

**Reason and Inspiration in Islam: Theology, Philosophy,
and Mysticism in Muslim Thought. Essays in
Honour of Hermann Landolt**

Todd Lawson, ed.

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Thirty-eight essays are brought together in this volume to honor Hermann Landolt of the Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill University, Canada. A broad range of participants, including former students and colleagues both close and distant, have contributed essays, most of which deal with aspects of Ismaili, Ithna-ashari, or Sufi thought. Almost all of the essays are in English; four are in French, however. The range of topics is catholic, to say the least, and the rough chronological ordering of the essays can hardly contain them.

The “classical” section features such figures as al-Junayd, al-Farabi, Ibn Tufayl, al-Qadi al-Nu`man, al-Kirmani, Abu Hatim al-Razi, and al-Waqidi; the “medieval” takes in al-Ghazzali, al-Suhrawardi, al-Qushayri, al-Shahrastani, Afdal al-Din Kashani, Jami’, Najm al-Din Kubra, Ibn Sina, and al-Sha`rani; the “pre-modern” includes Shah Tahir, Ahmad Sirhindi, Molla Sadra, and Fayd al-Kashani; and the “modern” section features not so much people as themes, such as dervish orders, Ginans, ulama, tradition, and modernization. It is worth noting that several articles in the last section focus their attention on medieval as much as modern aspects (if not more so, as in the case of Eric Ormsby’s interesting essay “The Faith of Pharaoh: A Disputed Question in Islamic Theology”). Their classification seems to be more out of consideration for achieving balance in the book’s form than in accurately reflecting the contents. Be that as it may, such a cornucopia (as the editor describes it) cannot help but provide something of relevance to almost everyone interested in Islamic thought.

Two essays particularly drew my attention; they also left me wishing that the two authors had had an opportunity to consider the conjunction between their papers before they were published (but the absence of such is, of course, in the nature of most such collections). L. Clarke’s excellent paper on “The Rise and Decline of *Taqiyya* in Twelver Shi`ism” will reward every reader. Clarke shows how two meanings of *taqiyya* – “precautionary dissimulation of belief” and “esoteric silence,” what she calls legal and esoteric *taqiyya*, respectively – became blended through the ages. Esoteric *taqiyya* was “a necessary and integral part” of Twelver Shi`ism in early times, for the

community's very existence and status depended upon notions of privileged knowledge belonging to the Imams, which is shared secretly with the community. This is the basis of the concept of *taqiyya*.

However, as Clarke outlines, such secret knowledge is more a matter of form than content. It is a "discursive strategy" designed to convey a privilege of membership and identity, within which, perhaps ironically, the primary prohibition on disclosure is focused on members within (as opposed to outside) the community. The Imams *must* have knowledge that is unknown to their followers for their status to be preserved. This serves to remind those inside that there is always more knowledge to be had. Such knowledge sustains the believer's "wonder and devotion." Such *taqiyya* also supports quietism, for knowledge cannot be revealed until the time is right (in the messianic age).

What we see in later centuries, however, is a focus on legal *taqiyya*, a tendency that Clarke traces in origin to Shaykh al-Mufid (d. 413/1022), who emphasized it as a duty only in circumstances of dire necessity. Sunni-Shi'i polemics are said to be the main cause of this shift. This was because the potential of hidden knowledge, with its inherent attitude of quietism, left the community in a tenuous situation – one that had, by modern times, proven to be totally incompatible with the community's aspirations. Within this new understanding, the Imams' status became protected by the doctrine of infallibility (*'ismah*) rather than esoteric knowledge, and quietism was no longer considered a suspect attitude.

It would have been fascinating indeed if this article could have been brought into conjunction with the topic of Bulbul Shah's essay: "Al-Qadi Nu'man and the Concept of *Batin*." Here, the Fatimid Ismailis' esoteric aspect is discussed in terms of the contrast between *zahir* (exoteric) and *batin* (esoteric). The Imams become the repository of the Qur'an's esoteric knowledge, which was passed on from one Imam to the next. After reading this, I was left wondering about the role of the *zahir/batin* dichotomy in early Ithna-ashari thought and how that might tie into the notion of the esoteric *taqiyya* explored so lucidly by Clarke.

Any good collection of essays, even if on disparate topics, will provide readers with food for thought on topics that capture their imagination. This one certainly did so for me. The editor is to be congratulated for bringing together such a fine tribute to Hermann Landolt.

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