Words of Power
The Institute of Ismaili Studies
Shi'i Heritage Series, 3

Editorial Board: Farhad Daftary (general editor), Maria De Cillis (managing editor), Gurdofarid Miskinzoda (managing editor), Mohammad-Ali Amir-Moezzi, Hermann Landolt, Wilferd Madelung, Andrew Newman, Sabine Schmidtke, Paul E. Walker

Previously published titles:
The Institute of Ismaili Studies was established in 1977 with the object of promoting scholarship and learning on Islam, in the historical as well as contemporary contexts, and a better understanding of its relationship with other societies and faiths.

The Institute’s programmes encourage a perspective which is not confined to the theological and religious heritage of Islam, but seeks to explore the relationship of religious ideas to broader dimensions of society and culture. The programmes thus encourage an interdisciplinary approach to the materials of Islamic history and thought. Particular attention is also given to issues of modernity that arise as Muslims seek to relate their heritage to the contemporary situation.

Within the Islamic tradition, the Institute’s programmes promote research on those areas which have, to date, received relatively little attention from scholars. These include the intellectual and literary expressions of Shi‘ism in general, and Ismailism in particular.

In the context of Islamic societies, the Institute’s programmes are informed by the full range and diversity of cultures in which Islam is practised today, from the Middle East, South and Central Asia, and Africa to the industrialised societies of the West, thus taking into consideration the variety of contexts that shape the ideals, beliefs and practices of the faith.

These objectives are realised through concrete programmes and activities organised and implemented by various departments of the Institute. The Institute also collaborates periodically, on a programme-specific basis, with other institutions of learning in the United Kingdom and abroad.

The Institute’s academic publications fall into a number of interrelated categories:
1. Occasional papers or essays addressing broad themes of the relationship between religion and society, with special reference to Islam.

2. Works exploring specific aspects of Islamic faith and culture, or the contributions of individual Muslim thinkers or writers.

3. Editions or translations of significant primary or secondary texts.

4. Translations of poetic or literary texts that illustrate the rich heritage of spiritual, devotional and symbolic expressions in Muslim history.

5. Works on Ismaili history and thought, and the relationship of the Ismailis to other traditions, communities and schools of thought in Islam.


7. Bibliographical works and catalogues that document manuscripts, printed texts and other source materials.

This book falls into category two listed above.

In facilitating these and other publications, the Institute's sole aim is to encourage original research and analysis of relevant issues. While every effort is made to ensure that the publications are of a high academic standard, there is naturally bound to be a diversity of views, ideas and interpretations. As such, the opinions expressed in these publications must be understood as belonging to their authors alone.
Shiʿi Muslims, with their rich intellectual and cultural heritage, have contributed significantly to the fecundity and diversity of the Islamic traditions throughout the centuries, enabling Islam to evolve and flourish both as a major religion and also as a civilisation. In spite of this, Shiʿi Islam has received little scholarly attention in the West, either in medieval or modern times. It is only in recent decades that academic interest has focused increasingly on Shiʿi Islam within the wider study of Islam.

The principal objective of the Shiʿi Heritage Series, launched by The Institute of Ismaili Studies, is to enhance general knowledge of Shiʿi Islam and promote a better understanding of its history, doctrines and practices in their historical and contemporary manifestations. Addressing all Shiʿi communities, the series also aims to engage in discussions on theoretical and methodological issues, while inspiring further research in the field.

Works published in this series include monographs, collective volumes, editions and translations of primary texts, and bibliographical projects, bringing together some of the most significant themes in the study of Shiʿi Islam through an interdisciplinary approach, and making them accessible to a wide readership.
To the memory of my grandparents
### Table of Contents

**Note on Transliteration and Conventions**  
xi

**Preface and Acknowledgements**  

**INTRODUCTION**  
Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī and his Followers  
Overview of Academic Research and the Purpose of the Present Book  
Puzzle of Fragments: Structure and Language of the *Jāwidān-nāma-yi kabīr*  

**PART I: COSMOGONY AND COSMOLOGY: THE LANGUAGE OF THE CREATION**  
1. Primordial Unity: The Semantics of the Creation  
3. Adam and Eve: The Form of the Word  
4. Excursus on Knowledge and Love  
5. Time: The Receptacle of the Word  
6. The Universe: Diversity in the Unity of the Word

**PART II: PROPHETOLOGY: THE DESCENT OF THE WORD AND ITS RETURN TO THE ORIGIN**  
7. Adam and Eve: The Prototype of Prophetic Experience and the Personification of the Prophetic Cycle  
8. The Revelation (*Tanzīl*): From the Divine to the Human Language  
   Joseph: The *Ta’wil* of Compound Units  
   Moses: Fragmentation and *Ta’wil*
Solomon: The 'Language of the Birds' 267
10. Jesus and Muḥammad: The 'Motherly' (Ummī) Prophets between Tanzil and Tā’wil 273
   Jesus, Son of Mary 273
   Muḥammad and the Revelation of the 'Mother of the Book' 285
11. From Idrīs to Moses: Other Significant Features of the Prophetic Missions 305

PART III: SOTERIOLOGY AND ESCHATOLOGY 319
12. Ways of Individual Salvation: Paradise of Knowledge and Hell of Ignorance 321
13. The Last Stage of the Cycle of the Word: The Ummīs and the End of Time 339

CONCLUSION: THE JĀWIDĀN-NĀMA IN THE CONTEXT OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT 387
The Jāwidān-nāma as Qurānic Commentary 389
The Jāwidān-nāma, Sufism and Esoteric Shi‘ism 398
The Messianic Project of the Jāwidān-nāma and the Use of Christian Apocalyptic Texts 427
Final Notes 434

Glossary of Key Technical Terms 437
Inventory I: Hadiths and Sayings 463
Inventory II: Biblical Citations 475
Index of Qurānic Citations 479
Persian Text of the Citations 483
Anonymous Note concerning the Thematic Organisation of the Fragments of the Jāwidān-nāma 483
Citations from the Jāwidān-nāma 485
Citations from the Works of Faḍl Allāh’s Followers 550
Astarābādī Vocabulary 553
Bibliography 557
General Index 573
The transliteration of Arabic and Persian in this book follows the rules of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, with some modifications: $j$ instead of $dj$, $ch$ instead of $č$, $q$ instead of $k$. Turkish transliteration conforms to modern Turkish orthography.

Unless otherwise indicated, the translation of all Qur'anic verses follows that of A. J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, occasionally with some modifications required by the context.

Qur'anic verse references are given in the text. References of *hadiths* and biblical citations are summarised, in alphabetical order, in Inventories I and II. The footnotes in the main text specify the entry number in the relevant Inventory.

Unless otherwise indicated, all citations in Parts One to Three are from the manuscript British Library Oc.Or.5957 of the *Jāvidān-nāma-yi kabīr*, the *magnum opus* of Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī, known also, with reference to its incipit, as the *Jāvidān-nāma-yi shish ibtidā*.

The original Persian text of the long citations from the *Jāvidān-nāma* and the works of Faḍl Allāh's followers is included at the end of the book. In order to facilitate the location of the original text of any particular citation, the Persian text of citations is arranged according to the numbers of the corresponding folios.
When, in the mid-1990s, I came to Paris with a small book of ʿImād al-Dīn Nasīmī's poetry in my pocket, I could not have known that it would take me on a long and surprising journey. In fact, I nearly forgot this book for the next few years, overtaken by work on another project. However, when the time came to choose the topic for my Master's dissertation, Nasīmī's poetry suddenly came back to my mind, singing its strange distiches. These verses from the 9th/15th century had an almost post-modernist ring to them, with their resonant lines reverberating the same phoneme or syllable several times, then suddenly flowing into beautiful, powerful words and rhymes. I knew next to nothing about Nasīmī, except that he was a courageous man who died flayed alive. I knew still less about his intellectual and spiritual background. The short introduction to his book of poetry mentioned a group called Ḥurūfīs and a certain Faḍl Allāh from Astarābād, their leader, whose teachings would have much influence in the Arab world.

influenced Nasimi. But who were the Ḥurūfīs and what kind of teachings found expression in Nasimi's poetry?

When I mentioned these questions in a conversation with Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, my supervisor at that time, I did not seriously consider them as a possible topic for academic work. After all, Nasimi was a famous poet and I was sure that his own works and anything related to them had been thoroughly researched long ago. I only expected some references from my erudite professor. I was surprised to hear that most of the Ḥurūfī texts had not yet been published, and that the primary sources of Ḥurūfī thought, the works of Faḍl Allāh Astarābādī himself, were still little known. This is how I found myself studying the few published Ḥurūfī works for my Master's dissertation, then embarking on the work on Faḍl Allāh's *magnum opus*, the *Jāwidān-nāma-yi kabīr*, the 'Great Book of Eternity', for my Ph.D.²

I will not dwell here on the particular features of the *Jāwidān-nāma* as a text; they are described further below in the Introduction. It should be mentioned, however, that the *Jāwidān-nāma* does not contain any systematic presentation of the doctrine. It is essentially a huge corpus of fragments. The main purpose of the present book is to produce a comprehensive presentation of the central doctrinal lines of the *Jāwidān-nāma*, such as they appear from the analytical study of the relevant fragments.

The Introduction begins with a general outline of Faḍl Allāh's spiritual career and of Ḥurūfī history after his death. It also contains a discussion of the significance of Faḍl Allāh's ideas in the context of intense transformation that the Eastern Islamic world underwent in the period between the Mongol invasion and the consolidation of the Ottoman, Ṣafawid and Mughal empires. A separate section of the Introduction summarises the history of academic research on the Ḥurūfīs. It is followed by some methodological remarks directly related to the assessment of the existing research, its achievements, its shortcomings and the place of the present book therein. Methodological observations are continued in the last section of the

Introduction, with a particular focus on the structural particularities of the *Jawīdān-nāma*.

The next three parts of the book (Chapters 1 to 13) deal with aspects of Faḍl Allāh’s doctrine such as it can be restored from the body of fragments. Part One (Chapters 1 to 6) brings together cosmogonical and cosmological doctrines of the *Jawīdān-nāma*. These doctrines are centred on the specific conception of the ontological divine Word. The creation and temporal evolution of the universe are described as a kind of metaphysical linguistics, with its semantics (Chapter 1), morphology (Chapter 2) and syntax (Chapters 3, 5 and 6). Within this presentation, the Human Being, Time and Universe appear as differentiated equivalents of the original Word, essentially identical to each other because they are produced in accordance with the same primary model. The Excursus (Chapter 4) focuses more particularly on knowledge and love, two pivotal elements of the *Jawīdān-nāma*’s anthropology. Part Two (Chapters 7 to 11) is devoted to the *Jawīdān-nāma*’s prophetology, that is, the progressive revelation (*tanzīl*) of the original divine Word through prophetic missions and its return to the origin (*ta’wil*) at the end of time. The central themes of this part are the relationship between divine and human languages, and the theory of *ta’wil*, which is the core doctrine of the whole work. Related to the latter is the theory of the ‘motherly’ (*ummi*) knowledge, and the ‘motherly’ prophets and saints, which seems to be an original development (Chapter 10), interestingly combining mainstream Sunni prophetology and eschatology with Shi‘i ideas concerning the role of the Imāms and their saintly investiture, the *walāya*. Part Three (Chapters 12 and 13) deal respectively with the ways of individual and collective salvation, including the *Jawīdān-nāma*’s eschatological views. The Conclusion contains a preliminary examination, based on the contents of the *Jawīdān-nāma*, especially concerning the place of Faḍl Allāh’s eclectic thought in the landscape of Muslim intellectual and spiritual currents, and a reflection, also based on the textual evidence of *Jawīdān-nāma*, on the possible messianic project of Faḍl Allāh, his approach to the reunification of the Muslim community, and reactualisation of the universal message of Islam addressed to mankind as a whole, in particular to Jews and Christians. This last purpose can arguably be discerned behind Faḍl Allāh’s extensive use of canonical biblical texts.
Words of Power

and apocrypha, which constitutes one of the most intriguing features of the Jāwidān-nāma.

It is impossible to mention here all friends and colleagues who contributed, in one way or another, to the maturation of this book over many years. It is my pleasure to extend my heartfelt gratitude to Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, my thesis adviser and dear friend. All members of my Ph.D. committee – Denise Aigle, Denis Gril and Thierry Zarcone – contributed, in different ways, to the development of my postdoctoral projects. My sincere thanks to Shahzad Bashir, for stimulating exchanges and for kindly sharing with me his copies of Hurūfī manuscripts. Meetings and conversations with Frédéric Gabriel, Asma Hilali and Lahcen Daafid ever renewed the chevaleresque ideal of the ‘search for knowledge’. Hassan Ansari and Daniel De Smet were always helpful and generously shared their impressive erudition. Discussions with Pierre Legendre, who was generous with his time when discussing my book project, were crucial for my understanding of academic book writing. Jean-Daniel Dubois, Anna van den Kerchove and Simon Mimouni helped me to find relevant Jewish and Christian parallels to some specific doctrinal positions of the Jāwidān-nāma. Saïd Amir Arjomand, Kathryn Babayan, Gerhard Bowering, William Chittick, Patricia Crone, Devin DeWeese, Pierre Lory and Ahmet Yaşar Ocak provided valuable suggestions and encouragement at the early stages of the work on this book.

The thriving academic atmosphere at the Department of Academic Research and Publications of The Institute of Ismaili Studies, which I joined in 2011 and where the writing of this book commenced, as well as discussions with colleagues I met in London and nearby – Omar Ali-de-Ünzaga, Mushegh Asatryan, Ilker Evrim Binbaş, Stephen Burge, Nadia Eboo Jamal, Janis Esots, David Hollenberg, Arzina Lalani, Toby Mayer, Matthew Melvin-Koushki, Eric Ormsby, Judith Pfeiffer, Miklos Sarkozy, Yuri Stoyanov and many others – were essential and contributed, either directly or indirectly, to the process of its maturation.

My special thanks to the Institute’s Co-Director, Farhad Daftary, as well as to Maria De Cillis and Gurdosfarid Miskinzoda for their attentive reading of the manuscript and for accepting this monograph in the Shi‘i Heritage Series. I was also fortunate to have careful, erudite and precise anonymous reviewers, whose detailed feedback, critiques
and thoughtful suggestions helped me greatly to improve the composition of the book. I would like to extend my deep appreciation to the Shi'i Heritage Series Editorial Board, and especially to Hermann Landolt who kindly read the entire draft of this book and made many valuable comments. My special thanks to Jalal Badakhchani for checking the Persian text. Working with the Department’s Senior Editor, Kutub Kassam, has been a gratifying and enriching experience. I am indebted to him for his patient, thoughtful and rigorous reading and editing of the text, and for many erudite remarks and valuable references, which not only significantly improved the structure and fluidity of the presentation but also, on several occasions, stimulated a revision of contents. Needless to say, I am alone to blame for all possible shortcomings. I would also like to thank Nadia Holmes for her editorial assistance in preparation of this book for publication, as well as Russell Harris and Patricia Salazar, for their help with the selection and layout of the cover image, acquisition of copyright permissions and kind assistance through the publishing process.

The staff of several libraries lent a helping hand to my research. I would like to acknowledge the kind assistance and cooperation of the Süleymaniye and University Libraries in Istanbul, the Vatican Library, the Bibliothèque Nationale and the library of the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris, the Staatsbibliothek and the libraries of various departments of the Free University in Berlin, the British Library, the Library of The Institute of Ismaili Studies and that of the School of Oriental and African Studies in London and the Cambridge University Library. I am particularly thankful to Gudrun Schubert, who helped me to find the then still uncatalogued Ḥurūfī manuscripts at the library of the University of Basel, to Renate Würsch for her assistance through the process of reproduction of the folio used on the cover of this publication, and to the staff of this library.

Over the years of research, I benefited from significant institutional support. Grants from the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), especially the Laboratoire d'Études sur les Monothéismes (LEM) and Laboratoire Islam Médiéval, enabled me to participate in conferences and to work with the manuscripts. Fellowships from the French Institute for Anatolian Studies (IFEA) in Istanbul enabled me to research the manuscript collections in Turkish libraries. A Dissertation Writing Scholarship from The Institute of Ismaili Studies helped me to
complete my doctoral thesis from which this book developed. A postdoctoral research fellowship at the Institute for Advanced Study at Nantes, France, was a crucial experience in making me conscious of broader interdisciplinary issues related to my area of research. A grant from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation allowed me to significantly develop the research leading to this book beyond my Ph.D. dissertation. I am especially grateful to Sabine Schmidtke, my scientific host at the Institute of Islamic Studies, Free University of Berlin, where I benefited from the exchanges with a brilliant group of scholars.

To my parents, Rufat and Aytekin, and parents-in-law, Michel and Dominique, to all my family, for their love and unwavering confidence, and especially to my wife Caroline and our daughter Jamila, for their patience and merry laughter, without which this work would never have been completed, thanks beyond thanks.