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Mohammed Rustom

To cite this article: Mohammed Rustom (2020): Sayyid Haydar Āmulī’s Seal of Absolute *walāya*: A Shīʿī Response to Ibn ʿArabī, Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2020.1847844

Published online: 17 Dec 2020.

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Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī’s Seal of Absolute *walāya*: A Shīʿī Response to Ibn ṬArabī

Mohammed Rustom
College of Humanities, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada

**ABSTRACT**
In Ibn ṬArabī’s (d. 638/1240) highly developed theory of *walāya* (‘sainthood’ or ‘friendship with God’), Jesus is conceived of as the ‘Seal of Absolute *walāya*’ whereas Ibn ṬArabī is the ‘Seal of Restricted *walāya*’. After explaining how Ibn ṬArabī understands these two designations, we shall move on to Sayyid Haydar Āmulī’s (d. ca. 787/1385) critique of Ibn ṬArabī’s hagiology. Although Āmulī was one of Ibn ṬArabī’s most prominent Shīʿī admirers, he was opposed to the identification of Jesus as *walāya*’s Absolute Seal and Ibn ṬArabī himself as its Restricted Seal. Instead, Āmulī contends, these titles can only apply to ‘Ali b. Abī Ṭalīb (the first Shīʿī Imam) and the Mahdī (the twelfth Shīʿī Imam) respectively. In order to demonstrate his point, Āmulī deploys his arguments from three different perspectives, namely those of transmission (*naqīl*), the intellect (*ʻaql*), and unveiling (*kashf*). Since Āmulī’s understanding of the Seal of Restricted *walāya* turns out in many ways to be a natural corollary to his identification of the Seal of Absolute *walāya*, this article will only be concerned with Āmulī’s explication of the latter. It is hoped that this investigation will help shed greater light on a key feature of Āmulī’s Imamology, which is inextricably tied to his simultaneous critical reading of, and commitment to, Ibn ṬArabī.

**ARTICLE HISTORY**
Received 12 July 2020
Accepted 5 November 2020

**KEYWORDS**
Haydar Āmulī; Ibn ṬArabī; Jesus; ‘Ali b. Abī Ṭalīb; *walāya*; hagiology; Imamology

**Introduction**
The work of one of the most important figures of philosophical Sufism, Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī (d. ca. 787/1385), has largely been neglected in modern Western scholarship. In Iran, however, the situation is quite different as a steady stream of Persian monographs dedicated to Āmulī’s life and thought have been appearing over the past twenty years. In Arabic, we have a handful of studies, the most noteworthy being the 800-page tome by Khanjar Ḥamiyya. Yet these works on Āmulī vary significantly in accuracy, scope, and depth. This explains why there are still so many key aspects of Āmulī’s thought about which we have only a cursory knowledge, such as his role as a philosophical/mystical qur’anic exegete. Another topic of enduring (because unresolved) investigation that is particularly worthy of our consideration is Āmulī’s engagement with Ibn ṬArabī (d. 638/1240).

Like so many other post-Ibn ṬArabī authors, Āmulī was haunted by the Shaykh’s dominating intellectual and spiritual presence which held sway over much of learned
discourse in Islamic civilization (from North Africa to parts of China) for over five centuries. While the thought of Ibn ‘Arabi and the work of his followers after him helped solve a number of age-old philosophical and theological dilemmas, they also presented a new set of obstacles to subsequent generations of thinkers. In the case of Āmuli, one of the greatest challenges that Ibn ‘Arabi presented to him was his highly developed doctrine of walāya. To be sure, many individuals after Ibn ‘Arabi had to come to terms with his complex understanding of walāya and its relationship to nubuwwa or prophecy. But, like some other major Twelver Shi‘ī philosophers and mystics after him, Āmuli also had to square Ibn Arabi’s treatment of walāya with his belief in the Imams, the repositories and embodiments of walāya.7

Although there are several discussions on Āmuli’s understanding of walāya (especially with reference to Ibn ‘Arabi) in the secondary literature, we lack a thorough and coherent presentation of its main features. While Henry Corbin gives us the gist of Āmuli’s argument, Ḥamiyya’s treatment of this problem is by far the most extensive,8 but in so many ways it gets lost in the details. This is undoubtedly because Ḥamiyya’s learned study is largely based on Āmuli’s introduction to his Naṣṣ al-nusūṣ (The Text of Texts), a lengthy commentary on Ibn ‘Arabi’s Fūsūṣ al-ḥikam (The Ringstones of Wisdom), which Āmuli wrote towards the end of his life.9 As Corbin notes, Āmuli’s discussion on walāya in the Naṣṣ is an augmented version of his argument as presented in his profound and early work of philosophical Sufism, the Jāmi‘ al-asrār (The Sum of Mysteries).10 A comparison of the relevant sections in both texts reveals that the substance of Āmuli’s argument remains the same, although in the Naṣṣ he adds many more proof texts to support the points he makes in the Jāmi‘, which already contains an abundant amount of textual materials.

In what follows I shall therefore investigate Āmuli’s most extensive engagement with Ibn ‘Arabi on the question of walāya as enshrined in the Jāmi‘. By focusing on this problem, the hope is to shed greater light on a key feature of Āmuli’s Imamology, which is inextricably tied to his simultaneous critical reading of, and commitment to, Ibn ‘Arabi.

The problem

At the heart of Āmuli’s response to Ibn ‘Arabi on the question of walāya is the issue of the identity of the ‘Seal’ (khātam) of walāya. The notion of a ‘Seal’ naturally calls to mind Q 33.40, which says that the Prophet Muhammad is the ‘Seal of the Prophets’ (khātam al-nabiyyīn). In the early history of Sufism, the great master al-Ḥakīm al-Tīmīdī (d. ca. 300/910) gave the first doctrinal formulation of the notion of walāya (which has its roots in the Qur’an), and wrote about a certain ‘Seal of the awliyā’ (khātam al-awliyā).11 Yet al-Tīmīdī did not develop this concept in any particular manner. Rather, he left it to posterity to solve his highly enigmatic questions pertaining to the identity of the Seal.12

It seems that Ibn ‘Arabi was the first to take up this challenge, answering al-Tīmīdī point-by-point in a separate treatise and then reworking this treatise into Chapter 73 of his magnum opus al-Futūḥat al-makkiyya (The Meccan Revelations).13 Ibn ‘Arabi’s doctrine of the Seal of walāya is certainly one of the most difficult aspects of his thought. For now, it should suffice to say that his unique contribution here lies in his two-tiered
distinction of the Seal of *walāya*: there is an Absolute or General Seal (also known as the Universal Seal), and then there is a Restricted or Specific Seal (also known as the Muḥammadan Seal). The Absolute Seal is Jesus, whereas the Restricted Seal is none other than Ibn ʿArabī himself.14

Like many of Ibn ʿArabī’s Sunnī followers, Āmuli, who has the utmost reverence for Ibn ʿArabī,15 whole-heartedly embraces the notion of there being two Seals of *walāya*. Where Āmuli feels that Ibn ʿArabī err, however, is in his identification of these Seals. As a Shiʿī, Āmuli maintains that the Seals of Absolute and Restricted *walāya* can be none other than Imam ʿAli16 and the Mahdī (the Twelfth Shiʿī Imam), respectively.

Tackling this particular problem in the context of his more general discussion on *walāya*,17 Āmuli outlines the problem and his method of resolving it as follows:

Some of the masters, including the perfect Shaykh Muḥyī al-Dīn b. al-ʿArabī and one of his followers, Sharaf al-Dīn al-Qaysārī [d. 751/1350], uphold the position that the Seal of *awliyāʾ* in an absolute sense is Jesus, the son of Mary, and that the Seal of *awliyāʾ* in a restricted sense is Muḥyī al-Dīn b. al-ʿArabī. It is said that Ibn ʿArabī himself also expressed this idea in some of his books.

The other group upholds the position that the Seal of *awliyāʾ* in an absolute sense is ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. This group includes the perfect Shaykh Saʿd al-Dīn Ḥamūʾī [d. 649/1252] and one of his followers, Kamāl al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Razzāq [al-Kāshānī] [d. ca. 730/1330]. And this group upholds the position that the Seal of *awliyāʾ* in a restricted sense is the Mahdī.18 That then is what the two aforementioned Shaykhs agree upon, and this impoverished one is with them.

Therefore, we wish to affirm this notion by way of transmission, the intellect, and unveiling; and, in so doing, to support the position of the latter group while likewise disproving the position of the former group (that is, by way of transmission, the intellect, and unveiling). We shall also adhere to the former group’s statements because they often point to the falsity of their own position …19

Āmuli will thus broach the question of the identity of the Seal of *walāya* in two separate sections, the first dedicated to the Seal of Absolute *walāya* and the second to the Seal of Restricted *walāya*. Although his method of explicating the problem by way of transmission (*naql*), the intellect (*ʿaql*), and unveiling (*kashf*) is consistent in each of these sections, the argument in the first section is by far the more detailed and coherent of the two. This is because Āmuli’s understanding of the Seal of Restricted *walāya* turns out in many ways to be a natural corollary to his identification of the Seal of Absolute *walāya*. My analysis will, therefore, only be concerned with Āmuli’s explication of the latter.

**The Seal of Absolute *walāya***

Āmuli first ventures to discuss the Seal of *walāya* in an absolute sense, providing a lengthy quotation from Chapter 24 of Ibn ʿArabī’s *Futūḥāt*.20 In this chapter, Ibn ʿArabī argues that, during his second coming or descent from heaven (*nuzūl*), Jesus, the Seal of Absolute *walāya*, will be under the sacred Law (*shariʿa*) established by the Prophet Muḥammad. Ibn ʿArabī insists that it is from the perspective of Jesus being a follower of the Prophet that he will be the Seal of Absolute *walāya*. His coming will entail that *ijtihād* in all matters of the Law will cease, as he will be the sole interpreter of the Law. He will be aware of the Prophet’s Law by virtue of an angel, who will
inspire him so that he will know how to rule by the Law as the Prophet would rule by it had he been present. Alternatively, Jesus will be able to behold the Spirit (rūḥ) of the Prophet so that he can be informed directly by him as to what it is that God has established for him with respect to ruling over his community.

The rest of the quotation from the Futūḥāt reveals that Jesus is the best of the Prophet’s community. Although himself a prophet, Jesus is also a wali belonging to the Muslim community and will have two resurrections: one, under the general banner (liwā‘) of prophecy and messengerhood with his followers behind him (i.e. the Christian community), just as the other messengers and prophets will be raised up with their respective communities behind them; and the other with the rest of the awliyā’ in the Muslim community under the specific banner of the Prophet. The rest of the awliyā’, from the time of Adam to the end of creation, will follow Jesus, who himself will be behind the Prophet.

Āmulī follows up with two quotations from Chapter 73 of the Futūḥāt, where, it will be recalled, Ibn ‘Arabi provides his answers to each of al-Tirmidhi’s questions. But in both instances Āmulī’s quotation are taken from al-Qaysāri’s commentary upon the Fusūs. With respect to the first quotation from the Futūḥāt, we learn of Ibn ‘Arabi’s basic position concerning the double nature of the Seal of walāya, while in the second, Ibn ‘Arabi provides us with the logic for why there needs to be a Seal to end the cycle of humanity: just as God sealed the revealed religions with the coming of the Prophet, the Seal of the Prophets, and there are no religions or prophets after him, so too is there a Seal of General walāya, which began with Adam and was sealed with Jesus. Ibn ‘Arabi here glosses the well-known qur’anic verse in which Adam and Jesus are likened to each other: ‘The Seal is similar to the beginning: “Truly the likeness of Jesus in the sight of God is that of Adam” [Q 3.59]. So He seals with the like of what He began.’

Finally, Āmulī provides us with a pertinent passage from al-Qaysāri’s own discussion, where he sets out some definitions that help guide the rest of the inquiry:

Walāya is divided into ‘Absolute’ and ‘Restricted’, namely general and specific. For, with respect to itself, walāya is a divine quality in an absolute sense; but with respect to its dependence on the prophets and awliyā’, it is restricted. That which is restricted is supported by that which is absolute, and that which is absolute is the outward aspect of that which is restricted. Thus, the walāyāt of all of the prophets and awliyā’ are parts of Absolute walāya, just as the prophetic functions of the prophets are parts of Absolute prophecy.

Having carefully presented the key texts from Ibn ‘Arabi and al-Qaysāri that support the position on the Seal of Absolute walāya with which he will take issue, Āmulī summarizes the upshot of the point of these quoted passages, namely to ‘affirm that the seal of awliyā’ in an absolute sense is Jesus, not anyone else’. Then, Āmulī restates the three-fold modes of knowing that he will employ to put Ibn ‘Arabi’s claim to the test: transmission, the intellect, and unveiling.

Transmission

Āmulī begins this section by saying that no transmitted report has come down that would indicate that Jesus is the Seal of Absolute walāya. Rather, Āmulī argues, the reports that we do have state that Jesus will be a follower of the Mahdī, and that the latter will be one of ‘Ali’s male descendants. Then Āmulī produces a long string of
qur'anic verses, sayings of the Prophet, and sayings of ‘Alī to show that, based on transmission alone, it is indeed ‘Alī who is the Seal of Absolute walāya. Although he tells us that the evidence in this regard is almost innumerable, Āmulī gives some of the most salient scriptural passages that help support his argument.

The first and most telling text Āmulī presents is what in Shiʿism is called the ‘verse of walāya’: ‘Your wāli is only God, and His Messenger, and those who believe, who perform the prayer and give the alms while bowing down’ (Q 5.55). Āmulī avers that the part of this verse that speaks of giving alms ‘while bowing down’ is well-known amongst the qur'anic commentators to have been revealed concerning ‘Alī.28 We are told that, while performing the bow or genuflexion (ruki‘) in the ritual prayer, ‘Alī offered the ring on his finger to a man seeking charity.29 Indeed, this interpretation is to be found in the commentaries of al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144), al-Baydawi (d. 685/1286), and others, although they tend to read this reference to ‘Alī as being a wāli to indicate his friendship with, or protection of, the believers. Yet Shi‘ī commentators, such as al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067) and al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1153), take the meaning of wāli in this verse to also indicate something else, namely ‘Alī as the rightful spiritual and political leader of the Muslim community after the Prophet’s death.

While telling us that the last part of this verse is a widely-accepted reference to ‘Alī, Āmulī does not highlight the clear difference in understanding between Sunnī and Shi‘ī commentators on the interpretation of the term wāli itself as it figures in this verse. He clearly would not agree with the common Sunnī interpretation of this verse. This is because, as Āmulī argues, God would not single out ‘Alī as a wāli in this verse if it did not have a specific meaning beyond some general application. That the term wāli has a general application in terms of its meaning is clear. Yet, according to the qur'anic exegetical tradition, in Q 5.55 God makes this general reference specific, and even particularizes it to a certain person. This is evidence enough of ‘Alī’s special status. In the following passage, Āmulī provides us with his argument, and also connects ‘Alī’s widespread spiritual influence amongst the Sufi orders as proof of his being the Seal of walāya:

> It is also well known that this sense of walāya does not depart from its general scope until someone who can make it specific does so. So ‘Alī is the Absolute wāli and the Seal of the awliyā – all of them – because no wāli comes after him except that he is upon his station and rank. That is, no wāli comes after him except that he displays something of him, and is one of his representatives. This is why the initiatory cloak of every Sufi Shaykh is only ascribed to him,30 and their paths only trace back to his representatives.31

Next, Āmulī presents some sayings of the Prophet and ‘Alī that again point up ‘Alī’s exalted rank. Amongst the traditions that Āmulī quotes in this context, one is a statement of the Prophet that reads, “‘Alī was sent with every prophet secretly (sīrā‘āt), but with me, openly (jāḥrā‘).”32 Āmulī glosses this saying on the tongue of the Prophet:

> Its meaning is that the Absolute walāya that was specified for ‘Alī secretly flowed in every messenger, just as the prophecy that was specified for me openly flowed in them, until I openly appeared in the world of the visible; and ‘Alī, likewise, appeared with me.33

Āmulī continues to explain what is meant by this, again in the words of the Prophet:

> The Absolute walāya that is specified for ‘Alī is that about which he reported in his statement, ‘I was a wāli while Adam was between water and clay.’ The Absolute prophecy that
is specified for me is that about which I have reported in my statement, ‘I was a prophet while Adam was between water and clay.’

The latter saying, ‘I was a prophet while Adam was between water and clay’, commonly figures in discussions on the doctrine of the Muhammadan Reality. This teaching highlights the primordial nature of the Prophet, which is to say that the reality of the Prophet has always been there and percolates through the generations of the prophets until it finally becomes manifest in the physical person of Muḥammad. In Āmulī’s Ḵāmi‘, however, this saying is recast in terms of Ḵāli’s walāya. Just as the Prophet, in his reality of being a prophet, was there before the first prophet (namely Adam), Ḵāli was likewise there as a wali before the first wali (namely Adam). This would be a surprising text on its own since it is rather uncommon in Islamic literature. But Āmulī tells us that the report in both its meaning (ma’nā) and linguistic form (lafz) is actually from Ibn ʿArabī, but in reference to Jesus and not Ḵāli. We thus have Ibn ʿArabī and Āmulī laying claim to this particular tradition because, for each of them, it clearly identifies the Seal of walāya (i.e. the wali who is there first but then comes last), just as the version of the tradition in which the Prophet is figured is meant to identify the Seal of the Prophets (i.e. the prophet who is there first but then comes last).

Āmulī assures his readers that the truth of the matter concerning the identity of the wali in the tradition in question will soon become clear to them. By this he means that he will adduce other traditions to demonstrate how it is that Ḵāli is more knowledgeable of God than Jesus. This is predicated on the view that the Seal of Absolute walāya should be both more knowledgeable and more eminent than everyone other than the Prophet. Amongst the arguments that Āmulī puts forth to prove that this best describes Ḵāli and not Jesus, two are particularly noteworthy:

(1) The Qur’an is greater than the Gospels and the Prophet is greater than Jesus. Therefore, since Ḵāli has knowledge of the Qur’an and the secrets of the Prophet, he is more knowledgeable than Jesus; (2) The Prophet told Ḵāli, ‘Your self is my self, your blood my blood, and your flesh my flesh.’ Since the Prophet is more eminent than all of the other prophets and Ḵāli is equated by the Prophet with himself in this tradition, Ḵāli is, equally, like the Prophet in being more eminent than all of the other prophets.

Intellect

When speaking of his assessment of the true identity of the Seal of Absolute walāya being based on the intellect (ʿaql), Āmulī has in mind something other than a full-out rational argument. Rather, he presents certain propositions, mostly scriptural in nature, and then proceeds to what he feels anyone with a sound intellect (al-ʿaql al-saḥīḥ) should be able to deduce from the evidence. As with the previous section, I shall confine my presentation of Āmulī’s position by focusing on the main thrust of his arguments.

Āmulī begins his query, partly quoting Ibn ʿArabī, with an important point, namely that the Muḥammadan Reality has two dimensions – outward and inward, which correspond to ‘prophecy’ and walāya, respectively:

It is well-known that the Shaykh regards Absolute prophecy and Absolute walāya as two specified qualities of the Muhammadan Reality, for the Muhammadan Reality has two aspects – an outward aspect, which is specified by prophecy, and an inward aspect, which is specified by walāya. And the Shaykh mentions that this walāya is acquired by the Seal
through a true inheritance, as in his statement, ‘With respect to his walāya, the relationship of the Seal of the Messengers with the Seal of [Absolute] walāya is like the relationship of the prophets and messengers with him. For the Seal of the Messengers is the wali and the Messenger-Prophet, while the Seal of awliyā [in an absolute sense] is the wali-inheritor, the one who takes from the source and who witnesses the levels of existence, all the while being one of the perfections of the Seal of the Messengers, Muḥammad.’41

There is some ambiguity in Ibn ‘Arabi’s words, ‘With respect to his walāya, the relationship of the Seal of the Messengers (khātam al-rusul) with the Seal of walāya (khatm al-walāya) is like the relationship of the prophets and messengers with him.’ Āmulī will return to this particular point later on in his discussion, and I shall thus follow his lead and remain silent on this statement until it resurfaces later. But what is clear from Āmulī’s words is that the Muḥammadan Reality contains the entire scope of walāya, whose outward nature manifests itself in the form of prophecy, and whose inward nature manifests itself in the form of walāya proper. Thus, the outward form of prophecy and the inward nature of walāya are both present in the Prophet.42 When his physical person leaves the world, prophecy is sealed with him. But walāya, as the inner dimension of the Muhammadan Reality, continues in both an absolute and restricted sense (the latter being reserved for the Mahdi, as already noted).

Given that the Seal of Absolute walāya is a manifestation of the inward dimension of the Muhammadan Reality, our authors are quick to point out that he is nevertheless still an heir to the Prophet, and thus inferior to him. This is because, to restate, the Prophet contains in his person both the outward and inward aspects of the Muhammadan Reality, whereas the wali, who is his heir, only contains in his person a lesser degree of its inward dimension.

On these details Āmulī and Ibn ‘Arabi stand in agreement. Where they disagree is of course on the identity of the Seal of Absolute walāya. Āmulī offers his most pointed argument in this important passage, where he states the only two ways in which Jesus could actually be the Seal of Absolute walāya:

It can either be with respect to his spiritual relationship with the Prophet, or with respect to his formal relationship with him. According to both propositions, ‘Ali has more right and is more fitting, since his spiritual relationship with the Prophet is known to everyone, and is known to be more abundant than that of Jesus. Likewise is the case with ‘Ali’s formal relationship with the Prophet.43

Yet the person with the greatest formal relationship to the Prophet would not, by virtue of this fact alone, be eligible to be identified as the Seal of Absolute walāya. Thus, although Āmulī presents two possibilities on how Jesus could be identified as the Seal of Absolute walāya, it seems quite clear that what is really being implied is that the only person who can be identified as the Seal of Absolute walāya is the one who has both the greatest spiritual and formal relationship to the Prophet, and that can be none other than ‘Ali.

Āmulī naturally spends less time explicating why ‘Ali shares such a close formal bond with the Prophet. Amongst the evidence Āmulī garners in order to establish what he describes as ‘more apparent than the sun’44 is ‘Ali’s close familial relationship with the Prophet. Furthermore, ‘Ali was the heir to the Prophet’s knowledge, the ‘treasurer-keeper of his secret’, his appointed representative, and the Imam of his community.45
With respect to ‘Ali’s superior spiritual relationship to the Prophet, Āmulī produces several arguments to support his claim. These arguments testify to ‘Ali’s special rank, which belongs neither to Jesus nor to any of the other prophets and messengers. The first of these is a version of a famous Shi‘ī Hadith in which the Prophet says, ‘God created my soul and ‘Ali’s soul before creating other human beings, as He so willed.’ Then the Prophet states that his soul and ‘Ali’s soul were passed on, from pure womb to pure womb, untainted with the defilement of associating partners with God (danās al-shirk) and submersion in the life of ignorance (ghamr al-jāhilīyya), until they became manifest in the loins of their respective fathers. The tradition ends with the Prophet’s well-known words, ‘Ali is from me and I am from him. His self is my self, and obedience to him is obedience to me. He who angers him does not love me, and he who loves him does not anger me.’ To be sure, shortly after quoting this Hadith Āmulī provides us with another that is almost identical, but with the emphasis now on the Prophet and ‘Ali being created from the same light (nūr), which stood before God for fourteen thousand years before God created Adam.

Āmulī further argues that this special spiritual relationship that ‘Ali has with the Prophet is confirmed by Ibn ‘Arabi himself in Chapter 6 of the Futūḥāt. In the relevant part of this chapter, Ibn ‘Arabi engages in a detailed explanation of the way in which God created the universe through the Primordial Dust (habāʾ), also known as Universal Hyle (al-hayūlī al-kullī) or the Cloud (‘amā). Within the Primordial Dust, all things receive the light of God’s self-disclosure (tajallī) in accordance with their readiness (isti’dād). The most receptive to God’s light is the Reality of Muḥammad (haqīqat Muḥammad), also known as the First Intellect (al-‘aql al-awwal). Although the relationship between the Primordial Dust and the Reality of the Prophet is complex in Ibn ‘Arabi’s thought, the main point to come away with is that Āmulī would like to demonstrate how, by Ibn ‘Arabi’s own confession, ‘Ali is the nearest of all beings to the reality of the Prophet, the first of God’s creation. To illustrate his position, Āmulī continues with his quotation from Ibn ‘Arabi’s Futūḥāt:

Muhammad is the master of the cosmos – all of it – and the first to emerge in existence. His existence was from that Divine Light, the Primordial Dust, and from the Universal Reality. In the Primordial Dust, his entity and the entity of the cosmos came to exist. And the nearest of men to him and the secrets of all of the prophets is ‘Ali b. Abī Ṭalib.

Āmulī then draws the ‘natural’ conclusion with respect to ‘Ali in this lengthy but telling passage:

This is a definitive statement and a clear proof concerning his being the Seal of Absolute walāya, since it affirms that the Muḥammadan Reality has two aspects: an outward aspect and an inward one. The inward aspect is tied to the wali, who is the Seal, the one who is the closest of men to the Prophet and is ‘one of his perfections’. For other than ‘Ali, none has this proximity, nor this specificity. This is especially the case since allusions have been related from the Prophet that indicate this, such as his statements, ‘I and ‘Ali are from one light’ and ‘I and ‘Ali are from one tree’, and other aforementioned allusions like these that indicate that the two of them are from one light and from one reality. Likewise is this the case with ‘Ali’s statements, ‘I am the dot under the bā’; ‘I am the first and the last, the manifest and the hidden’; ‘I am the face of God, and I am next to God’... All of this indicates that the reality of ‘Ali and the reality of the Prophet are one, which is the point of the current discussion.
Why Āmulī sees such definitive evidence in a text by Ibn ‘Arabī that the author himself does not see will become clear in the following section.

Unveiling

This last section in Āmulī’s argument is in many ways a continuation of the previous section on the intellect. That is to say Āmulī proceeds to outline his argument from several different angles, while also drawing on some earlier points and elaborating upon them. There is no doubt that Āmulī is also the most polemical in this section, and even calls into question Ibn ‘Arabī’s claim that the Fusūṣ was given to him by the Prophet in a dream.56

With respect to the kashf or unveiling that Āmulī adduces as proof for the identity of ‘Alī as the Seal of Absolute walāya, it is important to note that he is not concerned with giving us an account of his unveilings that would confirm this position. Rather, he seems to want to say that his perspective is itself based on kashf. This is all the more likely given the fact that, as we have seen, Āmulī is not entirely impartial in his interpretations of the textual evidence to be found in the Qur’an, Hadith, and even Ibn ‘Arabī’s own writings. That is to say, the reason there are so many instances in which Āmulī sees a given text as clear-cut evidence for his understanding that ‘Alī is the Seal of Absolute walāya is not because of some unequivocal proof that can be verified by all, but, rather, because of Āmulī’s own kashf into the matter.

But Āmulī even goes so far as to explicitly say that it is not only his kashf that has revealed the truth of the situation. Rather, Ibn ‘Arabī’s kashf also testifies to the same reality:

The unveiling of the Shaykh and his aforementioned masters is that Jesus has more right and is more fitting to be the Seal of Absolute walāya. Our unveiling and the unveiling of other masters is that ‘Alī has more right and is more fitting for this rank. Along with this, if you were to reflect, you would come to recognize that the unveiling of the Shaykh also bears witness to this.57

To support his point, Āmulī revisits one of the key texts from Ibn ‘Arabī’s Fusūṣ, which I have had occasion to quote earlier. The main thrust of this passage, it will be recalled, is that there is a fundamental distinction between the Seal of the Messengers and the Seal of walāya, and that the latter inherits the inward reality of the former. Āmulī proceeds through what looks like a paradox to show how Ibn ‘Arabī’s kashf supports his own kashf on the same question. Ibn ‘Arabī’s statement, ‘With respect to his walāya, the relationship of the Seal of the Messengers with the Seal of walāya is like the relationship of the prophets and messengers with him’, is glossed by Āmulī as meaning that the dependency that the prophets and messengers have upon the Seal of the Messengers for their prophecy and messengerhood is the same kind of dependency that the Seal of the Messengers has upon the Seal of walāya for his own prophecy and messengerhood.58

This interpretation given by Āmulī is indeed in keeping with what Ibn ‘Arabī says in this section of the Fusūṣ, even though Āmulī does not quote the entire section.59 On the face of it, these statements would seem to imply that the Seal of walāya is above the Seal of the Messengers, and this indeed is how they were taken by some of Ibn ‘Arabī’s most important medieval detractors, such as Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328).60 Commenting on this very passage from the Fusūṣ (and a cluster of other associated texts from the
Futūḥāt), the late Michel Chodkiewicz notes that, with respect to the Seal of the Messengers, the dependency in question is not ‘with regard to another being but to the subordination within himself of the visible aspect to the hidden aspect’, which is to say, ‘of the nubuwwa, which is an attribute of created being and comes to an end, to the walāya, which is a divine attribute and exists to eternity’.61 As we shall see, this observation is very much in keeping with the points that Āmuli will also make within the context of his own Imamology.

Āmuli says that Ibn ‘Arabi’s statements in the Fuṣūṣ can only be correct if we posit that the reality of both the Seal of the Messengers and the Seal of walāya are one, but with an outward and inward aspect, which would belong to the Seal of the Messengers and the Seal of walāya respectively. For if the inner reality of these Seals were not conceived as being one and the same, it would mean that prophecy and walāya are two separate things. If this were the case, then Ibn ‘Arabi’s words would entail that Jesus in fact has preponderance (tarjih) over the Prophet, which is not permissible.62 The same would apply to the case of ‘Ali.63 Nevertheless, Āmuli maintains that such a description as we find in this passage from the Fuṣūṣ under discussion applies more fully to ‘Ali primarily because Jesus is not ‘one of the perfections of the Seal of the Messengers’, whereas ‘Ali is.64 This must be taken to mean that, as Āmuli sees it, Jesus is not a wali-inheritor, and thus cannot be counted as being one of the Prophet’s perfections as such, since the perfection of the Prophet relates directly to his inward nature, which is walāya (i.e. the inward dimension of the Muḥammadan Reality). Jesus, for Āmuli, would correspond to being a perfection of the Prophet’s outward nature (i.e. the outward dimension of the Muḥammadan Reality) insofar as they are both prophets.

Āmuli also tells us that the Seal of walāya receives his knowledge of God without the need of an intermediary (wāsiṭa), which corroborates Ibn ‘Arabi’s statement that the Seal of walāya ‘takes from the source (aṣl)’65 and ‘sees the matter as it truly is.’66 Reflecting on Ibn ‘Arabi’s statement that the Seal of walāya ‘sees the matter as it truly is’, Āmuli insists that this too cannot pertain to Jesus.67 Rather, this can only be ‘the rank of the Pole of poles (qūṭb al-aqtāb) and no one else, for it is the special privilege of our Prophet and those of the awliyā who stand in his station, like the Commander of the Faithful (amīr al-muʾminīn) and his offspring’.68 Yet Āmuli introduces a problematic distinction here. Surely he does not wish to suggest that the Prophet is the Pole of poles, since he is above that station. But he does seem to want to say that ‘Ali, alongside being the Seal of walāya, is also the Pole of poles. Āmuli is even more explicit on this point several pages later, where he refers to ‘Ali as the ‘Pole of poles and the perfect ones (qūṭb al-aqtāb wa-al-kummal)’.69 However, such an identification is very problematic because the functions of the Seal of walāya and the Pole of poles in Ibn ‘Arabi’s hagiology clearly belong to different people, without any room for confusion between their respective offices.70

As for the Seal of the Messengers, he takes his knowledge from the same source, but through an intermediary, namely Gabriel, the Angel of revelation.71 To explain the apparent problem, Āmuli introduces another text from al-Qaṣṣārī’s commentary on the Fuṣūṣ:

The Seal of the Messengers only looks at the Real from the rank of his own self, not from the rank of someone else. Thus, no deficiency is entailed. It is like the treasure-keeper who, at the command of the sultan, gives something from the treasury to both a peasant and the sultan, and the sultan takes it from him just as the peasant would. Thus, there is no deficiency.72
Not surprisingly, Āmulī even sees in this explanation an indication of ‘Ali’s exalted rank as the Seal of Absolute walāya:

The treasure is the divine realities hidden within universal prophecy, and which are specified for our Prophet. The treasure-keeper is the one who stands in the station of the Prophet’s inward nature, which is universal walāya. And that would be ‘Ali, since their realities are one.73

Al-Qaysārī also maintains that, since the Seal of Absolute walāya is ‘the one who is the locus of manifestation for the inward All-Comprehensive Name (ism jāmi’), he is in fact higher than the angel of revelation, which explains why he does not need the medium of the angel to communicate divine knowledge.74 Agreeing that this point made by al-Qaysārī is also correct, Āmulī follows up on it in this manner:

However, there is a fine point here: The angel is an intermediary between God and the prophets in the world of forms and the station of humanness. If this were not the case, the angel would be in the world of reality and the station of walāya. But there is no angel there, not even Gabriel. As the Prophet said, ‘I have a moment with God in which neither proximate angel nor sent prophet are permitted’;75 and in Gabriel’s words, ‘If I were to come one inch closer, I would burn to ashes!’76

The difference here has to do with the embodied form of the prophets. Put differently, it is because of the outward form of the Muḥammadan Reality that there needs to be an outward intermediary for the revelation. But with respect to the inward reality of Muḥammad, there need not be a intermediary because of the inward nature of the receptacle. This again calls to mind the distinction Āmulī makes (following Ibn ʿArabi) between the outward and inward aspects of the Muḥammadan Reality, with the former corresponding to prophecy and the latter to walāya. To be sure, Āmulī offers a way of approach, while also reiterating his stance on ‘Ali as the inward nature of the Prophet and thus the Seal of Absolute walāya:

The etiquette here is to say that the inward nature of this Prophet, which is the station of walāya, takes the effusion from God without any intermediary other than himself. And God then effuses [this knowledge through the medium of Gabriel] to his outward form, which is the station of prophecy. However, the station of his walāya in the world of manifestation is specified for the Seal of [Absolute] walāya, the one who is created from the Prophet’s special light, who is his spirit and reality. As he said, ‘I and ‘Ali are from one light.’ In accordance with this position, this station does not apply to Jesus.77

Closing remark

It is my hope that the foregoing discussion has been able to display the underlying logic behind Ḥaydar Āmulī’s response to Ibn ʿArabī on the question of the Seal of Absolute walāya. What is quite remarkable is the etiquette or adab that Āmulī the Shi‘ī displays towards his illustrious Sunni predecessor, even after vehemently disagreeing with him. Like a true gentleman, at the end of his discussion on the question of walāya, Āmulī offers his humble apology:

If the Shaykh is perfect in relation to others on another occasion, on this occasion he is deficient in relation to others. But this does not detract from the perfection of the one who is perfect, because the perfect one does not have to be perfect on every level, just as Ibn ʿArabi himself has indicated78 … . Nevertheless, these [statements of ours] and the like are bad etiquette from us towards him, for he is the Shaykh of the Tribe and the
head of the Folk. So we seek pardon concerning what we have said: 'The plea for pardon before noble men is accepted.'

Notes


5. This is a major lacuna that will soon be filled by Nicholas Boylston. For starters, see his article, ‘Quranic Exegesis at theMeeting between Twelver Shi’ism and Sufism: Sayyid Ḥaydar Âmuli’s al-Muḥît al-ʿaẓîm (The Greatest Ocean)’, Journal of Qur’anic Studies (forthcoming).


7. In this article, I refrain from translating walâya, given the nuanced ways in which it features as a technical expression in both Sufism and Shi’ism. In Sufism, walâya refers to ‘sainthood’ or ‘friendship’ with God, and is the goal of the spiritual life. In Shi’ism, walâya primarily designates the sanctity and spiritual authority of the Imams, who are infallible (maʾṣûm) and divinely designated (mansûs) to fulfill their charge as the rightful heirs of the Prophet. Thus, while in Sufism anyone can become a wali, the function of walâya in Shi’ism is only open to the Prophets and the Imams. At the same time, walâya also plays an important religious, communal and social role in Shi’i life and thought; for the manner in which walâya allowed the early Shi’i community to develop its sense of self-identity, see Maria Dakake, The Charismatic Community: Shi’ite Identity in Early Islam (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007). Of course, there is a great degree of overlap between Sufism and Shi’ism by virtue of walâya’s initiatory and sanctifying function. For the relationship between Sufism and Shi’ism in this regard (and in general), see Corbin, En islam iranien, 3:149–355 and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Sufi Essays (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1972), 104–20. One may also profitably consult the various papers in Denis Hermann and Mathieu Terrier, eds, Shi’i Islam and Sufism: Classical Views and Modern Perspectives (London: I. B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2020).

8. Ḥamiyya, al-ʿIrŷân al-shî’î, 419–70.


14. The most comprehensive study of Ibn ‘Arabi’s doctrine of the Seal(s) of walāya is Chodkiewicz, Seal of the Saints. See also Elmore, Islamic Sainthood, 131–62.

15. See the discussion in Āmuli, Muqaddimāt, 64–154, as well as the passage from his Jāmi’ quoted at the end of the present article.


17. An extensive discussion of the entire problem of the Seal of walāya in Āmuli can be found in Hamiyya, al-‘Irfān al-shī‘ī, 377–492.


20. Ibid., 396–8, §§ 793–6; quoting Ibn ‘Arabi, Futūhāt, 1: 184–5. See also Chodkiewicz, Seal of the Saints, 120–1, which discusses another part of this passage from the Futūhāt.

21. Āmuli, Jāmi’, 398–9, §§ 797–8; quoting al-Qaysārī, Sharḥ Fūṣūs al-hikam, ed. Ḥasanāzādah Āmuli, 2 vols (Qum: Bustān-i Kītāb, 2002), 1: 246, who in turn is quoting Ibn ‘Arabi, Futūhāt, 2: 49. The passage is translated in Chodkiewicz, Seal of the Saints, 117–18. Why Āmuli does not directly quote the texts from the Futūhāt here is unclear. He may simply not have had this particular part of the work with him. Or, he may have provided al-Qaysārī’s quotations from the text to demonstrate his earlier observation that Ibn ‘Arabi has some followers who accept his position on the respective identities of the Seals of wulāya.

22. Āmuli, Jāmi’, 399, § 799; quoting al-Qaysārī, Sharḥ, 1:270–1, who is in turn quoting Ibn ‘Arabi, Futūhāt, 2: 50.

23. All translations of Qur’ānic verses are taken from Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Caner Daglı, Maria Dakake, Joseph Lumbard, and Mohammed Rustom, eds, The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary (New York: HarperOne, 2015). The only modification here is in the following quotation from the Qur’an, where I have retained the Arabic word wali when quoting the translation.

24. That is, muṭlaqa and muqayyada respectively.


26. Āmuli, Jāmi’, 400, § 802.

27. Ibid., 400–6, §§ 802–13.

28. Ibid., 406, § 802.
29. This point, and the rest of the information in this paragraph, are derived from the commentary on Q 5.55 in Nasr et al., Study Quran.
30. The well-known exception to this rule is the Naqshbandiyya order, which traces one of its lines of descent back to the first Sunni Caliph Abū Bakr (d. 13/634). The other two lines of transmission amongst the Naqshbandiyya, like every other Sufi order, trace their lineage back to ‘Ali. See Itzchak Weismann, The Naqshbandiyya: Orthodoxy and Activism in a Worldwide Sufi Tradition (London: Routledge, 2007), 23–4. For Āmulī’s extended version of this argument, where he provides the names of many important Sufi figures who have some form of connection to ‘Ali, see Naṣṣ, 216–23, § 491–505.
32. Ibid., § 804.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
36. Āmulī, Jāmī’, 401, § 804. Ibn ‘Arabī is in favour of the meaning, but does not call it a tradition; see Fūṣūs al-ḥikam, ed. A. E. ʿAfīfī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿArabīyya, 1946), 64. The passage from the Fūṣūs can be found in translation (and in context) in Chodkiewicz, Seal of the Saints, 124.
37. Āmulī, Jāmī’, 402, § 806.
38. Ibid., 403, § 807.
39. Ibid., § 808.
40. See Āmulī’s comments in ibid., 412, § 827.
41. Ibid., 407, § 814. The quotation from Ibn ‘Arabī can be found in Fūṣūs, 64. This is part of a lengthy passage that is translated and discussed in Chodkiewicz, Seal of the Saints, 122–5. I follow Chodkiewicz (p. 124) in rendering hasana min hasanāt as ‘one of the perfections’.
42. See also Āmulī, Jāmī’, 417, § 837.
43. Ibid., 407–8, § 815.
44. Ibid., 412, § 825.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid., 409, § 817.
47. Ibid., 408, § 816. Note here again the Prophet’s referring to ‘Ali as his ‘self’.
50. For a helpful outline of Ibn ‘Arabī’s sophisticated cosmology, see Chittick, Self-Disclosure of God, xxix–xxxv.
51. Āmulī, Jāmī’, 410–1, § 821; quoting Ibn ‘Arabī, Futūḥāt, 1: 119.
52. It will be recalled that we encountered this phrase earlier, in Ibn ‘Arabī, Fūṣūs, 46.
53. Cf. Q 57.3.
55. Āmulī, Jāmī’, 411, §§ 822–3. In the corresponding section in Nuṣṣūs, 203, § 456, Āmulī replaces the khutbat al-bayān with ‘Ali’s other famous (and similar) sermon, the khutbat al-iftikhāriyya.
56. See Āmulī, Jāmī’, 419–20, § 841.
57. Ibid., 413, § 828.
References


Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).


