

The treatise of Sayyid Kāzīm Rashī on the Shīī graphical form of the Mightiest Name of God (al-ism al-a`zam).

Stephen N. Lambden (Ohio University at Athens).

ABSTRACT



SAYYID KĀZĪM RASHĪ

(d.1259 /1843).

The charismatic Persian Shīī thinker Sayyid Kāzīm Rashī (c. 1212/1798-1259/1843) was the second head of al-Shaykhiyya, the so-called Shaykhī school of Shīī Islam which emerged during the early Qājār period. He succeeded the sage, philosopher and mystic thinker, the foundational figure for Shaykhism, Shaykh Aḥmad b. Zayn al-Din al-Aḥsāī (1166-1241 = 1753-1826 CE). Born in the eastern Arabian province of al-Aḥsā (= Ḥasā) he lived most of his life in the Shīīte shrine cites of Iraq (1790s – early 1800s) and in Iran (1806-1826) and passed away in the Mecca-Medinan region whilst on Islamic pilgrimage.

Like Shaykh Aḥmad, Sayyid Kāzīm was a prolific and wide-ranging writer in both Persian and Arabic. The bibliographical Fihrist (“Index”) of Ibrahīmī lists around 166 of his writings which have been much less studied and published than his master Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsāī.

The graphical form of the al-ism al-a`zam (Mightiest Name) is specifically said to have the following *ṣūrat* (form) towards the beginning of the *Risālah fī sharḥ wa tafsīr ism al-a`zam*:



Though an extra initial as well as the final pentalpha (☆) (as above) is not always represented in the ten or more variant forms of the graphical representation of the Mightiest or Greatest Name of God, the seven (or more) sigla / components comprising it are collectively representative of the all-Powerful divine "Name". They are largely if not wholly derived from their graphical depiction ascribed to the first Shī`ī Imam, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad, Imam Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40 / 661) to whom a good deal of esoteric knowledge and sometimes Isrā`īliyyāt (loosely, "Israelitica"), Islamo-biblical and associated traditions are ascribed. Note for example, the al-Khuṭbah al-ṭutunjiyya [or taṭanjiyya] (loosely, "Sermon of the Gulf") contained in the *Mashāriq anwār al-yaqīn fī asrār Amīr al-Mu`minīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Andalus, 1978, pp. 166-170) of al-Ḥāfiẓ Rajab, al-Bursī (d. c. 814/1411) and the unpublished marginally written Persian treatise on (3X3 type) 'Magic squares and talismanic devices' attributed to this first Imam 'Alī which is held in the national Library of Medicine (mss. 'On Magic Squares and Talismans' MS P 29, marginal - item 15; refer <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/hmd/arabic/astrology3.html>).

Sayyid Kāẓim cites the following sevenfold Arabic description of the al-ism al-a`zam: it is,

- [1] Three rods (*'uṣṣiy*) in a row [|||] after
- [2] a seal [*khātam* = ☆]; above them the likeness of a straightened lance [--].
- [3] A blind [Arabic letter] M [mīm م] without a tail;
- [4] then a ladder unto all that is hoped for, but which is not a ladder [##].
- [5] Four things like fingers in a row, pointing to good deeds, but without a wrist [IIII]
- [6] And a [letter] "H" (*hā'*) which is cleft (*shaqīq*) [ھ]
- [7] then an inverted [letter] wāw و like the syphon of a phlebotomist (*ka-anbūb ḥajjām*, "tube of the cupper") though not a cupping glass (*mihjam*):

This is [representative] of the Mighty Name (*al-ism al-mu`azzim*);
If you knew it not aforetime, then know it now!

O bearer of the Mighty Name (*sāhib al-ism al-`azīm*), take sufficiency in it, for you shall be preserved from misfortunes and kept safe thereby. It is the Name of God (*ism Allāh*) -- exalted be His glory -- unto all humankind whether pure Arab (*faṣṭḥ*) or non-Arab (*a'jam*).¹

Sayyid Kāzim's imamologically oriented commentary on the poetical and graphic Isrā'īliyyāt rooted traditions regarding the symbol of the Mightiest Name cannot be discussed in detail save to note that he also draws upon allegedly pre-Islamic dimensions of traditions about the Mightiest Name of God. Rashtī commences his commentary by acknowledging his indebtedness to the upright, pious and sagacious

¹Arab. text cited from al-Būnī, *Shams*, cited Winckler, 1930:69-71 with German trans. 71 ; text and French trans. Anawati, 1967:24, 27; Eng. trans. MacEoin, 1982 [BSB 1/1:4-14] = 1992:93-97 = App. XXIII. I have adapted MacEoin's translation in the light of the other translations and al-Būnī's *Shams*.

master, named Shaykh Muhammad Aḥmad (= Shaykh Aḥmad?! Al-Būnī?). Through him he was informed that "certain of the religious communities (*al-millī*) are aware of portions of the words (*al-kalimāt*) constituting the Mightiest Name (*al-ism al-a`zam*)". It is stated that they are evident in "fourteen temples" (*hayākil*), apparently indicating the Shī`ite pleroma ("fullness") of Muhammad, Fāṭima and the 12 Imams. Differentiated or subdivided into thirteen "letters" after the thirteen individual elements constituting the seven graphic sigla which make up the mightiest Name of God (counting from the initial pentacle (☆) to the inverted *wāw*) eight portions out of the 13 were known to the pre-Islamic communities. Four elements ("letters") derive from the *Tawrat*, (the Torah, Hebrew Bible) and four from the *Injīl* ("Gospel"), the other five derive from the Q. (4+4+5 =13). Sayyid Kāzīm's explanations of these components of the *al-ism al-a`zam* are distinctly imamological (Rashtī, Sh-Islm, 271 aff).

The Sayyid further explains how it is that the Torah has four "letters" of the Mightiest Name. He explains that this is so in the light of the following well-known prophetic *ḥadīth*, "O `Alī you are to me after the manner of Aaron to Moses". A typological relationship is thus set up between Moses and Muhammad. Moses [= Muhammad], it is explained, is foundational (*asī an*), the Reality (*al-ḥaqīqa*), while the Torah (*al-tawrat*) before him is his essential persona (*aṣāla dhāt an*). Moses the prophet (*al-nabī*) is essentially the Moses of the gate of reality upon reality (*ḥaqīqa*). In a metaphorical sense the reality of the Torah which was revealed before him consists of four letters which are the four lettered personal name Muhammad (= M-Ḥ-M-D). The manifestation of the name Muhammad before Moses took place at the Sinaitic theophany (*tajallī*) of the Lord (= Q. 7:143). The agent of this theophany is again said to have been an individual from among the cherubim (*rajal min al-karubiyyīn*) evidently one associated with the name Muhammad (Rashtī, Sh-Islm, 273b).

That four letters of the *al-ism al-a`zam* are found in "the *Injīl* of Jesus son of Mary" is also commented upon by Sayyid Kāzīm. He states, "And he [Jesus] is the likeness (*mithāl*) of [Imam] `Alī." This typological equation also has to do with the letters of the mightiest Name being imamologically realized. That Imam `Alī is equated with Jesus finds echoes in the writings of the Bāb (see Persian Bayan VIII:2). Five "letter" components of Mightiest Name are also allotted to the Q. They are imamologically understood as representing the pentad of the four twelver Imams, [1] Ḥasan, [2] Ḥusayn,

[3] Ja`far al-Şādiq, [4] Mūsā and the prophet's daughter [5] Fāṭima. At one point in his commentary on the *Khuṭba al-ṭutunjiyya* Sayyid Kāẓim also interprets the seven graphic sigla of the Mightiest Name imamologically, as [1] Muhammad, and six of the Imams, [2] `Alī, [3] Fāṭima [4] Ḥasan, [5] Ḥusayn, [6] Ja`far and [7] Mūsā. These seven are indicative of the fullness, the pleroma of the fourteen (= 2x7) immaculate ones (Sh.Ttnj : 53).

It is also interesting to note that Sayyid Kāẓim gives the seventh item, the inverted letter *wāw* و a messianic significance stating that it "alludes to the [messianic] Proof (*al-ḥujjat*), the son of Ḥasan [al-Askarī, the 11th Imam, d. c. 260/874]". The central (hidden) letter "A" (*alif*) of the three letters of *wāw* when spelled out in full (= و ا و) (represents the Qā'im [messianic Ariser]) as one "stationed between the two gulfs (*ṭutunjayn*), the isthmus (*barzakh*) between the two worlds". This mode of exegesis is also taken up in Bābī-Bahā'ī scripture, most notably in the *Qayyūm al-asmā'* of the Bāb and, for example, the *al-Kitāb al-aqdas* ("Most Holy Book" c. 1873) and *Lawḥ-i Hirtik* of Bahā'u'llāh.

In this paper the above and related themes and motifs will be succinctly developed and commented upon in the light of Islamic and Shaykhī, Bābī and Bahā'ī doctrines and practices.
