: “The Two Principles and the Three Moments”. Where are these in Àalkj? Bringing in a second principle into the religion of the Divine Unity was a tall order but it was accomplished by absolutizing the role of Satan, essentially making him a partner of God’s in carrying out a divine plan. The end result was that both God and Satan approached the same plane. This remodelling of Islam was begun before Àalkj, in large part by his teacher Sahl Tustarâ, who was also the architect of the whole school which is called “the Drunken Sufis”, that is, Sufis who claimed to be God themselves³⁰. Bringing a second principle into Islam achieved its fullest expression under the Fatimid Ism‘âlâs, who unnoticed by most, demoted God - Allah - to Demiurge, or an emanation out of an unknowable Bythos which they called *al-Ghayb Ta‘ala* - “the Great Abyss”. To this end the Ism‘âlâs created a pseudo-etymology for the Name Allah saying it came from *walaba*, a verb meaning “to lament”. This was because the Demiurge - here Allah - “lamented his exile”. from the Great Abyss. This interpretation was also accepted, it should be noted, by Ibn ‘Arabâ. So Àalkj says:

My Companion is Iblis and my teacher is Pharaoh. Iblis was threatened with the fire and did not retract his allegation. Pharaoh was drowned in the Red Sea without retracting his allegation or recognizing any mediator.³¹

The *nânn*«*sân*, where this appears point blank, may be apocryphal but there are other Àalkjian references, equally strong, to the idea that Iblis is, in reality, a Saint. And then Two Principles also appear in the Àalkjian notion, affirmed in his teachings and at his trial, that there is a God in heaven and a god on earth, the earthly one hidden behind the appearance of phenomena.

Ah! Was that me? or Thee?

Two Gods!

Far be it from me to say there are two Gods!

Yet between me and Thee lies this torment of ‘Tis me.

*Take my ‘Tis me from between Us with Thy ‘Tis Thyself.*³²

In this passage, and it must be remembered that here Àalkj was on thin ice, the paradoxical Àalkjian notion of unity emerges more succinctly:

I came to Àalkj and said to him: “explain the Proclamation of Unity”. He said: “The Proclamation of Unity is beyond the ability of language to express”. “So”, I said, “what does the statement mean: there is no god except God?”— “That” (he answered) “is something which keeps the

vulgar busy so that they can't be mistaken for the true followers of the Proclamation of Unity". Then his cheeks turned red: "You want me to be brief?"—Yes"—"Whoever claims to expound the Unity of God is a polytheist"³³.

There we have it: to truly proclaim the doctrine of Unity, Àall«j says, one has to be a polytheist - on two planes: Divinity lies both in a principle and in matter; and in itself is a plurality. The Qur'anic person of Pharaoh has always been, in the minds of Muslims, the ultimate unbeliever, equivalent to Satan; but Àall«j did not hesitate to defend Pharaoh, or Satan for that matter, over and over again, as also being the truth, equivalent to God:

Recit de 'Othman ibn Mo'awiya lequel dit:

Al-Àall«j passa une nuit dans la grande mosquée de Dinawar avec un groupe de gens. L'un d'eux lui demanda: Matre, que dis-tu de la declaration de Pharaon [Sourate LXXIX: 24: "Je suis votre Seigneur Très-Haut]" - Ce fut une parole de vérité, dit-il - Et que dis-tu de la déclaration de Moise? [Sourate XX 12: "C'est Moi qui suis Ton Seigneur]" - Ce fut une parole de vérité. Car chacune de deux paroles suit son cours dan l'éternité d'après, comme elle suivit son cours dans l'éternité d'avant .³⁴

In this passage the Two Principles are both Pharaoh (= Satan) - "who is Lord" and the God of Moses who is also "Lord". (The God of Moses because Moses' God is already closer to a Demiurge in ancient usage than Muhammad's God.) And here also appear the themes of "post eternity" and "pre-eternity" which are repeated several times in the Àall«j corpus. These along with the present, are the "Three Moments" of Manicheism. But their appearance in Islam was developed by Àall«j's teacher Tustarâ to whom we will come to in a moment. But first a curious element:

Massignon writes about the name "ManÄër" which is usually used to designate Àall«j while his actual name was (Äusayn ibn ManÄër):

on peut se demander si le surnom "ManÄër", sous lequel la poésie a immortalisé Hallaj, n'est pas d'origine initiatique artisanale. Et n'est pas un indice de l'origine ismaélienne de cette "futuwwa" [initiativ guild] artisanale³⁵? Puisque la propagande ismaélienne a utilisé déjà une fois ce nom de "ManÄër" pour désigner un chef de Da'is, de propagandistes 'AQ. Hasan Ibn Hawshab, qui reçut le nom de "ManÄër al-Yaman" et commença la propagande en 268/881 en Yemen (hadj en 266 h.); et fonda ainsi l'Etat Fatimite.³⁶

The name ManÄär (“the Victor”) seems to have a special political or mystical significance for the movements joined by the thread Mukht«riyya-Abë Muslim-Ism«âlâs and Qarmatis, and thereby the Manicheans heralding their hopes of eventual ascendance over Islam or their opponents. As Massignon notes, the name, ManÄär, under which Àall«j is remembered was used by Ism«âlâs for a leader of *D«is* or propagandists; nevertheless, if the police say that Àall«j is a Qarmati agent, they “dreamed it up”. But to turn to Tustarâ. Sahl ibn ‘Abdallah al-Tustarâ was a Drunken Sufi (he too made declarations of his own divinity, at least according to some authors). Indeed, he was the founder of the group which went on to include Abë Yazâd BisÇ«mâ (d.260/874) and Ibn Abi ‘l-Khayr (d.440/1049). He had a school, or a number of followers whom he indocrinated and was the first and probably most significant of Àall«j’s teachers. Tustarâ’s masters were “the ancient masters” (*qadâm«n-i mash«yikh*).³⁷ Since Tustarâ died in 283/896 and was born in the year 203 of the Hijrah, when he studied with these ‘disciples of the ancient masters”, Islam was less than 220 years old. For these masters to have been ancient, they could hardly, therefore, have been Muslims. Tustarâ placed an emphasis on citing the Qur’an; but to this end he wrote the first allegorical, or “mystical” commentary, in which the Qur’an says one thing but was interpreted to mean another to suit Tustarâ’s needs. The difference between Qur’anic Islam and Tustarâ’s interpretation is so radical that anyone with a sense of orthodoxy would have had to declare Tustarâ a heretic. For example, in Tustarâ, man is an emanation out of particles of light. “In his pristine perfection man exists in the form of a particle of light as an atom (*darr*)”.³⁸

But despite these grossly unorthodox theories, Tustarâ apparently kept out of politics and grew old before conflicts between Manicheans and ‘Abbasids came to a head and broke out in general insurrection. It should be noted that his apparently innocuous emphasis on citing the Qur’an, which he also specifically taught to his disciples, of whom Àall«j was one, is curious, not to say suspect; suspect because a Muslim has no need to be taught this as a method; to a Muslim it comes naturally, without thinking. To someone to whom the Qur’an was superfluous it would require an effort to constantly quote the Qur’an and base one’s thoughts on it as an authority. (Let us remember that Àall«j had said once to his teacher Makki that he, Àall«j, could write as well, or better than the book God revealed.)

... Tustarâ names the essence of Muhammad *'amîd al-nër* (=column of light): this subtle body of faith emanated from God Himself, which had bowed down before Him a million years before the Adamic Covenant, and which has been disseminated in particles of uncreated certitude (*yaqân*) in a certain number of hearts, those of the intimate elect; seeds of certitude that “illuminate” their reading of the Qur'an. Hence, Muhammad “knew the essence of the Qur'an before the first visit of the angel”³⁹.

Tustarâ expounds his conception of the spiritual emanation of the human race from their prophetic ancestors, who, in turn, represent stages in the light emanation from the light of Muhammad. Selecting the Qur'anic term *durrîyyah* (seed) and the etymologically related *darr* (atoms, specks; collective plural of *darrab*) as the cue, Tustarâ differentiates between three specks or three seeds: Muhammad, Adam, and the offspring of Adam [or Massignon says of Tustarâ, the creation of two kinds of men: Adamic and Muhammadian].

Muhammad, the Muhammad of pre-existence, was created of divine light. When he had stood as column of light before God for a million years in primordial adoration, “God created Adam from the light of Muhammad” or according to another passage of the *Tafsîr*, “He created Adam from the clay of divine might (*Çân al-izâb*) from the light of Muhammad” (*min nër Muhammad*).

Not only Adam is formed from Muhammad's light, but the whole universe participates in this emanation of light: “The light of the prophets (*nër al-anbîy*) is from his (Muhammad's) light and the light of this heavenly kingdom (*malakêt*) is from his light and the light of this world (*dunya*) and of the world to come (*«kîrah*) is from his light”. The spiritual masters and the divinely-desired (*murâdun*) and the spiritual disciples and God-seekers (*murâdun*) also take part in this successive light-emanation, though there are two somewhat different parallel passages concerning the source of this emanation of light. In the *Tafsîr*, the “Divinely-desired” (*murâdun*) directly emanate from Muhammad's light, while the “God-seekers” (*murâdun*) issue from Adam's light⁴⁰.

In Tustarâ's symbolism of light, the “theophany of the divine Essence” is the radiation of the Divine Being, in its Essence and attributes, who manifests Himself like the splendour of the sun when it emerges from the horizon, or the beauty of the bride when she unveils. The subject

who is granted this experience of radiation and unveiling is immersed in the divine light which transfigures him. He absorbs the divine light and is transformed by its illumination, so that he reflects and radiates the light like the jewel or the mirror sparkling in the sunlight.⁴¹

Or in other words, matter and divinity are one and this divinity emerges from behind the illusion of manifestation.

In Tustarâ's mystical perspective the course of man's existence is drawn out between two fundamental events antecedent and subsequent to his life in the world of creation. Man's existence in this world is suspended between the Day of Covenant and the Day of Resurrection. On his course from pre-existential infinity (*ibtid*) to post-existential infinity (*intih*) man passes through his phenomenal existence, marked by the moment of his creation and the instant of his death.⁴²

Àallqj, the disciple of Tustarâ, also refers to these two "moments" which, along with the present "moment", are really the "three times" of Manicheism.

Tustarâ claimed to have met "one thousand five hundred righteous (*Àiddâq*), among them forty substitutes (*budak*) and seven pegs (*amt*). Their path (*Çarâqab*) and their way (*madhab*) is the same as mine".⁴³

And at least once he himself is called the *quÇb* or the spiritual pole of the world embodied in a person, something like, say, an archegos. What is essential in all of this is that Tustarâ uses a very Manichean concept, that of the "column of light"; has light particles strewn all over the place, creation by emanation, which is explicitly very, very much at odds with the Qur'anic doctrine of creation that he pretends to base himself upon, and has a theory of three moments, which, for better or for worse, is the Three Times of Manicheism, and he claims that the path of the *Àiddiqên* ("the perfected", a Manichean term) is the same as his own.

Ibn N«dim in his *Fihrist* speaks several times of philosophers who were dualists in disguise, and sometimes of philosophers who, at first considered orthodox, were unmasked as dualists in the course of events. The reason why Àallqj was not unmasked more clearly (if being put to death is not a clear enough indication that the establishment thought something was seriously wrong) is that his disguise was so tightly drawn around him that it had become a part of him; he was what he pretended to be, a new breed of Manichean, a Sufi. Besides the first Sufis, or in any case the Sufis called the

“Drunken Sufis”, the Ism‘âlâs are another more generic case of Manicheans who had taken on a disguise under the pressure of the new world religion. When they tried to take the disguise off in 1164, in the event called the “Feast of the Resurrection” in Alamut, they discovered that the disguise had grown too close and could no longer be removed. This apparently had also happened to the Alawis of Syria who probably had been disguised at one time as Christians and then sometime in the 8th or 9th century on top of that disguised themselves as Muslims. The two layers of disguises produced chaos within themselves; they are aware today of having a great secret but no longer know what that secret is. They claim to be Muslims, but they know perfectly well that they are not; they know that they are related to the Ism‘âlâs and the Druzes but they do not know how.

An interesting discussion arose in our times over BisÇ«mâ who is a figure in the same stream as Àall«j and Tustarâ. A classical Sufi author, Sarr«j, in the *Kitâb al-Luma‘* says that BisÇ«mâ taught a certain Abë ‘Alâ Sindâ how to pray as a Muslim, and Abë ‘Alâ Sindâ taught BisÇ«mâ metaphysics. Zaehner thought that this showed an influence of Vedanta into Sufism:

...this Abë ‘Alâ was a convert to Islam from another religion, for Abë Yazâd [BisÇ«mâ] says of him: “I used to keep company with Abë ‘Alâ Sindâ and I used to show him how to perform the obligatory duties of Islam, and in exchange he would give me instruction in the divine unity (*tam‘âd*) and the ultimate truths (*‘âq‘iq*)”.⁴⁴ Abë Yazâd, then, represents himself as learning the ‘ultimate truths about the divine unity from a man who did not even know how to perform the obligatory duties of a Muslim. It seems, then, fairly clear that this man, Abë ‘Alâ Sindâ, was a convert from another faith⁴⁵.

Or no convert at all. Zaehner thought that Sindâ came from Sind in India. Nicholson also held that Sindâ was from India, but Arberry, basing himself on an ancient geographer found a village named Sind in Khorasan. For Zaehner this Sindâ would have been a Vedantist and this would explain why there is a version of “*Tat Tvam Asi?*” among the Sufis. But this Sufi version which is *ant« takëna dh«ka* (“thou art that”) was so widespread among heretical movements in the Near East that it could really be considered as local and well established before BisÇ«mâ’s time. However, Sindâ could indeed have been from India, and could indeed have taught BisÇ«mâ, but not as a Vedantist teaching a Muslim, but as an Indian Manichean teaching a Persian Manichean. BisÇ«mâ is described as a convert from Zoroastrianism,

or more exactly from the Majës, a term which in Islam could mean any Iranian religion. As “former” Majës, or children of former Majës, Àallkj, Bistami, Tustarâ could have been Manicheans pure and simple, or Manicheans cloaking themselves as Zoroastrians. But their doctrines should leave no doubt on the matter.

Both BisÇ«mâ and Ibn Abâ 'l-Khayr were accused of practising “backwards prayer” (*Āalkt maqlëb*), that is, prayer directed towards themselves as the Divinity. BisÇ«mâ is quoted as having said, because he claimed to be God, *subĀ«mâ* or “Glory to myself”. Apologist spin-doctors seeking to neutralize this along with other scandalous accusations against these figures, explained backwards prayer, ludicrously, as an ascetic devotional practice which consisted of reciting the Qur’an while suspended upside down in a well. For good measure, the subjects were supposed to have done this for several years! And for many, this explained it all, dispelling all doubts as to what these two were really about. (In all fairness, it should be said that the spiritual effects of reciting the Qur’an upside down suspended in a well have yet to be studied thoroughly.)

BisÇ«mâ originated the well known Sufi formula *ibn al-waqt* (“son of the moment”). Although it does have a very respectable spiritual meaning today, for BisÇ«mâ its utility is best illustrated by a play which appeared in Muslim India some fifty years ago. This play was entitled “*Ibn al-Waqt*” and in it a young Muslim gentleman dresses and acts like an Englishman. In BisÇ«mâ’s own time, and to BisÇ«mâ’s familiars being an *ibn al-waqt* meant that the way of the future lay through Islam and one had to adapt; which is why he taught his co-religionist Abë ‘Alâ Sindâ, how to perform the Islamic prayer. BisÇ«mâ was, like Àallkj, a first generation Muslim, having been a “Majës”.

Apropos of the figure of ‘Alâ, the movements which represented the adaptation of Manicheism to Islam, had early on made ‘Ali a code word for Mani. In Twelve Imam Shâ‘ism, as a less radical by-product of the power struggle between Manicheism and Islam, there is also an ambiguity about who ‘Alâ is. Allama ñab«tab«â, the Persian Shâ‘ite scholar, was heard to say once: “Our ‘Alâ is not the same as the Caliph”. He was responding to an objection raised by his cousin Seyyed Hossein Nasr that the historic ‘Alâ could not have composed the *Nahj al-Bal«gha*. Along these lines it is hard not to think that the Mausoleum of “‘Alâ” in Mazar-i Sharif (Balkh) in Afghanistan is really the tomb of Mar Ammo. (It is impossible that ‘Alâ who

died in Kufa is in Afghanistan; the tomb in Mazar-i Sharif, of pre-Islamic origin, has a curious history in which Sind also plays a role.)

The movement of the “Drunken Sufis”, which included Tustarâ, BisÇ«mâ, Âalkj, Ibn Abi 'l-Khayr, was that of Manicheism penetrating Islam in the form of a mysticism. There can be little doubt that the Sufi notion of *QuÇb* was derived from that of the Archegos, and that many Manichean Khaniqahi became Sufi ones. As a result, there are invisible Sufi spiritual hierarchies, to this day, which resemble the description of the Manichean hierarchy found in Mas'udâ: from the *Murëj al-Dhabab* (Prairies of Gold).⁴⁶

This of course is also similar to the description of the Fatimid organization of *D«'âs*, as well it might be since the *Ism«'âlis* are another, less esoteric, adaptation of Manicheism to the new climate created by Islam.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. L. Massignon, *Akbb«r al-Âalkj*, Paris 1957, p. 117. Massignon reconstructs this from several different sources. The reference to *Tammëz* is in the *ManÇiq al-nâir* by 'AÇÇ«r.
2. E. Schroeder, *Muhammad's People*, Portland (ME) 1955, p. 552.
3. L. Massignon, *The Passion of al-Âalkj*, Princeton 1982, vol. I, p. 16.
4. L. Massignon, *Akbb«r al-Âalkj*, p. 92.
5. I. Gershevitch, *Beauty as the Living Soul in Iranian Manicheism*, in *From Hecataeus to al-Huwarizmi*, ed. J. Harmatta.
6. L. Massignon, *The Passion of al-Âalkj*, vol. I, p. 17.
7. *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 15. The image of a temple destroyed and rebuilt; after his execution Âalkj would be burned, as were those formally accused of Manicheism such as Ibn Muqaffa.
8. L. Massignon, *Akbb«r al-Halkj*, p. 121. Massignon says in a note that this pillory is not the one of the year 309/922 but of 301/912 where he was exposed for three days while children made fun of him and his brother-in-law.
9. L. Massignon, *Al-Âalkj, martyr mystique de l'Islam*, Paris 1922, vol. II, p. 905.
10. E. Schroeder, *Muhammad's People*, p. 526.
11. L. Massignon, *Al-Halkj, martyr mystique de l'Islam*, p. 909.
12. L. Massignon, *Akbb«r al-Halkj*, p. 155.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 118.
14. Abë 'l-Hasan al-Hujwârâ, *Kashf al-Mahjub*, pp. 150 & 151-153.
15. E. Schroeder, *Muhammad's People*, p. 548.
16. *Ibid.*, p.544.

17. L. Schroeder, *The Passion of al-Àalkj*, vol. I, p. 184.
18. *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 185.
19. L. Massignon, *Akbb«r al-Halkj*, p. 131.
20. E. Schroeder, *Muhammad's People*, p. 527. It would be reasonable to think that this is meant to be alchemical. But as it is not systematic, to say the least, it is also reasonable to conclude that it is alchemy for literary or rhetorical purposes, that is, to produce an effect upon the reader, or for show, rather than to convey a real method.
21. L. Massignon, *The Passion of al-Àalkj*, vol. I, p. 170.
22. *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 30.
23. L. Massignon, *Al-Àalkj, martyr mystique de l'Islam*, vol. II, p. 917.
24. *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 904
25. *Ibid.*, p. 906
26. *Ibid.*, p. 909.
27. From R. A. Nicholson, art. *Al-Ma'arrâ*, in *The Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. J. Hashtings.
28. L. Massignon, *The Passion of al-Àalkj*, vol. I, p. 234. He also mentions that the early Ism«âlâ sects around Wasit (near Kufa, the former Hira) were also vegetarians (p. 60). It is in these Isma'ili centers in Wasit that Àalkj first studied. Hira was center of Arab Manicheism before Islam. It disappeared with the Arab conquest and was replaced by Kufa which is nearby. To this day in Armenia and Iran, the eating of cucumbers and other "white" vegetables is recommended for their "light" content.
29. L. Massignon, *The Passion of al-Àalkj*, vol. I, p. 192.
30. See P. J. Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption: Iblis in Sufi Psychology*, Leiden, 1983.
31. Al-Àalkj, *The Tanw«sân*, pp. 46-47.
32. E. Schroeder, *Muhammad's People*, p. 527.
33. L. Massignon, *Akbb«r al-Àalkj*, p. 136
34. *Ibid.*, p. 123.
35. Massignon has written that the Western craft guilds originated with the Ism«âlâs; probably he had in mind the Freemasons as originating from Ism«âlâ influence upon the Templars.
36. L. Massignon, *Akbb«r al-Aalkj*, p.204. The family origin of the D«i known as the ManÄ«r al-Yaman, a supporter of the Fatimids, was from Kufa, the city which replaced Hira, a known center of Arab Manicheism. The 'Abbasid called ManÄ«r was involved in a strange incident: in 758 a group of

the followers of Abu Muslim from Rawandah surrounded the Caliph al-ManÄër at his camp at Hashimiyyah and declared that they knew of his divinity and demanded that he gives them food and drink. Some threw themselves to their death from a building in the hope that they would be reborn in a better state by dying in his presence. Al-ManÄër had them killed; presumably they were an embarrassment, even though they were fanatical followers. The Persian scholar Bihruz claimed that al-ManÄër was a secret member of a Manichean cell.

37. G. Bowering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: The Qur'anic Hermeneutics of the Sufi Sabl at-Tustarâ*, Berlin 1980, p. 46.

38. G. Bowering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam*, p. 195.

39. L. Massignon, *The Passion of al-Äalkj*, vol. III, p. 284.

40. G. Bowering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam*, p. 153.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 175.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 175.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 237. This is a quotation from the *Tafsir* of Tustarâ.

44. Abë NaÄr al-Sarr«j, *Kit«b al-Luma' fi 'l-TaÄÄannuf*, ed. R. A. Nicholson, p. 177.

45. R. C. Zaehner, *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism*, New York 1969, p. 94.

46. G. Monnot, *Matoridi et le Manichéisme* (Institut Dominicain d'Études Orientales di Caire, Mélanges n° 13).