

logo not found or type unknown

Title Love (ḥubb) of God in Islamic mysticism (II): Love (ḥubb) of God in the hadith : A study of a semantic development / by Giuseppe Scattolin

Contained in MIDÉO : Mélanges de l'Institut dominicain d'études orientales du Caire / Direction : Georges Shehata Anawati, (puis) Régis Morelon, (puis) Emilio Platti, (puis) Emmanuel Pisani, (puis) Dennis Halft

Volume 27 (2008)

pages 131-167

URL <https://ideo.diamondrda.org/manifestation/121947>

LOVE (*HUBB*) OF GOD IN ISLAMIC MYSTICISM (II)
— LOVE (*HUBB*) OF GOD IN THE HADITH* —
A Study of a Semantic Development

by

Giuseppe SCATTOLIN

PATTERN OF RESEARCH

Introduction

1. The Question of the Hadith

1-1. On the authenticity of the hadith literature.

1-2. On the authority of the hadith and its significance for Sufis.

2. The Vocabulary of Love in the Hadith: a Semantic Approach

2-1: The stem (*HBB*) and its derivatives.

a. The frequency of the vocabulary of love in the hadith.

b. Subject and object of love: who loves whom or what?

b-1: Love in God.

b-2: Love in humans.

* Note des éditeurs — *Editor's note*: Pour faciliter la lecture nous garderons l'orthographe «hadith» lorsqu'il s'agit de ce genre littéraire ou d'une partie importante du corpus ainsi désigné en général et proposerons la translittération ḥadīth ou aḥādīth chaque fois qu'il sera question d'un ḥadīth ou de quelques-uns en particulier (*In order to make the reading of this article easier, we'll maintain the writing «hadith» when it designates the whole «hadith material» or a great part of this corpus as generally mentioned and we'll propose the transliteration ḥadīth or aḥādīth when concerning one or several aḥādīth in particular*).

- i. The Prophet Muhammad.
 - ii. The pious servants of God (*'ibād*), the good believers (*al-mu'minīn*).
 - c. The reasons of love: what is the motive of love (*ḥubb*) in the hadith?
 - d. The consequences or the results of such a religious love (*ḥubb*).
 - e. The worldly love.
 - f. A «chain» of reciprocal love?
 - g. The first ascetic circles as the *Sitz im Leben* of these hadiths of love.
- 2-2: **The other stems** (RHM, WLY, WDD, HWY, KLL, HNN, SHWQ, 'SHQ)
- 2-2-1. RHM and its derivatives.
 - 2-2-2. WLY and its derivatives.
 - 2-2-3. WDD and its derivatives.
 - 2-2-4. HWY and its derivatives.
 - 2-2-5. KLL and its derivatives.
 - 2-2-6. HNN and its derivatives.
 - 2-2-7. SHWQ and its derivatives.
 - 2-2-8. 'SHQ and its derivatives.
- 2-3: Some remarks on the vocabulary of love in the hadith.

3. Some Significant *Aḥādīth* for the Sufi Experience

- 3-1. The *ḥadīth al-nawāfil* or *kuntu*.
- 3-2. The *ḥadīth al-ibtilā'*.
- 3-3. The *ḥadīth ḥubbiba*.
- 3-4. The *ḥadīth kuntu kanz* ^{an}.
- 4-5. The *ḥadīth man 'arafa*.

4. Some Concluding Remarks

- 4-1. The language of love in the hadith and its limits.
- 4-2. A semantic development of the language of love.
- 4-3. A «purified» language of love?
- 4-4. The hadith and the Sufi language of love.

INTRODUCTION¹.

The question of the origin of Sufi language and the factors of its development are among some of the most disputed issues in the history of Sufism. Louis Massignon's

1. This article is a continuation of my previous article on God's love in the Koran (*al-Qur'ān*): Giuseppe SCATTOLIN, «Love (*ḥubb*) of God in Islamic Mysticism (I): Love (*ḥubb*) of God in the Koran - a Study of a Semantic Development» in *MIDEO* 23 (1997) 239-258. Here, I pursue the re-

Essai sur les origines du lexique technique de la mystique musulmane (1922) and Paul Nwiyā's *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique* (1970) remain up to the present the best attempts to give an answer to such an issue². Both have firmly upheld the basic Islamic origin of the Sufi language but, surely, further research is still needed to get to a more detailed picture of its development.

The Sufi language of love is one instance of such an issue. It is well known that in Sufi literature and experience love has occupied in an increasing way an absolutely central place, to the point that, for many authors, Divine love appears to be the apex of the whole Sufi experience. However, it has also been remarked that there is a clear semantic gap between the Koranic and the Sufi languages of love³. Hence, the question inevitably arises: from where did Sufis derive their experience and their expressions of love? Was it from purely Islamic sources, *i.e.*, the Koran and the hadith, or from other, possibly, foreign sources? Can one trace a development of the language of love going from the Koran, to the hadith and eventually to Sufi literature? These are important issues to be addressed, if one wants to reach a better understanding of the history of love language in Sufi literature.

In a previous article, I have analyzed the language of love in the Koranic text, exploring whether the Koranic vocabulary may support the Sufi claim that their love language has its origin in the Koranic text. The conclusion I reached through a semantic analysis of the text was that the Koranic vocabulary of love is quite limited, especially in its religious meaning; therefore, other factors outside the literal exegesis of the Koranic text must have been at work helping Sufis with the development of their particular language of love.

Now, taking it a step further, I intend to address the hadith literature (*al-ḥadīth*), which is the second authority in Islam next to the Koran (*al-Qur'ān*), inquiring whether a clue can be found in it that might help solve such a disputed issue, namely the origin and development of the Sufi language of love.

1. THE QUESTION OF THE HADITH.

The «Tradition of the Prophet» or «the Prophetic Tradition», usually designated in Islam by the term *al-ḥadīth*, is commonly understood as: «... an account of what

search on the development of the Sufi language of love through the study of the hadith material (*al-ḥadīth*). The term hadith is used here as the accepted standard form for the Arabic *al-ḥadīth*, and the term Koran (K. in quotation) for the Arabic *al-Qur'ān*.

2. Louis MASSIGNON, *Essai sur les origines du lexique technique de la mystique musulmane*, Cerf, Paris, 1999 (P. Geuthner, 1922, Vrin, 1954); Paul Nwiyā, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique*, Dar al-Machreq, Beyrouth, 1991 (1^{ère} ed. 1970).
3. See some Sufi sayings on love in «Love (*ḥubb*) of God in Islamic Mysticism (I): Love (*ḥubb*) of God in the Koran», *op. cit.*, pp. 241-242.

the Prophet said or did, or of his tacit approval of something said or done in his presence⁴. *Al-ḥadīth* is the source of the «normative custom of the Prophet» (the *sunna*) which is in Islam, after the Koran, the most authoritative source of religious law (*sharī'a*) and, thus, an obligatory reference in all questions concerning Islamic beliefs and practices. Therefore, it is most relevant to our purpose to compare the Koranic vocabulary of love with that of the ḥadīth literature exploring whether there is continuity or discrepancy between them, whether some form of development may be found, and investigating then the probable reasons for it.

Such an inquiry is not an easy task, for two reasons in particular. First, the thorny question of the authenticity of the ḥadīth is far from having received a satisfactory solution. To what extent is the massive number of ḥadīths reported in the canonical collections as authentic actually so, *i.e.*, said or done by the Prophet of Islam, Muḥammad, or to what extent are they later fabrications? Such questioning is still a disputed point in the ḥadīth literature. Second, the topic of love (*ḥubb*) of God in the ḥadīth has not been fully explored in a systematic way. Therefore, the present research must be somehow tentative. A thorough exploration of this topic would have been a most useful resource for my purpose. Nonetheless, I intend to carry out a survey of the ḥadīth vocabulary of love following the same way I used for the Koranic text, and on the basis of the material found in A.J. Wensinck's *Concordance*. Through a semantic analysis of it, I will try to point out the similarities and the differences existing between the two vocabularies of love, that of the ḥadīth and that of the Koran. Such a comparison should provide helpful insights into some aspects of the development of Sufi language, in particular during the first two centuries of Islam.

To start with, it is important to make a clear distinction between two different questions: that of the authenticity of the ḥadīth, and that of its authority and significance for the Islamic community in general and for Sufi circles in particular. These two questions must not be confused.

1-1. On the authenticity of the ḥadīth literature.

The question of the authenticity of the ḥadīth material has been widely discussed in recent years and an extensive amount of contradictory literature is found in the

4. J. ROBSON, «Ḥadīth» in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edition (= *Et* 2), E. J. Brill, Leiden, III, p. 23a.

5. A. J. WENSINCK, *Concordance et indices de la tradition musulmane*, E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1936-1969, 7 vols.

field⁶. Two opposite views clash on this point. On one hand, the overwhelming majority of Muslim scholars uphold the traditional view that whatever has been handed down in the official collections of hadith (ranging from six to nine) as authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) must be held so by all Muslims. On the other hand, many modern scholars (most of them from the West) do not accept the traditional criteria used by Muslims in establishing the authenticity of the hadiths; thus, they put in doubt the authenticity of most of the traditional hadith material. A typical example of Western scholarship is the drastic verdict expressed by G.H.A. Juynboll in his research on the hadith:

«... but surely it is unlikely that we will ever find even a moderately successful method of providing with incontrovertible certainty the historicity of the ascription as such to the prophet, but in few isolated instances⁷».

In Juynboll's view the absolute majority of the hadiths attributed to Muḥammad are not his actual deeds or words, but rather later inventions worked out by the Islamic community for particular purposes. Therefore, the whole hadith material needs to be examined through an accurate, critical method, and only in some particular instances may one establish their authenticity. Muslim scholars find such a stand unfair and biased by what appears to them as «Western prejudices and imperialist goals», intended to downplay the importance of Islamic tradition and scholarship.

Western views, however, are not that unanimous. Recently, a British scholar, John Burton, has taken a milder position, conceding that the hadith material has some historical foundation. He concludes his study saying that many hadiths:

«... can be shown to spring from an ancient source in the primitive exegesis... Such *hadiths* would preserve some material on the thinking of Muslims, if not precisely in the age of the Prophet, then very soon after, in what might be called the age of the Quran⁸».

6. Some basic studies on the hadith are: Ignaz GOLDZIEHER, *Études sur la tradition islamique*, tr. fr., A.-Maisonnette, Paris, 1952; id., *Le dogme et la loi de l'Islam*, tr. fr., P. Geuthner, Paris, 1920, pp. 27-60, 111-155; Joseph SCHACHT, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1950; J. ROBSON, «Tradition, the Second Foundation of Islam» in the *Muslim World* 41 (1951) 22-33, 98-112, 166-180, 257-270; id., «Hadith» in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, op. cit., III, pp. 23a-29b; Th. W. JUYNBOLL, «Hadith» in *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam* (= *SEI*), J. Brill, Leiden, reprint 1974 (1st ed. 1953), pp. 116-121; Felix M. PAREJA (ed.), *Islamologie*, Imprimerie Catholique, Beyrouth, 1964, pp. 622-636; Robert CASPAR, *Cours de mystique musulmane*, PISAI, Rome, 1968, pp. 14-15; G. H. A. JUYNBOLL, *The Authenticity of the Tradition Literature*, E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1969; id., *Muslim Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983; Şubhī ŞĀLIḤ, *'Ulūm al-ḥadīth wa-muṣṭalahuhu*, Dār al-'Ilm li-l-Malāyīn, Damascus, 1973; W. A. GRAHAM, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam*, Mouton, The Hague-Paris, 1977; John BURTON, *An Introduction to the Hadith*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1994; *Introduction au hadith*, Études Arabes n° 90, PISAI, Rome, 1996/1; Harald MOTZKI, *The Origin of Islamic Jurisprudence. Meccan Fiqh before the Classical Schools*, E. J. Brill, Leiden, 2002.

7. G. H. A. JUYNBOLL, *Muslim Tradition*, p. 71.

8. J. BURTON, *An Introduction*, p. 181.

A similar position is held by another scholar, W.A. Graham. In his work on the Divine hadith (*qudsī*, so called because in it God is the speaker in the first person), he says that the question of authenticity is «... only one type of concern» about the hadith, and that:

«Of potentially greater significance for the historian who is trying to understand early Islam is the more subtle question of the meaning and function of such material in the individual and collective life of the early Muslims»⁹.

Our semantic analysis of the hadith material on love language seems to confirm Graham's view. Recent scholars, though, such as Harald Motzki, would concede much more ground to the historical credibility of a number of hadiths, especially those connected with the Mekkan tradition of 'Abd Allāh b. al-'Abbās (d. 68/687-8), which can be traced back to the end of the I/VII century¹⁰.

1-2. On the authority and significance of the hadith for Sufis.

Whatever may be the result of such a controversial issue on the authenticity of the hadiths, it is not our first concern here. Of far more importance for the present research is the relevance and significance the hadiths played in forming and shaping Islamic spirituality. The spiritual people of Islam, the Sufis, lived on the whole inside the Islamic tradition; they intended to uphold it, most of the times, with utter scrupulousness (*wara'*). Besides, the Sufis are generally known to be quite conservative; they try to find first in the religious tradition of their own community whatever may be useful for their spiritual life, and very rarely do they look outside it. Now, the Prophetic hadiths, especially those listed in the official collections, have been and continue to be for Muslims a most important source of faith and practice, holding for them the highest authority second only to the Koran. W.A. Graham too stresses this point saying that:

«The most crucial kind of «authenticity» of a scripture or anything else of religious significance is, in the final analysis, its absolute authenticity in the understanding of a particular individual or a particular group in a particular age»,

He goes on saying that the hadiths were for Muslims:

«... their basic sources of authority and guidance, what they recognized as «authentic» guides for ordering their lives, shaping their dreams, and informing their faith¹¹».

In the light of such an understanding, it is not surprising to find that the hadith material has played a very important role throughout the history of Sufism. It has

9. W. A. GRAHAM, *Divine Word*, p. 2.

10. H. MOTZKI, *The Origin*, *op. cit.*; see his conclusion: ch. 4, «The Beginnings of Islamic Jurisprudence», pp. 295-297.

11. W. A. GRAHAM, *Divine Word*, p. 2.

shaped the spiritual experience of Sufis, being a most important source for their inner inspiration. In fact, the origin and development of the Sufi movement cannot be understood without taking into account the role of the hadith. Besides, Sufis refer not only to the hadiths listed in the official collections of the Islamic community, but also to a number of hadiths transmitted apart, in their own Sufi circles¹². From these two sources the hadith material has been accepted by them with the highest consideration as authentic sayings of the Prophet. Thus, those hadiths have become for them a basic source of their experiences and speculations. For example, in some hadiths the Prophet Muhammad is extolled in a way that goes far beyond the letter of the Koranic text, being described as the absolute model of all virtues, working all kinds of miracles. The Prophet Muḥammad is even said to have existed before creation as the eternal Light (*al-nūr al-muḥammadī*) through which God created all things, in a way very similar to the Neo-platonic (and also the Christian) idea of *Logos*. Such ideas have, in time, become central topics in the vision and speculation of many Sufis, among them the «Supreme Spiritual Master» (*al-shaykh al-akbar*), the Andalusian Sufi Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 638/1240)¹³.

Thus, the whole history of Sufism shows the importance the hadith material had in the formation of the Sufi experience. There is now also a general consensus among Western scholars, at least, on the fact that such hadith material mirrors more the life of the Islamic community and its development over time more than the actual life of the historical Muḥammad, the Prophet of Islam. Many scholars would agree with R. Caspar's view that: «...in the end, the most precious contribution of the hadith is to inform us not about the epoch of Muḥammad, but about the first two centuries of

12. These extra-canonical hadiths are found scattered around in Sufi writings. Some important hadiths on love, e. g., are found in «Kitāb al-maḥabba», in the fourth part of Muḥammad Abū Hāmid AL-GHAZĀLĪ, *Iḥyā' ulūm al-dīn*, (see excerpts in *Études Arabes* 43 (1976), 14-21, PISAI, Rome); others are found in id., *Mishkāt al-anwār*, ed. by Abū al-'Alā 'Āfīfī, al-Dār al-Qawmiyya li-l-Ṭibā'a wa-l-Nashr, Cairo, 1964 (see its introduction, Arabic text and translation done by Roger Deladrière, *Le tabernacle des lumières - Mishkāt al-anwār*, Seuil, Paris, 1981; some of them have been transmitted as hadiths *qudsī* and a collection of them is given in Ibn 'Arabī, *Mishkāt al-anwār*, Cairo, Maktabat al-Qāhira, 1999 (see its introduction, Arabic text and translation by Muhammad Valsan, *La niche des lumières - Mishkāt al-anwār*, Paris, Seuil, 1983; another collection is *Al-aḥādīṭ al-qudsiyya*, ed. by Lajnat al-Qur'ān wa-l-Ḥadīṭ, Cairo, 1983, 2 vols.; some of them are mentioned in *Introduction au hadīth*, PISAI, *op. cit.*, pp. 143-162; a specific study of the hadiths *qudsī* with a collection of them is given in W. A. GRAHAM, *Divine Word*, *op. cit.*, introduction, Arabic text and translation.

13. The idea of the 'Perfect Man' is a basic topic in Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-'Arabī's Sufi vision (we write his name according to the original Arabic spelling, and not in the common, simplified form, Ibn 'Arabī). A synthesis of this topic is given in Giuseppe SCATTOLIN, «Realization of 'Self' (*Anā*) in Islamic Mysticism: The Mystical Experience of 'Umar Ibn al-Fāriḍ», in *Mélanges de l'Université de St. Joseph*, Dar El-Machreq, Beyrouth, Tome IV (1995-1996) 1999, pp. 119-148.

Islam, the epoch during which the hadiths were forged¹⁴. In other words, the hadiths must be seen firstly as the mirror of the Islamic society in which they were formed and transmitted, as answers to a number of issues the Islamic community was facing. Muḥammad's authorship in this respect could be explained as just a «moral» one (intended to give authority to the hadiths), rather than as a «verbatim, material» one. This is, in fact, the case of many other literatures of the East: e. g., the authorship of many books of the Bible. Such a point will become clearer in the course of the present research, as a result of the linguistic analysis of a number of hadiths. We will find that many hadiths on love, for instance, presuppose a life context, or a *Sitz im Leben*, of the Islamic society quite different from that of the Prophet Muḥammad and his time. In those hadiths, many traits appear that were characteristic of the first Muslim ascetics, the forerunners of the whole Sufi movement, during the first two generations of Islam rather than of the time of the Prophet and his companions. One notices in them an evident linguistic development when compared with the Koranic vocabulary. Such a development implies a new spiritual milieu or ambiance of which those hadiths were an appropriate expression.

In conclusion, this research confirms the importance the hadith material has for a better understanding of the history of Sufism. Through the hadith material we gain insight into many aspects of Islamic spirituality and its development, particularly during the first two centuries of Islam.

2. THE VOCABULARY OF LOVE IN THE HADITH: A SEMANTIC APPROACH.

The language of love in the hadith will be analyzed here following the same semantic approach we used for analysis of the Koranic vocabulary. For this reason I have chosen here the same selection of synonyms of love so as to have a common ground for a fair comparison between the two vocabularies¹⁵.

14. R. CASPAR, *Cours* p. 14; cf. I. GOLDZIHNER, *Études*, pp. 5-6; J. Schacht, *The Origins*, pp. 4-5; W. A. GRAHAM, *Divine Word*, p. 2.

15. As to the hadiths we refer to A. J. WENSINCK, *Concordance*, *op. cit.*. Their sources are quoted as found there (we quote only the first source, and not all the other parallel sources) without tracking them back in the different printed editions of hadiths, which can be easily found. Some hadiths have been quoted together separated by a semicolon (;), their references are given in the footnotes in the same order, also separated by a semicolon (;). As to the basic meaning of the Arabic stems and their derivatives we refer to the common Arabic dictionaries, especially to: E. W. LANE, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, The Islamic Text Society, Cambridge, 1985 (1st ed. 1863); *Dictionnaire arabe-français-anglais*, ed. by Régis Blachère, Moustafa Chouemi, Claude Denizau, Paris, Maisonneuve, 1967-1976; IBN MANZŪR, *Lisān al-'Arab*, Dār Iḥyā' al-'Turāḥ al-'Arabī, Beirut, 1999, 18 vols; A valuable general insight in the topic 'Love' in Sufism is found in Hellmut RITTER, *Das Meer der Seele*, E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1955: 'Liebe', pp. 347-574; Margaret SMITH, *Studies in Early Mysticism in The Near and Middle East*, Oneworld, Oxford, 1995.

2-1: The stem (*HBB*) and its derivatives.

a. The frequency of the vocabulary of love in the hadith.

Among the synonyms of love in the hadith vocabulary the derivatives of the stem (*HBB*) are those that have the largest use and the most significant semantic development. The stem (*HBB*) in its derivatives recurs 191 times in the official collections of hadith (96 times in the Koranic text), of which 161 times with the connotation «love» (83 times in the Koranic text) and 30 times (13 times in the Koranic text) with the meaning of «grain seed» (*ḥabb*) of plants¹⁶.

In order to grasp the meaning the vocabulary of love (*ḥubb*) has in the hadith one has to inquire about the subject and object, the causes and the consequences, and the qualities of love, *i.e.*: «Who loves whom or what, how and for what reason and with what consequences». In a word, one has to form the semantic «identity card» of love in the hadith vocabulary. It will be by answering such questions that the full meaning and extent of the vocabulary of love in hadith will become clear, and its novelty with regard to the parallel Koranic vocabulary may be highlighted.

To start with, it is useful to quote a *ḥadīth* on love which sounds like a philosophical principle not found in the Koranic text: «The love (*ḥubb*) for something makes people blind and deaf¹⁷». According to this *ḥadīth*, love is a tremendous power that can sweep through one's life, changing it completely for better or worse, bringing happiness or misery.

Another *ḥadīth* establishes what can be called «the rule of love» among lovers: «Everybody is with the people he loves¹⁸». This *ḥadīth*, too, points to the power love has: it is a deep and powerful inclination that pulls people to meet each other, to stay together, and this will be applied to both God and humans. Here, too, a new accent can be noticed when compared to the Koranic language: the encounter between God and his servant here takes on the colour of the love encounter between lovers. Such *aḥādīth* herald a new perception, or, say, a new experience and vision of love, expressed in a new «love language» found in many other hadiths.

b. Subject and object of love: who loves whom or what?

b-1: Love in God.

In the hadiths, God appears, both statistically and semantically, to be in absolute the first subject of love (*HBB*). This fact is quite relevant when contrasted with some

16. *Concordance* 1 405b-410b.

17. *Concordance* 1 409a (al-Dārimī, *adab* 116).

18. *Concordance* 1 406a (al-Bukhārī, *adab* 96).

later theological polemics among Muslims scholars. Some scholars, namely the Muʿtazilites and the Ashʿarites, would argue that love (*ḥubb*) cannot be attributed to God in its real meaning, but only metaphorically. Others, such as the Hanbalites, out of textual evidence, had to admit the validity of such an attribution, but they tried to limit its connotation when applied to God. Sufis, on the contrary, based on the Koranic text and the Prophetic tradition, pointed to the fact that the quality of love is explicitly attributed to God in the Divine revelation, and therefore, their claim and expressions of Divine love are fully justified¹⁹.

In the hadith, God is said to love first of all his Messenger, the Prophet Muḥammad, who is called here, in the hadith, for the first time *ḥabību-llāh* (God's beloved): «Surely, I am the beloved of God (*ḥabību-llāh*), and I pretend no honour for this...²⁰». This title *ḥabību-llāh* is not found in the Koranic text and surely indicates a new perception of the Prophet in Islamic piety. Such a title became over time quite popular among Muslims in general and Sufis in particular. Besides the Prophet, God also loves the companions of the Prophet, in a special way his «family» (*ahl al-bayt*), i.e., ʿAlī, and his two sons, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn. In the hadiths, as in the Koranic text, God is described as loving in general the good and pious servants (*ʿibād atqiyā*), the believers (*muʾminūn*), the good-doers (*muḥsinūn*), who live in concealment (*akḥfiyā*): «God loves those who are just (*abrār*), pious (*atqiyā*) and in concealment (*akḥfiyā*)»; «God loves the believing (*muʾmin*) poor (*faqīr*) and chaste (*mutaʿaffif*) servant²¹». Here, for the first time, the servant of God is called his beloved (*ḥabību-hu*), and with such a title he is assured of God's preferential love for him to the point that he no longer needs to fear even of the fire of Hell, because: «God does not put his beloved (servant, *ḥabība-hu*) in the fire of Hell²²».

However, differently from what is found in the Koranic text, God in the hadith is also said to love abstract things such as beauty (*jamāl*), gentleness (*rifq*), modesty (*ḥayā*), and singularity (*witr*): «God, the most High, is beautiful (*jamīl*) and loves beauty (*jamāl*)»; «God, the most High, is gentle (*rafiq*) and loves gentleness (*rifq*)»; «He is singular (*witr* or *watr*) and loves singularity (*witr*)²³. These are new accents not present in the Koranic vocabulary. Also contrary to the Koranic text, not much is said in the hadith about what God does not love. Only a couple of times is it said that God does not love haughtiness (*khuyalā*) and jealousy (*ghayra*).

19. A good survey of such theological polemics on love is found in Joseph Normant BELL, *Love Theory in Later Hanbalite Islam*, State University of New York Press (SUNY), Albany, 1979.

20. *Concordance* I 409b (al-Tirmidhī, *manāqib* 1).

21. *Concordance* I 406b (Ibn Māja, *fitan* 16); *ibid.* (Ibn Māja, *zuhd* 5).

22. *Concordance* I 409b (Ibn Ḥanbal 3, 235).

23. *Concordance* I 407a (Ibn Ḥanbal 4, 133.134); *ibid.* (Muslim, *birr* 77); I 407b (al-Bukhārī, *daʿwāt* 68).

God's love is described in the hadiths as radiating around his beloved ones. In fact, when God loves somebody, he puts his love for such a person first in the «people of heaven» (*abl al-samā'*, the angels, especially Gabriel, *Djibrīl*), then in the Prophet and in the pious people on earth, so that such a person is surrounded by what appears to be like «a circle of love» going from heaven to earth: «When God loves somebody... the people of heaven will love him»; «God loves him and the people of heaven will love him»; «... so, if someone loves them, God will love him»; «... if someone loves me, let him love him»; «So, if someone loves them, he loves them with my love (*bi-ḥubbī*)²⁴». Such a love, existing among those pious people, appears to be a circle, if not a community, of love binding them together in a close bond that goes from heaven to earth. Such a vision lies at the heart of the language of love in a number of hadiths and sounds quite new when compared with the Koranic vocabulary.

b-2: Love in humans.

i. **The Prophet Muḥammad.** Humans, too, are said in the hadith to be the subject of love according to one's own particular status. First of all, the Prophet of Islam, Muḥammad, is said in many instances to love (*ḥubb*) God above all. In a prayer he says: «O God, make your love dearer (*aḥabba*) to me than myself (*nafs-i*), my family (*abl-i*) and the fresh water (*al-mā' al-bārid*)²⁵». However, of the Prophet it is also reported that he loved, or better he was made to love (by God) (*ḥubbiba*), many things of this world (*dunyā*), as in the famous *ḥadīth* in which he states: «I was made to love (*ḥubbiba*) out of this world (*dunyā*) women (*al-nisā'*), perfume (*al-ṭīb*), and I put my utmost joy in prayer, *ṣalāt*²⁶». Then, the Prophet had a special love for his «family», *i.e.* 'Alī, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, and his companions. It is also said that he loved Mekka, his birthplace, and Medina, the place of his emigration (*hijra*), and that in general he had love for all the good and pious servants of God (*'ibād*), but in particular for the poor (*masākīn*). Also of Muḥammad (as of God) it is said that he loved abstract things such as solitude (*khalā'*), prayer (*ṣalāt*), faith (*īmān*), beauty (*jamāl*), ablutions (*wuḍū'*), etc.. Strangely enough, in this section of the hadith coming under the heading of love (*ḥubb*), no mention is made of the Prophet's love for his wives, who, in the Koran and in the common tradition of Muslims, are given special consideration, particularly his beloved 'Ā'isha²⁷.

24. *Concordance* I 406a (al-Bukhārī, *adab* 41); (Ibn Ḥanbal 3, 218); *ibid.* (al-Bukhārī, *manāqib al-anṣār* 4); *ibid.* (Ibn Ḥanbal 5, 366); *ibid.* (al-Tirmidhī, *manāqib* 58).

25. *Concordance* I 409b (al-Tirmidhī, *da'wāt* 72.73).

26. *Concordance* I 405b (al-Nasā'ī, *'ishrat al-nisā'* 10); the same hadith is differently reported in the sources.

27. W. Montgomery WATT, «'Ā'isha» in *Et* 2, 1, 307b-308b.

ii. The pious servants of God (*'ibād*), the good believers (*al-mu'minīn*). After the Prophet, the good and pious servants of God, the true believers, too are said in the hadith to have love (*ḥubb*). The good servants of God love God (*Allāh*) first of all; they must have in fact: «...faith in God and love (*ḥubb*) for him»; because: «The best of the works (*a'māl*) is to have love in God (*al-ḥubb fi-llāhī*)²⁸». Then, they are said to love the Prophet, for whom the names *ḥabīb-ī* (my beloved) and *khalīl-ī* (my intimate friend) appear here for the first time: «My beloved (*ḥabīb-ī*) — God's peace and blessing upon him — has ordered me three things...»; «I have heard my beloved (*ḥabīb-ī*), intimate friend (*khalīl-ī*) — God's peace and blessing upon him —...²⁹». In fact, the Prophet must be loved above everything else and such a love is one of the clearest signs of faith (*īmān*): «Love for the Prophet comes from faith»; «None of you is a believer (*mu'min*) till I (the Prophet speaking) am dearer (*aḥabb*) to him than (himself, his own people etc.)...»; besides, the two loves, for God and for his Messenger, are strictly connected: «... so that God — the most High — and his Messenger (*rasūl*) will become dearer (*aḥabb*) to him than anything else (*siwā-humā*)³⁰».

Thus, the Prophet appears to be the most beloved (*ḥabīb*) one both to God and to the pious people of his community. Here one can discern the beginning of what is known as the «exaltation of the Prophet» (*ta'zīm al-nabī*), a typical trait of later Sufi piety and literature. In many hadiths a special recommendation of love is made on behalf of the «family» of the Prophet, *i.e.* 'Alī, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, and the *Anṣār* (the Supporters of Medina), but, strangely enough, there is no mention of love for the *Muhājirūn* (the Emigrants from Mecca). In the background of these hadiths, one can perceive something of the struggle that went on in early Islam among the Islamic parties fighting for the succession (*khilāfa*) to the Prophet, such as the «party of 'Alī» (*shī'a*), the Emigrants, the *Anṣār* and the Umayyads. The good servants of God (*'ibād*) are said to have a general love for all their fellow co-servants of God (*'ibād*). These are now currently called brothers (*akh/ikhwal/ikhwān*), a title that underlies the intimate relationship existing among those pious servants of God (*'ibād*) on the basis of faith. In the Koranic text such a title appears only once: «Verily, the believers are brothers (*ikhwa*), make peace between two brothers» (κ. 29, 10). In one instance, the good servants of God are also said to have love for the Holy Book, the *Qur'ān*.

Given the general principle, quoted above, that «Everybody is with the people he loves», those who love God and his Prophet like to be with their beloved. In fact, the

28. *Concordance* I 409a (Ibn Ḥanbal 3, 114, 173.174); *ibid.* (al-Dārimī, *sunnat* 3).

29. *Concordance* I 409b (Muslim, *muṣāfirina* 86); *ibid.* (Ibn Māja, *ṣadaqāt* 10).

30. *Concordance* I 409a (al-Bukhārī, *īmān* 8); I 410b (al-Bukhārī, *īmān* 8); *ibid.* (al-Nasā'ī, *īmān* 3-4).

apex of the mutual love between God and his good servant (*'abd*) will be in their mutual meeting (*liqā'*): «If someone likes (*aḥabba*) to meet (*liqā'*) God, God will like to meet him (*liqā'*)³¹». Moreover, a very important *ḥadīth* for Sufi spirituality states that such a mutual love between God and his good servant (*'abd*) will bring about the utmost union, to the point that God will become the only, absolute agent (*fā'il*) in his servant: «...And if my servant continues to draw near to me by voluntary acts of devotion (*nawāfil*), I shall love him (*aḥbabtu-hu*); and when I love him, I shall be his ear (*kuntu sam'a-hu*) with which he hears, his sight with which he sees, his hand with which he grasps, and his foot with which he walks³²». This *ḥadīth*, called «*ḥadīth al-nawāfil*, or *kuntu*», but which could be better called «*ḥadīth of union*», has become the centre of very deep Sufi insights on the possibility of union between God and his servant. Sufis will often affirm the experience and the reality of such a union (*wahda, ittihād*), as love necessarily leads to union, as said in the *ḥadīth*. This is a clear instance in which the Sufi hermeneutics of the revealed texts clashed with that of the doctors of the religious law (*'ulamā'*). Such clashes led to dramatic confrontations and condemnations, even to death, as happened with al-Ḥallāj, executed in Baghdad in 309/922 for having proclaimed his utmost union with God.

In the end, it is clearly stated in the *ḥadīth* that such a love (*maḥabba*) among believers is a gift coming from God, a grace from Him: «...love (*maḥabba*) on his part was thrown (*ulqiyat*) on me... (= he was given love for me); «...I threw (*alqay-tu*) on him my love (*maḥabba*)...³³». Here the Koranic term *maḥabba* recurs seven times in a usage that is very similar to the Koranic one and in connection with the same Koranic verb either in active (*alqay-tu* — I threw) or in passive voice (*ulqiyat* — it was thrown). Here a reference to and perhaps, a dependence on the Koranic text can be easily perceived.

c. The reasons of love: what is the motive of love (*ḥubb*) in the hadith?

In many hadiths it is said that God loves his good servants; however, nothing is clearly said about the reasons for God's love. Is such a love an intrinsic, quasi-necessary, quality of God, or is it a fruit of his free will? Does God have a purpose in his love or not? In the hadith, as well as in the Koranic text, no speculation is made on the absolute mystery of God's will, and no trace is found there of later theological disputations, as those that occurred between the Mu'tazilites and the Ash'arites, on such a topic.

31. *Concordance* I 406a (Muslim, *dhikr* 14-18).

32. *Concordance* I 406b (al-Bukhārī, *riqāq* 38).

33. *Concordance* I 410b (Ibn Ḥanbal I, 391); *ibid.* (al-Dārimī, *ṣalāt* 10).

On the contrary, the love (*ḥubb*) that exists among the «good and pious servants of God» (*ʿibād*) is often qualified in the hadith as done «in God» (*fi-llāhi*) or for «God's sake» (*li-llāhi*). Also these are expressions not found in the Koranic text. Such expressions reveal the foundation, as it were, of the bond of love existing among those pious people: «The best of the pious deeds (*aʿmāl*) is the love in God (*al-ḥubb fi-llāhi*)»; and a most high example of love is that of «... two people who loved each other (*taḥābbā*) in God (*fi-llāhi*) and in Him they met and in Him they separated...», and «...they loved each other (*taḥābbā*) in God (*fi-llāhi*) and lived in a pure friendship (*taṣāfaw*)...»; and: «...if someone loves a servant (of God) (*ʿabd*), he should love him only for God's sake (*li-llāhi*)³⁴. Love (*ḥubb*) and hate (*bugḥḍ*) are the two opposite attitudes comprehending the whole of human behaviour and both must be grounded only in God (*fi-llāhi*), so that it must be said: «...that you love in God (*fi-llāhi*) and you hate in God (*fi-llāhi*)³⁵. Thus, the bond of love uniting the believers, the pious servants of God, must be based on God alone: He alone must be the deepest and ultimate reason of their mutual love. In many hadiths it is stressed that such a love is the fruit of faith (*īmān*), but also the result of the ascetic practice of renouncement to the world (*zuhd*) and of voluntary acts of devotion (*nawāfil*) beyond what is strictly required by the law: «...Out of faith (*īmān*) one must love for his brother (*akhi-hi*) what he loves for himself» (a *ḥadīth* that echoes the Evangelical commandment of love, Mt. 7, 12; 22, 39 and parll.); «...renounce the world, and God will love you»; and in the quoted *ḥadīth* of *nawāfil* it is said that such a love leads to union: «If my servant continues to draw near to me by voluntary acts of devotion (*nawāfil*) I will surely love him (*aḥbabtu-hu*), and when I love him, I will be his ear...³⁶».

Thus, in these *aḥādīth*, love appears to be, as it were, a basic trait and a spontaneous fruit of a life of faith (*īmān*), prayer (*nawāfil*) and ascetic practice (*zuhd*), a genre of life that had become quite common among many «good and pious servants of God» during the first two centuries of Islam. Those people, in fact, were called the «ascetics» (*zubbān*, *nussāk*) and the «true servants» of God (*ʿubbād*), and given other similar names.

d. The consequences or the results of such a religious love (*ḥubb*).

It is said in the hadith that when somebody loves God, God will protect him (*ḥimāya*) from the world, and make the angels (*ahl al-samāʿ*) and the pious people

34. *Concordance* I 409a (al-Dārimī, *sunna* 3); I 408a (al-Bukhārī, *ādhān* 36); I 408b (Ibn Ḥanbal 5, 343); I 406a (al-Bukhārī, *īmān* 14).

35. *Concordance* I 407b (Ibn Ḥanbal 4, 286).

36. *Concordance* I 406b (al-Bukhārī, *īmān* 7); I 407b (Ibn Māja, *zuhd* 1); I 408a (al-Bukhārī, *riqāq* 38).

love him, and thus he will achieve the perfection of religion (*dīn*) and faith (*īmān*), and perfect submission (*islām*) and obedience (*ṭāʿa*) to God: «Love for the others what you love for yourself, you will be a real *muslim* (i.e., submitted to God); «...you will not be true believers (*tuḥminū*) if you do not love each other (*taḥābbū*)...³⁷». Besides, love urges people to perform every kind of good (*khayr*) and pious works (*aʿmāl*), keeping them away from the burden of hatred (*shahna*) they have against each other and leading them to reconciliation. Above all, a true love rooted in faith enables the believer to love his «brother» as he loves himself, as it is said in the already quoted *ḥadīth*: «...Out of faith (*īmān*) one must love for his brother (*akhi-hi*) what he loves for himself». This *ḥadīth*, and others similar, echo the Evangelical «golden rule» of life and indicate to Muslims a very important principle of true spiritual life: true love for God necessarily calls for love of the fellow co-servants of God. Consequently, it must be said that in the hadith vision, too, the two loves, that for God and that for fellow human beings, cannot be separated, the second being a necessary consequence of the first. Besides, true love leads to union between the servant and his Lord, as said in the quoted *ḥadīth* of *nawāfil*. But in some *aḥādīth* it is also stated that God's love draws upon his good and pious servants «trials and tests» (*balā*): «When God loves someone he puts him to the test (*ibtilā*)³⁸». This *ḥadīth*, known as the «*ḥadīth* of the trial (*balā*' or *ibtilā*)», seems to reflect an experience of opposition, if not persecution those pious and devout people encountered on the part of their community. And on the basis of this *ḥadīth* it will become almost a rule for Sufis to expect that the true and pious believers should necessarily face opposition and persecution, first of all on the part of their fellow co-believers. Thus, Sufis will become for their communities, as it were, «signs of contradiction», as history has witnessed many a time. However, such trials, tragic as they may be, should not be interpreted by Sufis as signs of God's forsaking, but as signs of His special love and choice for them, as the hadith affirms. In fact, it will be by undergoing patiently and lovingly such trials that the pious servants of God will reach the state of being the people «chosen» by God (*iṣṭafā-hum*) to bear a witness of Him to their fellow co-believers, as the trial of al-Ḥallāj clearly shows. Love, in fact, leads to union and intimacy with the beloved, «to be with him» (*ma'a-hu*), as the quoted *ḥadīth* states. It will always be in such union and intimacy with their Lord (*Rabb*) that the pious and good servants will find true refuge and protection against any kind of opposition and persecution, even when coming from their fellow co-believers.

37. *Concordance* I 407b (al-Tirmidhī, *zuḥd* 3); I 408b (Muslim, *īmān* 93).

38. *Concordance* I 406a (Ibn Ḥanbal 5, 427-429).

e. The worldly love.

Contrary to the Koranic usage, very little is said in the hadith about worldly love. In some few instances, it is said that the love for the present world (*dunyā*) leads one to be attached to it, or to one's own wife (*imrā'a*), possessions (*māl*) and life (*'umr*). Such an attachment may lead to exaggeration (*ifrāt*) damaging (*ḍarr*) the servant's life here (*dunyā*) and in the hereafter (*ākhirā*). In fact, in some *aḥādīth* it is said that people who have been dear friends (*aḥibbā'*) out of love for the present world will meet in the fire (*nār*) of Hell, where their dear friends (*aḥibbā'*) will be of no help³⁹.

f. A «chain» of reciprocal love?

A most striking trait of love in the hadith is what I like to call a «chain of love». Such a vision is quite new compared with the one given in the corresponding Koranic vocabulary. The hadiths, in fact, show that there is a dynamic bond of love linking together a number of different persons: God, the angels, the Prophet, his family and his companions, the good and pious servants. There is a movement of love going on among them, a movement that is expressed also in the linguistic structure of these *aḥādīth*. In fact, many of these *aḥādīth* are clearly built on «premise and consequence» patterns, such as: «If somebody loves so and so,...he will be loved by... (*idhā aḥabba... aḥabba-hu...*)», or «He loved... therefore he was loved by...» (*aḥabba... fa-aḥabba-hu...*); e. g.: «God loves (*yuhibbu*) Such and Such (*fulān*)... so, you must love him too (*fa-aḥibba-hu*)»; «...if someone loves me (*aḥabba-nī*), let people love him too... (*fa-l-yuhibba-hu*)»; «if someone loves them, God will love him (*aḥabba-hu*)...», «...(*Allāh*) loves you (*aḥabba-ka*) as you loved him in Him (*kamā aḥabba-hu fihī*)⁴⁰. Such linguistic patterns and the vision expressed in them are completely absent from the Koranic text, and they represent no doubt a remarkable linguistic innovation compared with the Koranic language.

Many examples of such «new language» of love can be pointed out in some *aḥādīth*, such as: «If someone loves (*aḥabba*) to meet (*liqā'*) God, God will love (*aḥabba*) to meet him (*liqā'*)»; «He loves (*yuhibbu*) God and his Messenger, therefore God and his Messenger love him (*yuhibbu-hu*)...⁴¹»; and in the same way: «When God loves (*idhā aḥabba*) somebody... the people of heaven will love (*fa-yuhibbu-hu*) him too»; «...God will love him (*aḥabba-hu*) and the people of heaven will love him too (*aḥabba-hu*)»; «...so, if someone loves (*aḥabba*) them, God will love him

39. *Concordance* I 409a (Ibn Ḥanbal 2, 334.378; 4, 414; 6,3).

40. *Concordance* I 406b (al-Bukhārī, *adab* 41); *ibid.* (Ibn Ḥanbal 5, 366); *ibid.* (al-Bukhārī, *manāqib al-anṣār* 4); *ibid.* (Muslim, *birr* 38).

41. *Concordance* I 406a (Muslim, *dhikr* 14-18); I 406b (al-Tirmidhī, *jihād* 26).

(*aḥabba-hu*)»; «...if someone loves me (*aḥabba-nī*), let people love him too (*fa-l-yuḥibba-hu*)...»; and the chain may continue without end: «I love him (*uḥibbu-hu*), therefore love him (*fa-aḥibba-hu*) and love (*wa-aḥibba*) the ones who love him...⁴²».

In some *aḥādīth* love appears to be not only a consequence of a previous love, but it becomes, as it were, instrumental. In other words, it is «through it» that people love each other. This is clearly expressed in *aḥādīth* such as: «So, if someone loves them (*aḥabba-hum*), it is through my love (*bi-ḥubb-ī*) that he loves them»; «I love him in God (*fi-llāh*)... so, he loves you with the same love you have (*bi-ḥubbi-ka*) for him in Him (God)⁴³». In some beautiful invocations, the pious servants of God proclaim: «O God, we love with your love the ones who love you (*nuḥibbu bi-ḥubbi-ka man aḥabba-ka*)»; and «O God, love him and love the one who loves him⁴⁴». Here one can say that love reaches its climax in the hadith vocabulary. Love is not just an exterior bond linking people together, but it becomes, as it were, an «inner principle», creating among them a new reciprocal and intimate relationship. One could almost speak here of a «divine» love, «divine» in its origin, action, strength and purpose, uniting people in a sort of spiritual «community» or, say, a spiritual friendship of love.

As a result of such a spiritual community in love one can notice that the reciprocal forms of the verb love (*taḥābba* and its derivatives), completely absent in the Koranic vocabulary, become quite frequent (9 times) in the hadith literature. The expression «*al-mutaḥābbūna fi-llāh*» (people who love each other in God) becomes an almost standard formula to designate those «pious lovers in God», such as: «...two people who loved each other (*taḥābbā*) in God (*fi-llāhi*), and in Him they met and in Him they separated...», and «...they loved each other (*taḥābbā*) in God (*fi-llāhi*)», and «My love (*maḥabbat-ī*) is due to those who love each other (*mutaḥābbūna*) in Me (*fiyya*)⁴⁵». Such an intimate kind of mutual love becomes a constant request from God in the invocation of those pious believers, such as: «O God, make me desire a beloved-friend (*ḥabīb*) who will be dearer to me than myself⁴⁶». Here, in the usage of the reciprocal forms of the verb «to love» (*taḥābba*) and in the intimacy of these invocations of love, one can perceive a deep innovation, or, say, a remarkable semantic development with respect to the Koranic vocabulary. Such a semantic develop-

42. *Concordance* I 406a (al-Bukhārī, *adab* 41); I 406b (Ibn Ḥanbal 3, 218); *ibid.* (al-Bukhārī, *manāqib al-anṣār* 4); *ibid.* (Ibn Ḥanbal 5, 366); I 407b (Muslim, *fuḍā'il al-ṣaḥāba* 57-59).

43. *Concordance* I 406b (al-Tirmidhī, *manāqib* 58); I 408a (Ibn Ḥanbal 3, 393).

44. *Concordance*; I 408a (al-Tirmidhī, *dā'awāt* 30); *ibid.* (al-Bukhārī, *buyū'* 49).

45. *Concordance* I 408a (al-Bukhārī, *adhān* 36); I 408b (Ibn Ḥanbal 5, 343); *ibid.* (al-Muwaṭṭa' *shī'r* 16).

46. *Concordance* I 409b (Muslim *jihād* 132).

ment mirrors, surely, a different and a deeper experience of love in which intimacy, reciprocity and friendship were prominent features.

g. The first ascetic circles: the *Sitz im Leben* of these Hadiths of love?

In the course of the present semantic analysis of the language of love in the hadith, I have more than once highlighted the remarkable linguistic development found. Love in the hadiths takes on an ever stronger connotation and character of a personal, close, intimate relationship between two or more persons linked together in a particular, strong bond of «spiritual friendship». All this has no match in the Koranic text. In my previous research, I have pointed to the fact that the basic connotation of the term love in the Koranic text is that of «making a radical choice or commitment» for or against God's cause and the mission of his Messenger, Muḥammad⁴⁷. I stated there that the Koranic language of love is in most instances situated in a context of *jihād*, i.e., «the fight for God's cause and for his Messenger» against his opponents, first of all the pagans of Mecca. So, those who love (meaning «those who have chosen or preferred to side with») God and his Prophet, must follow the Prophet in his *jihād* disowning and rejecting all previous allegiances to their own pagan country folks, even if these were one's own family and intimate friends. The Koranic vocabulary does not focus on love as a close, intimate, personal relationship.

In the hadith, on the contrary, the stress is laid on the personal, close, intimate relationship love creates, linking together God, the Prophet and the pious servants. This love relationship is based on some particular spiritual features such as faith (*īmān*), renouncement of the world (*zuhd*), prayer (*du'ā, nawāfil*). In a word, it is based on a deep ascetic life, which is seen as the basic and essential premise for such a particular bond of love. In such a bond of love people are linked, as it were, by a «chain or a circle of love», forming something like a «community of love» quite distinct from the rest of the believers. Only those who practise such a particular type of life, namely an ascetic style of life (*zuhd*), can have access to such a community of friendship and love. We have remarked that such a bond of love is not just an exterior commitment to a cause, as in the Koranic vocabulary. Love is described in the hadith vocabulary as an inner principle of a new personal life, binding together a number of people who now call themselves beloved-friends (*aḥibbā'*) or «brothers» (*ikhwa*). In the end, the pious believer comes to love his fellow-servants, his «brothers» «in — through — for God's love (*fī- bi- li-llāhi*)». Moreover, such a bond of

47. This is a basic result of my research, G. SCATTOLIN, «Love (*ḥubb*) of God in Islamic mysticism (I)», *op. cit.*

love is so deep that it leads to a personal meeting, and even union, with God himself, to the point that God takes over everything of his servant, becoming the real agent of whatever his servant does. In the end, there remains only one agent, God. To Him his pious servant can entrust everything in the present as well as in the future life, because now he has become the beloved-friend (*ḥabīb*) of God, and God will never forsake his beloved-friend (*ḥabīb*) and, of course, not let him fall into the fire of Hell.

This is without doubt quite an elevated vision of love, a vision that must have arisen out of an actual experience of it and not out of mere abstract speculation. One can also remark that such a kind of love fits quite well into the life context, or *Sitz im Leben*, of the ascetic circles of many pious people in the first two centuries of Islam. From the historical sources we know that those first generations of ascetics in Islam consisted of pious people who, tired of the fighting that was going on in the Islamic community among the rival political parties, chose for themselves a life of seclusion and asceticism. They used to gather around the readers of the Koran (*qurrā*), the tellers of edifying stories of the prophets (*quṣṣās*), or some famous preachers (*wu'āz*) such as al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) in Baṣra and some pious persons who had gained a high renown for their ascetic lifestyle, such as Ibrāhīm b. Adham (d. 160/777) and Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya (d. 185/801) and others. Those pious people, called ascetics (*zubbād*, *nussāk*), poor (*fuqarā*), true servants-worshippers of God (*'ubbād*), and the like, intended to return to what they thought to have been the simple lifestyle of the Prophet Muḥammad, imitating his virtues, especially poverty, prayer and ascetic practices, in order to reach intimacy with God. Little by little they grew into circles of people, based many a time around mosques, such as in Kufa and Baṣra in Iraq, or in the private dwelling of some holy persons, such as Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya, cultivating a certain degree of communal life and sharing their spiritual search. The dialogues and sayings of these first ascetics, such as those reported from Ibrāhīm b. Adham, Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya and others, reveal such an intimate, spiritual atmosphere that surrounded those pious circles⁴⁸. Their discussions focused on their way of life and their ascetic practices, the way to reach spiritual perfection in some virtues, and the like. The content of those ascetic sayings is similar in many ways to that of many hadiths on spiritual life. It seems to us that only such ascetic, pious milieu can fully account for the content and the style of many hadiths in which such a high degree of deep, intimate and personal spiritual love is expressed. Here, one can verify the principle that the development of language is fruit and witness of a corresponding devel-

48. A still useful description of these first ascetic circles in early Islam is the one given in Louis MASSIGNON, *Essai, op. cit.*: ch. IV «Les premières vocations mystiques en Islam», pp. 137-240; Margaret SMITH, *Studies, op. cit.*

opment of experience: language, in fact, is the mirror of experience. In the present instance, only the milieu and the lifestyle of those first circles of pious and ascetic servants-worshippers of God (*'ubbād*) can account for the formation of such a new vocabulary of love as witnessed in the hadith material.

On the other hand, one must notice too that, with such a striking similarity, there is also a distance between those Sufi sayings on love and the content of the *ahādīth* of love. In the hadiths, for instance, there is no mention of the desire or the experience of a direct vision (*ru'yā*) of God, while such a thought was already clearly present in many Sufi sayings going back to the second century of Islam, such as in Ibrāhīm b. Adham, Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya and others; to say nothing about the language of «union» (*ittiḥād*), or indwelling (*ḥulūl*) of God in his servant, a language that will appear only later in the Sufis of the third and fourth century of Islam, such as Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (d. 261/875), al-Ḥusayn b. Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922), and others.

In conclusion, it appears as if the material of the official collections of hadith has undergone a kind of selection or, perhaps, «purge», to make it fit into the frame of the accepted Islamic vision of God and human beings, avoiding all the «exaggerations» of which many Sufis have been accused. One may guess that a kind of «purification» of language has occurred in the compilation of the official collections of hadith, from which all suspicious material had to be expunged. In conclusion, one can say that the language of love found in the official hadiths mirrors the spiritual atmosphere of the first generation of the ascetics (*zuhhād*) in Islam, *i.e.*, from the time of the followers (*al-tābi'ūn*) of the Companions up to the end of the second century, but before the further development Sufism underwent in third and later centuries.

However, to complete the picture, one must always keep in mind that a lot of that material discarded from the official collections of hadith has been preserved and transmitted separately in the Sufi circles. Thus, a different type of hadith literature, parallel to the official one, was formed, transmitted and held in the highest esteem by the Sufis as authentic utterances of the Prophet, and, therefore, enjoying in their view the highest authority. Such «Sufi literature of hadith» too has become in time a most important source for later Sufis' experience and vision.

2-2: The other stems (RHM, WLY, HWY, WDD, ḤLL, ḤNN, SHWQ, 'SHQ).

Others synonyms of love, in particular the derivatives of the stems RHM, WLY, WDD, HWY, KHLL, ḤNN, SHWQ, 'SHQ, appear in the hadith, but their frequency, on the whole, is much lower and their semantic range quite limited compared with the derivatives of ḤBB.

2-2-1. RĤM and its derivatives.

The derivatives of the stem RĤM occur 213 times in the hadith, that is in a much lower frequency than in the Koranic text (340 times), but still more than the derivatives of ĤBB in the hadith (161 times)⁴⁹.

The connotation of the derivatives of RĤM is basically the same in both the Koran and the hadith vocabularies. As known, the Arabic term *rahma* (mercy) is a derivative of the word *rahim* (womb), and thus it conveys the connotation of mercy in the sense of «the deep tenderness and the innate love a mother feels for her child». In the hadith too, as it has been remarked in the Koranic text, the derivatives of RĤM recur repeated in sort of fixed stereotypical formulas that make them lose a great deal of the passionate and emotional connotation of their original root: the «womb» (*rahim*) of a mother⁵⁰.

In the hadith, as well as in the Koranic text, God appears, both at the statistical and semantic levels, to be the absolute subject of *rahma*. Even when *rahma* is attributed to humans, the human *rahma* is always strictly dependent on and derived from God's *rahma*. It is said in the hadiths that surely God grants his *rahma* to all people in general, but in a special way to his prophets and pious believers.

In some hadiths, God's *rahma* is invoked particularly for the dead; this is a new trait not present in the Koranic text. Here too, some stereotypical formulas appear that have become in time of common use among Muslims on the occasion of death, such as: «...may God have mercy on him (*rahima-hu allāhu*) — we belong to God and we return to him (*innā li-llāhi wa-innā ilay-hi rāji'ūn*, K. 2, 156)»; «...a dead person — may God have mercy on him (*rahima-hu allāhu*) -...»; «... and when he (God) takes his soul (*qabaḍa-hu*), he will pardon him and have mercy on him (*rahima-hu*)⁵¹».

Above all, God shows a special mercy to those who are merciful (*ruḥamā*). This point is given special emphasis in the hadith, compared with the Koranic text. Here too one can notice something like a «chain of *rahma*» going from God to some people, and from these to others, in a movement parallel to the «chain of *ḥubb*» shown above. In this context, a number of *ahādīth* sound quite similar, in content and wording, to some passages on mercy found in the Gospels: e. g., «Verily, God shows his mercy (*yarḥamu allāhu*) from among his servants (*'ibād*) to those who are merciful (*ruḥamā*)»; «If someone shows no mercy (*lā yarḥam*), he will receive no mercy (from God) (*lā yurḥam*)»; «Have mercy (*irḥamū*) toward those who are on earth, you

49. *Concordance* II 235a-241a.

50. Cf. G. SCATTOLIN, «Love (*ḥubb*) of God in Islamic mysticism (I) », *op. cit.*

51. *Concordance* II 235b (Ibn Māja, *janā'iz* 53); *ibid.* (Ibn Ḥanbal, 5, 231); *ibid.* (Ibn Ḥanbal, 3, 148).

will receive mercy (*yarḥam-kum*) from the one who is in heaven (God)»; «Upon those who have mercy (*rāḥimūn*), God will show his mercy»; «Have mercy, you will receive mercy (*irḥamū, turḥamū*); pardon, God will pardon you⁵²». One can easily compare these *ahādīth* with some Evangelical sayings as in Mt. 5, 7 and parallels.

In a number of *ahādīth* the invocation of God's *rahma* is moulded in formulas that have become common figures of speech among the Muslims: «O God, have mercy on me/ you/ him/ us... (*irḥam-nī/-kal/-hul/-nā...*); and: «O God, open (*iftah*) to me the doors of your mercy (*abwāb raḥmati-ka*)⁵³».

In the hadīth, it is stressed that God's *rahma* is particularly connected with the *ṣilat al-raḥim* (lit. the link of the uterus), *i.e.*, the family bonds derived from the same uterus (*raḥim*) or the same blood, and carrying, therefore, the gravest obligations for the persons linked by it. Such a bond is a most sacred one, because, as many *hadīths* make clear, it is directly connected with God's *rahma*. Thus, God proclaims that he is the warrant of the family bond and those who infringe it (*qaṭʿ al-raḥim*, lit. «to cut the uterus») commit a most hideous sin that will be punished in Hell: «I am God, and I am the Most-merciful (*rahmān*), and I have created the uterus (*raḥim*)»; «The uterus (*raḥim*) is linked with the throne (of God) (*ʿarsh Allāh*)»; «Who cuts (*qāṭiʿ*) — *i.e.*, cuts the uterus (*raḥim*, meaning the bond based on it) — will never enter Paradise»; «God has sent me (the Prophet is speaking) to renew the family bonds (*ṣilat al-arḥām*, lit. the link of the uteruses), and to break (*kasr*) down idols»; and a most grave sin is that «They have killed (lit. shed blood) and broken the family bonds («*qāṭāʿū al-arḥām*», lit. cut the uteruses)⁵⁴».

Mercy (*rahma*) is, in fact, the most characteristic attribute of God: «...(*al-raḥma*) is the attribute (*ṣifa*) of the Most-merciful (*rahmān*)»; «...I am the most Merciful of the merciful... (*arḥamu al-rāḥimīn*)⁵⁵». Therefore, one should never despair of God's mercy. In some *ahādīth* the mention of God's mercy (*rahma*) connected with the term «peace» (*salām*) occurs in stereotypical greeting formulas that too have become of common usage among Muslims all over the world, such as: «...and upon you peace and God's mercy (...*wa-ʿalay-kum al-salām wa-raḥmatu-llāh*)»; «Peace upon you and God's mercy (*al-salāmu ʿalay-kum wa-raḥmatu-llāh*)⁵⁶».

It is worth noticing that the two terms (*rahmān* — *rāḥīm*), the two most typical and common names of God in the Koranic text, appear in a much lower frequency

52. *Concordance* II 235b (al-Bukhārī, *janāʿiz* 32); II 236a (al-Bukhārī, *adab* 18); *ibid.* (al-Tirmidhī, *birr* 16); *ibid.* (al-Tirmidhī, *birr* 16); II 236b (Ibn Ḥanbal, 3, 165.219).

53. *Concordance* II 236b (al-Bukhārī, *adab* 149, and *passim*); II 239b (Ibn Ḥanbal, 3, 20, and *passim*).

54. *Concordance* II 238a (al-Tirmidhī, *birr* 9); II 237b (Muslim, *birr* 17); *ibid.* (Muslim, *birr* 18.19); II 238b (Muslim, *musāfirīn* 294); *ibid.* (Ibn Ḥanbal, 2, 431).

55. *Concordance* II 240b (al-Bukhārī, *tawḥīd* 1); *ibid.* (Ibn Ḥanbal, 1, 5).

56. *Concordance* II 239b (Muslim, *faḍāʾil al-ṣahāba* 90-91); *ibid.* (al-Bukhārī, *tafsīr sūrat* 33, 8).

in the hadith than in the Koranic text itself: in the hadith *rahmān* recurs 7 times (against the 57 times of the Koran) and *rāḥīm* 2 times (against the 115 times of the Koran).

The Prophet Muḥammad, too, is said in few instances to be the subject of *rahma* towards his community and also the whole humankind in general: «The Messenger of God (*rasūl Allāh*) was merciful (*rahīm*) and gentle (*rafiq*)»; «I am Muḥammad... and the Prophet of mercy (*nabiyu al-rahma*)⁵⁷».

Finally, the common believers, too, are united by *rahma* deriving from both the family bond and the common faith. They are said in a few instances to have *rahma* for each other with the reciprocal form of the verb (*tarāḥama*), and to invoke *rahma* for each other, especially for their dear dead, with the intensive form (*tarāḥamū*): «You see the believers having mercy for each other (*tarāḥum*)»; «...people having for each other mercy (*tarāḥum*) and family bond (*tawāṣul*)»; and «...he invoked mercy (*tarāḥama*) upon 'Umar»; «I have invoked mercy (*tarāḥamtu*) for them upon their dead⁵⁸».

On the whole, one can see that the derivatives of RHM also form a dynamic link similar to the one existing in the derivatives of ḤBB. Here, too, there is, as it were, a chain of *rahma* going from God to his creatures and to the believers in particular. Among the believers there is a reciprocal *rahma* based on the reciprocal bonds of family and faith. However, such a bond of *rahma* seems not to be as deep and comprehensive as that of *ḥubb*. The quality of *rahma*, in fact, goes basically from a superior to an inferior and dependent one, like a member of the family or a servant. It is said of God in respect to his creatures, and toward humans in particular. However, the circle of *rahma* cannot go back to God, as the circle of *ḥubb*. There cannot be any possible reciprocity in *rahma* between God and humans: in fact, never it is said that a human has *rahma* for God, while it is said that he/she has *ḥubb* for Him. Thus, the inferior, the human being can have *ḥubb* for God, but never *rahma*.

In conclusion, one can notice that the language of love in the hadith reaches a degree of true communion and reciprocity between God and his servants only with the term *ḥubb* and its derivatives, and not with the term *rahma* and its derivatives. Nonetheless, the concept and language of *rahma* has continued to play a great role in Sufism with deep and, in some instances, remarkable insights, as in the case of Ibn al-'Arabī's Sufism. However, it will be around the term *ḥubb* and its derivatives that Sufis will develop their particular vocabulary to express their special experience of

57. *Concordance* II 238b (Muslim, *nadhr*, 8); II 239b. (Muslim, *faḍā'il* 126).

58. *Concordance* II 237a (al-Bukhārī, *adab* 27); *ibid.* (Ibn Māja, *fitan* 28); *ibid.* (al-Bukhārī, *faḍā'il al-ṣahāba* 6); *ibid.* (Ibn Dāwūd, *janā'iz* 22).

God's love, in which reciprocity, closeness, intimacy and even union can reach the highest levels.

2-2-2. WLY and its derivatives.

The derivatives of the stem WLY occur about 549 times in the hadith (233 times in the Koranic text), but only in a limited number of instances (in derivatives such as *walī/awliyā'* - *mawlā* — *walā'* — *walāya/wilāya*, about 296 times) do they occur with the general meaning of being in «friendship and allegiance» with somebody else⁵⁹.

The basic connotation of the derivatives of WLY in the hadith is not much different from the one they have in the Koranic text: they denote in the first a reciprocal relationship of nearness (in place and position) (*wālyā*), and, consequently, that of protection-dominion (physical and moral) (*wilāya*) or that of fidelity-allegiance (*walā'*) to a pact agreed upon between people linked by various kinds of bonds, such as marriage, blood, covenants, contracts, friendship etc. The partners of such a bond are called with the same nouns *walī* — *mawlā*, because such terms can have both the active and the passive meaning and, therefore, they can be translated according to the context either as «friend-protector» (active meaning) or «friend-protégé» (passive-meaning). These terms do not occur in the hadith with a religious meaning except in some few instances in which nouns such as *walī* — *mawlā* and *walā'* — *walāya* — *wilāya* are attributed to God in the first place; e. g., «...so he deserved protection-fidelity (*walā'*) from God...⁶⁰». In the same meaning God is said to be, first of all, the friend-protector of his prophets: «God has never sent a prophet without being himself his friend-protector (*walī*)⁶¹». This title, friend-protector (*walī*), is also given in some instances to the Prophet and his «family» in regard to the believers: «When I am the friend-protector (*walī*) of someone, 'Alī too will become his friend-protector (*walī*)⁶²».

Only in one instance does the term protected-friend (*walī*) occur in the hadith connected with the term love (*ḥubb*), taking on a more intimate connotation, going beyond the Koranic meaning, to indicate a closer friendship between God and his friend-protected servant (*walī*): «Whoever treats a friend-protégé (*walī*) of mine as an enemy, I will declare war on him...⁶³». This is the beginning of the quoted *ḥadīth al-nawāfil*. In it God declares his special love (*ḥubb*) for his servant, who has become now his friend-protégé (*walī*), to the point of taking over the complete and total

59. *Concordance* VII 322a-336a.

60. *Concordance* VII 329a (Ibn Ḥanbal, 3, 340).

61. *Concordance* VII 330a (Ibn Ḥanbal, 1, 278).

62. *Concordance* VII 330b (Ibn Ḥanbal, 5, 250).

63. *Concordance* VII 330b (al-Bukhārī, *riqāq*, 38).

«agency» of his servant's actions, saying that: «...I will be his ear (*kuntu sam'a-hu*), his sight, etc.». In this *ḥadīth* a new meaning of the term *walī* appears, a meaning that will grow in the history of Sufism coming to designate in particular the Sufi as a close and intimate friend (*walī*) of God. In this way, the term *walī* (pl. *awliyā'*) has become, as it were, a technical term to designate Sufis in general, because they are considered to live in a special relationship of friendship with God. Sufis, in fact, consider themselves and are considered by the others as the friends of God *par excellence* (*awliyā' Allāh*), *i.e.*, those who are the nearest to Him among the rest of the believers. For this reason, they will also call themselves and be called by others «special people» (*khāṣṣa/khawāṣṣ*), because God has chosen them (*iṣṭafā-hum*) from among the rest of the community. This last meaning can also be discerned in another *ḥadīth* that says: «My close friends (*awliyā'-ī*) from among all my servants (*'ibād-ī*) are those who practice the remembrance of me (*dhikr-ī*)⁶⁴». Here, the friendship with God is linked with the practice of his remembrance (*dhikr*), a practice that will become very common among the Sufis, as a typical feature or emblem of their way of life. But these are just a couple of instances in the total *ḥadīth* language of love. Thus, one must say that at this stage, in the *ḥadīths*, the derivatives of *WLY* have not yet undergone any important semantic development. Such *ḥadīths* seem to reflect, on the whole, the stage of the pious language existing among the first ascetic circles in the first two centuries prior to the linguistic development that came about in the III/IX century with Sufis such as al-Bistāmī (d. 261/875), al-Djunayd (d. 298/910), al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922), and others. In these latter Sufis, the term *walī* and its derivatives will acquire a quite deeper meaning to express the «closest proximity to» and the «most intimate friendship with» God. At this point, the *awliyā'* are thought of as dwelling in the proximity (*qurb*) and love (*ḥubb*) of God, in his contemplation (*mushābada*), even enjoying a privileged status of union, not only at a moral, but even, one could say, at an ontological level.

2-2-3. WDD and its derivatives.

The derivatives of the stem *WDD* occur 53 times in the *ḥadīth* (29 times in the Koranic text)⁶⁵. The verb *wadda* has the general meaning of «desiring or wishing something», while the derived nouns (*wudd*, *mawadda*) mean the bond of friendship existing between two or more people, in parallel with the terms *ḥubb* and *maḥabba*.

In the *ḥadīth*, the derivatives of *WDD* are mostly used in its general, profane meaning. Only in two instances does the reciprocal form (*tawādda*) (parallel to the recip-

64. *Concordance* VII 331b (Ibn Ḥanbal, 3, 430).

65. *Concordance* VII 165b-167a.

rocal form *taḥābba*) occur with a religious connotation. In one it indicates: «...[two people who]... have a reciprocal friendship among themselves (*tawāddāni*) in God (*ʔillāh*)», and in the other «[people who]... had a reciprocal friendship (*tawāddū*) with God and his Prophet⁶⁶». In the hadith, as in the Koranic text, the title of God *wadūd* «The most friendly One» occurs only twice⁶⁷.

2-2-4. HWY and its derivatives.

The derivatives of the stem HWY occur 119 times in the hadith (38 times in the Koranic text), but only 44 times as synonyms of love⁶⁸.

The general meaning of the term *hawā* and its derivatives is «to love out of passion», most of the time with strong sensual, even sexual, overtones and usually with a negative connotation opposite to the spiritual life. The reason for this is that such a love-passion (*hawā*) is mostly directed towards women, material possessions and evil things, especially when used in the plural form (*al-ahwā*), meaning the blind passions that lead people astray.

Only in one instance in the hadith is the verb (*yahwā*) attributed to the Prophet with a religious connotation because directed toward a religious object: «God knew the heart of his Prophet and his intention (*niyya*), and that he loved (*yahwā*) the Ka'ba⁶⁹».

In another instance the noun (*hawā*) is attributed with a religious meaning to the pious servant of God: «If his intimate aspiration (*himma*) and love (*hawā*) is in my obedience..⁷⁰.». These two terms, intimate aspiration (*himma*) and love (*hawā*), will often appear linked together in Sufi texts to express the Sufi's intimate desire and orientation towards spiritual realities, God in the first place.

2-2-5. KHLL and its derivatives.

The derivatives of KHLL occur only 15 times in the hadith (13 times in the Koranic text) with the meaning of «close friend» (*khalīl*), and friendship (*khulla*)⁷¹.

The title «friend of God» (*khalīl al-Allāh*) is given in the hadith, as in the Koranic text, first of all to Abraham (*Ibrāhīm*). But, in the hadith the same title is given also to the Prophet Moḥammad by God «God says: wrap up my friend (*khālīl-ī*, meaning Muḥammad)⁷²», and by his companions: «I have heard my beloved (*ḥabīb-ī*), my

66. *Concordance* VII 166b.

67. *Concordance* VII 167a.

68. *Concordance* VII 113a-116b.

69. *Concordance* VII 114b (Ibn Māja, *iḡāma* 56).

70. *Concordance* VII 115b (al-Dārimī, *muqaddima* 37).

71. *Concordance* II 57a-58a.

72. *Concordance* II 57a (al-Dārimī, *riḡāq* 80).

close friend (*khalīl-ī*) – God's peace and blessing upon him –⁷³». Muḥammad is reported in one instance to have given this title to his closest companion, Abū Bakr. It is worth noticing the link established here between the two titles «my beloved» (*ḥabīb-ī*) and «my close friend» (*khalīl-ī*), when given to Muḥammad on the part of God and his companions. These appellations will become of very common usage in Sufi circles, heralding a special relationship that will grow among them with regard to the Prophet.

The noun *khulla* (friendship) occurs in the hadith only once with a clear religious meaning: «But the friendship (*khulla*, a variant says: *ukhuwwa*, i.e., the brotherhood) of Islam is preferable⁷⁴». The terms «friend – friendship» (*khalīl – khulla*) will also acquire a particular meaning with Sufis, such as Rabāḥ b. 'Amr al-Qaysī (d. 180/796). At this point they will denote a state of friendship with God (*khulla*) that puts the Sufi in a privileged status, elevating him above the precepts of the common religious law. Such an antinomian claim, however, will be considered dangerous and will be rejected by the vast majority of Muslim as well as of Sufi scholars. No hint, of course, of such a dangerous connotation is to be found in the hadith language.

2-2-6. ḤNN and its derivatives.

The derivatives of the stem ḤNN occur 6 times in the hadith (only once in the Koranic text)⁷⁵, and only twice with a clear religious meaning, in the two instances in which God is called with the Koranic title *ḥannān* (The most affectionate One)⁷⁶.

2-2-7. SHWQ and its derivatives.

The derivatives of SHWQ occur only 3 times in the hadith (never in the Koranic text), but only in one instance with a clear religious meaning⁷⁷. This occurs in a prayer attributed to the Prophet in which he says: «I ask you the joy of looking to (*naẓar ilā*) your countenance and the desire (*shawq*) of meeting you⁷⁸». It is worth noticing here that the vision of God is expressed by the Koranic term (*naẓar ilā*), which means the eschatological vision of God, as in the verse: «(faces)... looking toward their Lord (*ilā rabbihim nāẓira*)» (K. 75, 23), and not by the terms preferred by Sufis (*ru'ya – mushāhada*) by which their experience of a «vision of God», even in the present life, is designated.

73. *Concordance* I 409b (Ibn Mâja, *ṣadaqât* 10).

74. *Concordance* II 57b (al-Bukhârî, *farâ'id* 9).

75. *Concordance* I 520b.

76. *Concordance* I 520b (Ibn Ḥanbal, 3, 23.158)

77. *Concordance* III 213a.

78. *Concordance* III 213a (Ibn Ḥanbal, 4, 264; 5, 191).

2-2-8. 'SHQ and its derivatives.

The stem 'SHQ occurs only once in the hadith (never in the Koranic text) with the only connotation of «the love-passion for a woman»: «Because of a woman he fell in love-passion with (*'ashīqa-hā*)..⁷⁹.». In the official collections of hadiths, no mention is made of the famous *ḥadīth al-'ishq*, transmitted by al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī in which the term means the «intense reciprocal love between God and his servant⁸⁰». As known, the derivatives of 'SHQ will have a very large development and usage in Sufi language to express the intense and passionate Sufi love for God. A clear semantic gap is to be noticed here between the Koranic/hadith vocabulary on one side and the Sufi vocabulary of love on the other.

2-3: Some remarks on the vocabulary of love in the hadith.

From the present survey of the love vocabulary in the hadith, it appears quite clear that the derivatives from stems others than ḤBB are, on the whole, quite limited in frequency: none of them has reached a semantic development comparable with that of ḤBB and its derivatives. Nonetheless, some of them such as *walīlawliya'* (friend protector-protégé), *hawā* (love-passion), *khalīl* – *khulla* (friend-friendship), *shawq* (love-desire), *'ishq* (love-passion) and others, will be widely used by Sufis undergoing in time a deep semantic development. Such a development will become clear when Sufis, starting from the middle of the III/IX century, adopt erotic language in a more consistent way of expressing their spiritual experience. At the same time, the Sufi vocabulary of love will become all the more connected with that of vision (*ru'ya* – *mushābada*) and union (*waḥda* – *ittihād*), terms not mentioned in the hadith vocabulary in connection with love (*ḥubb*). From all this evidence, it seems reasonable to infer that the official collections of the hadiths testify to a state of Sufi language previous to the new semantic development that came about around the III/IX c. of Islam. It appears as if the collection of the hadiths was carried out in the light of a certain criterion of orthodoxy. In this way, anything that appeared to be against an accepted Islamic vision, in particular all the «exaggerations» of which many Sufis have been accused, was expunged from it. A sort of «purification» of language occurred at that point in the enterprise of the collection of the hadiths. A case in point is the famous *ḥadīth al-'ishq*, transmitted by al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī but not accepted in the official collections, in spite of the authority of the traditionist. Yet, we know from history that a lot of that discarded hadith material has been preserved and transmit-

79. WENSINCK, *Concordance* IV 225b (Ibn Ḥanbal, 5, 164).

80. L. MASSIGNON, *Essai* pp. 127.195-196; CASPAR, *Cours* 83-84; BELL, *Love Theory* pp. 165-167.

ted in Sufi circles as coming from the Prophet of Islam, Muḥammad, and as such enjoying the highest esteem in their life and experience.

The present analysis also shows that in the hadiths some terms such as *rahma*, *walī* (*awliyā*), *hawā* (love-passion), *khalīl* – *khulla* (friend-friendship), *shawq* (love-desire) and others, have already undergone a particular semantic development with respect to the Koranic vocabulary. I maintain here that such a development can only be accounted for as a result of a new spiritual experience brought about by the new life context, or *Sitz im Leben*, of the ascetic circles of the first two centuries of Islam.

3. SOME SIGNIFICANT HADITHS FOR THE SUFI EXPERIENCE.

As a conclusion to the present semantic survey of the vocabulary of love in the hadith I present the text of some *ahādīth* that have played a quite important role in the formation of the experience of the Sufis and are often quoted in their writings.

3-1. The *ḥadīth al-nawāfil* or *kuntu*.

«Whoever treats a friend-protégé (*walī*) of mine as an enemy, I will declare war on him. And there is nothing dearer to me, my servant can do to draw near to me, than his accomplishing the religious duties (*farā'id*) I have imposed on him. And if my servant continues to draw near to me by voluntary acts of devotion (*nawāfil*), I shall love him (*aḥbabtu-hu*); and when I love him, I shall be his ear (*kuntu sam'a-hu*) with which he hears, his sight with which he sees, his hand with which he grasps, and his foot with which he walks. If he asks me (anything), I will give it to him; and if he seeks protection from me, I will give it to him. And never do I hesitate doing anything as taking the soul of a faithful believer of mine (i.e., to make him die): since he hates death, and I hate to harm him, [however, he has no escape from it (= death)]⁸¹».

The original meaning of this *ḥadīth* should be drawn from its context, which is that of *jihād*, i.e., of fighting for God's cause. Such a *ḥadīth* sounds very close in meaning to the Koranic verse in which, referring to the battle of Badr that marked the first victory of the Muslims over the pagans of Mecca, it is said: «It was not you who threw when you threw, but God (who threw)» (K. 8, 17). In such texts, God appears to be the true and absolute agent in every act of his believers, especially when he intervenes in their favour, as in the situation of *jihād*. The Koranic language in this respect is quite similar to many Biblical texts in which God is said to be the absolute agent in all. In the Bible, too, God is described as the absolute doer of everything: he gives good and evil, victory and defeat, «...makes one go down to the underworld and come out of it», (1 Sam. 2, 6). In the present *ḥadīth*, a very strong

81. *Concordance* I 408a (al-Bukhārī, *riqāq* 38); the text translated here is taken from Graham, *Divine Word* pp. 173-174. There are some variants in the reports of this hadith.

union between God and his servant is emphasized and, for this reason, it has played a most important role in the Sufis' experience. Some Sufis, such as al-Junayd (d. 298/910), went on to build on it the idea of the «exchange of qualities» (*tabādul al-ṣifāt*) between God and his servants: the servant is transformed by putting on «God's qualities». Such an idea will become a basic principle for many Sufis, such as al-Ghazālī (d. 505./1111). Other Sufis, such as al-Ḥallāj, 'Umar Ibn al-Fāriḍ (d. 632/1235) and others, will find in this *ḥadīth* a justification for their affirmation of unity (*wahda-ittihād*) with God. Ibn al-'Arabī will read this *ḥadīth* in his vision of «unity of being or existence» (*wahdat al-wujūd*), in which God (*al-ḥaqq*) and creatures (*al-khalq*) must be thought of as united at the deepest level of «being or existence» (*wujūd*): God (*al-ḥaqq*) and creatures (*al-khalq*) are two aspects of the same «being or existence» (*wujūd*)⁸².

3-2. The *ḥadīth al-ibtilā'*.

«When God loves someone, he puts him on trial (*ibtilā'*)⁸³».

As said above, this *ḥadīth* has been the object of frequent meditation on the part of many Sufis who have found in it an explanation for the strict link existing in their experience between love (*ḥubb*) of God and trials (*balā'*). In the light of this *ḥadīth*, the Sufis could account for all the persecutions they had to suffer many a time at the hand of their own people, especially the doctors of the law (*'ulamā'*). Persecutions and trials are to be seen in this case not as a sign of God's forsaking but rather of His special love for and choice of His beloved friends, the Sufis, as is evident in the trial of the famous Sufi-martyr al-Ḥallāj⁸⁴.

3-3. The *ḥadīth ḥubbiba*:

«I was made to love (*ḥubbiba*) (i.e., by God) three things of your world: women, perfume, and I put my joy in prayer⁸⁵».

82. Louis MASSIGNON *La passion de Hallāj, martyr mystique de l'Islam*, Gallimard, Paris, 1975 (1st ed. P. Geuthner, 1922), 4 vols., in particular vol. III pp. 47-54, 154-156; IBN AL-FĀRIḌ, *al-Tā'īyyat al-kubrā* vv. 719-724, in *Diwān Ibn al-Fāriḍ*, ed. by Giuseppe Scattolin, IFAO, Cairo, 2004, pp. 138-139 (Arabic text). For Ibn al-'Arabī's view of this hadith see William C. CHITTICK, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge. Ibn al-'Arabī's Metaphysics of Imagination*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1989, pp. 325-331; id. *The Self-Disclosure of God*, State of New York University Press, Albany, 1998, pp. 290-291, and *passim*.

83. *Concordance* I 406a (Ibn Ḥanbal 5, 427-429).

84. This point has been at the centre of Louis Massignon's studies of al-Ḥallāj, see *La passion, op. cit.*, in particular vol. III, pp. 52-60, 123-133; Roger ARNALDEZ, *Hallāj ou la religion de la croix*, Plon, Paris, 1964; R. CASPAR, *Cours*, pp. 83-84.

85. *Concordance* I 405b. There are some variants in the reports of this hadith. We report the form it has in Ibn AL-'ARABĪ, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, ed. Abū l-'Alā al-'Afīfī, Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, Beirut, 1980, (text)

This *ḥadīth* is not mentioned here for some particular role it played in Sufism. Actually, it is not often quoted. Usually Muslims refer to it to justify Muḥammad's, and thus the believers' love, for the «good things of the present world (*dunyā*)», which must not be thought of as forbidden to the believers. It is interesting to mention that the «Greatest Sufi Master» (*al-shaykh al-akbar*), Ibn al-'Arabī in his book *The Bezels of Wisdoms* (*Fuṣūṣ al-Hikam*) reads this *ḥadīth* in a quite original way. On it he has based the last chapter of his book, «The Bezels of Wisdom», under the heading «The Singular Wisdom of the Muḥammadian Word». Ibn al-'Arabī expands in it his vision of universal, cosmic and Divine love. He explains in particular his original understanding of sexual love between man and woman, that must be seen as the most expressive symbol of love between God (*ḥaqq*) and human being (*insān*). In the end, he concludes saying that it is in prayer (*ṣalāt*, feminine singular) — mentioned in the *ḥadīth* as the third element after the feminine plural (women) and the masculine unity (perfume) — that the Sufi should reach the highest degree of union with God. In it the true Sufi reaches the vision (*ru'ya*) of the universal union, in which plurality and singularity are united and merged together.

3-4. The *ḥadīth kuntu kanz^{an}*.

«I was a hidden (unknown) treasure (*kuntu kanz^{an}*), and I loved (*aḥbab-tu*) to be known, so I created the world (*'ālam*) and through it they knew me (*'arafūn-ī*)⁸⁶».

This *ḥadīth* is one of the few Islamic texts in which the reason and purpose of creation is explicitly expressed, and is indicated to be love (*ḥubb*). In the whole Koranic text, in fact, in only one verse the purpose of creation is clearly indicated, namely as utter submission and servanthood (*'ibāda*) to God on the part of his creatures: «We have created the *jinns* and the humans (*ins*) with the sole purpose that they worship us (*li-ya'budūnā*)». (K. 51, 56). This *ḥadīth* has played a very important role in many Sufi reflections, especially in Ibn al-'Arabī's Sufi vision⁸⁷. On the basis of this *ḥadīth*, *kuntu kanz^{an}*, creation is seen by him as a movement of love (*ḥubb*) pouring out of the divine Essence. Everything in the universe must be seen as a manifestation of such a love of the divine Essence. In such a vision creation (*khalq*) becomes the display of the divine Names and Attributes through which the transcendent di-

p. 114; see the whole chapter: «The Singular Wisdom of the Muḥammadian Word», pp. 214-226, which is a commentary of this *ḥadīth*.

86. This *ḥadīth* is not found in the official collections, but it is often quoted in Sufi writings with some variations; we translated the text found in IBN 'ARABĪ, *Fuṣūṣ al-Hikam*, ed. Abū l-'Alā al-'Aḥfīfī, pp. 203-204; Arthur John ARBERRY, *Sufism. An Account of the Mystics of Islam*, reprint ed., Allen & Unwin, London, 1990 (1st ed. 1950), p. 28; Abū l-Wafā AL-GHUNAYMĪ AL-TAFTĀZĀNĪ, *Madkhal ilā al-taṣawwuf al-islāmī*, Dār al-Thāqāfa, Cairo, 1979, pp. 200-205.

vine Essence, indicated in the *ḥadīth* as the «hidden treasure» (*kanz^{an} makhfiyy^{an}*), manifests itself. The creative act appears as an everlasting movement coming from the divine Essence, going through the multitudes of its self-manifestations (*mazāhir-tajalliyyāt*), and returning in the end to its transcendent, mysterious Source, the «hidden treasure» (*kanz^{an} makhfiyy^{an}*). Such a powerful vision, suggested in this *ḥadīth*, has been the source of inspiration for many Sufis. In it the unity and the multiplicity of the whole universe are merged together in transcendent unity.

3-5. The *ḥadīth man 'arafa*.

«*He who knows himself, knows his Lord (man 'arafa nafsa-hu 'arafa rabba-hu)*⁸⁸».

This *ḥadīth* does not come directly under the heading of love, but under that of knowledge (*ma'rifa*). However, we mention it here because it has played a very important role in Sufi speculation in connection with love (*ḥubb*). The true knowledge (*ma'rifa*) of God is said to be not the one acquired from outside, through research and study, but the one reached by delving into the depth of the human soul (*nafs*). Thus, true self-knowledge is seen in the end as the source of true knowledge of God. Such an idea, probably of Gnostic origin (echoing the famous Socratic saying: «know yourself» — γνῶθι σεαυτον), has been joined in the Sufi speculation with the idea of the human being as the «image» (*ṣūra*) of God (attested in another famous *ḥadīth*) and as the «vice-regent» (*khalīfa*) of God (mentioned in the Koranic text). Thus, a relationship of similitude, love and knowledge is established between the divine Essence and its image. This *ḥadīth* has been the starting point of many Sufi reflections, in particular in Ibn al-'Arabi's Sufi school, as well as with other Sufis such as Ibn al-Fāriḍ. This latter, actually, has built his great poem *al-Tā'iyya al-kubrā* upon the idea of Sufi life as self-knowledge, *i.e.*, as the discovery of the deepest dimensions of his own self (*anā*) up to its ultimate stage: the «all-comprehensive union» (*jam*)⁸⁹.

87. For a synthesis of Ibn al-'Arabi's Sufi vision on this point, see Abū l-Wafā AL-GHUNAYMI AL-TAFTĀZĀNĪ, *Maakhal*, pp. 200-205; W. C. CHITTICK, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, pp. 79-96; *id.* *The Self-Disclosure*, pp. 201-265, and *passim*.

88. This hadith is not found in the official collections, but it is often quoted in Sufi writings; we translated the text found in IBN 'ARABĪ, *Fuṣūṣ al-Hikam*, ed. Abū l-'Alā al-'Aḥḍī, pp. 69.92, and see the commentary following it.

89. For the meaning of this hadith in Sufi history see Giuseppe SCATTOLIN, «Realization of 'Self' (*Anā*) in Islamic Mysticism», *op. cit.*; Reynold Alleyne NICHOLSON, *The Mystics of Islam*, reprint ed., Routledge & Kegan, London, 1979 (1st ed. Cambridge 1914), «The Gnosis», pp. 68-101; W. C. CHITTICK, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, pp. 344-346; *id.* *The Self-Disclosure*, pp. 269-270, and *passim*.

4. SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS.

At the end of this short survey of the language of love in the hadith, one has to sum up some most important conclusions of it.

4-1. The language of love in the hadith and its limits.

The vocabulary of love in the hadith appears to be on the whole not much greater in frequency than that of the Koranic text. Moreover, if one takes into account the enormous vocabulary recorded in the nine collections of hadiths scrutinized in Wensink's *Concordance*, one has to conclude that the vocabulary of love occupies a very tiny and peripheral place in it. From such a fact it appears quite evident that the topic «love» was not of great concern to the collectors of the hadiths nor to the Islamic community they were addressing. Other issues, especially juridical and legal matters such as marriage and inheritance, rituals, social behaviours, etc., were clearly the dominant concerns of those collectors of the hadiths and their communities. From this and other historical evidence, one can infer that the collection of the hadiths was not an «impartial» enterprise, but rather a work guided by some dominant interests of the Islamic community to which the collectors of hadiths had to respond. On this premise, one can explain the predominantly juridical character of the official hadiths, a trait that makes them quite different in this respect even from the Koranic text itself, in which the juridical verses occupy on the whole a quite secondary place. N. J. Coulson, for instance, finds that out of over 6000 verses of the Koranic text: «No more than approximately eighty verses deal with legal topics in the strict sense of the word⁹⁰». Hence, one can easily infer that, if the vocabulary of love was already secondary in the Koranic text, as I have proved in my previous research, such a vocabulary has become all the more so in the official collections of hadith. From such premises, some important consequences and interesting reflections can be drawn.

4-2. A semantic development of the language of love.

It is a well established historical fact that the language of love, in spite of its limited presence (especially in its religious meaning) in the revealed sources of Islamic religion, the Koran and the hadith, has continued to grow in scope and importance in the Sufi experience. Such a fact cannot be explained, in our view, on the basis of a purely literal exegesis of the revealed sources, since they do not offer sufficient basis for it. Such a development in the Sufis' love language can only be explained, in our

90. N. J. COULSON, *A History of Islamic law*, reprint ed., Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1994 (1st ed. 1964) p. 12.

view, as the result of an ever deepening experience in spiritual life. Historical sources attest that such a «special way» of life started and continued to grow and deepen in the pious circles of the first ascetics during the first two centuries of Islam. Thus, such a development of language is both a consequence and a witness of a corresponding development of experience. This remains a sound principle of hermeneutics, and the Sufi literature of love offers quite good evidence of it.

We have often remarked in the present research that the vocabulary of love in the hadith shows a quite remarkable semantic development compared with the Koranic one, especially in the words centred around the root ḤBB and its derivatives. In the *ahādīth* examined above, love (*ḥubb*) is described as a deep experience of intimacy, linking together different persons: first of all God and his faithful servants, then special groups of people, creating among them a kind of «chain» or «circle» of love. Reciprocity in love is stressed in the hadith even by the usage of the reciprocal verbal form (*taḥābba*), such as the «mutual lovers in God» (*al-muthābbūna fī-llāh*), terms that do not appear in the Koranic text. Such a development is, in our view, an expression of a new experience of love as a link of «brotherhood» and «community» in which some people felt to be united in a bond of reciprocal friendship and intimacy. Only such a spiritual experience can account for the remarkable development of the language of love found in the hadiths. Thus, the hadith material attests beyond doubt to the growth of an intense spiritual life that came about in the Sufi circles during the first two centuries of Islam. This is a fact that the historical sources confirm.

For a fuller understanding of such a development one should also take into account a number of ideas coming from other different sources, even from outside Islam, such as the Gnostic, Neoplatonic, Judaic, Christian, Iranian etc., milieus. These ideas were quite spread around in the regions of the Middle East that came under Islamic rule. A number of hadiths (many of them not recorded in the official collections) show without doubt a link with some Oriental sources⁹¹. This fact does not put into question that Sufism must be basically seen as an Islamic movement, that originated from inside Islam itself, especially through the practice of the

91. For this complicated issue, see L. MASSIGNON, «Die Ursprung und die Bedeutung des Gnostizismus im Islam», in *Opera Minora*, Dar al-Maaref, Beirut, 1963, I, 498-513, excerptum from *Eranos-Jahrbuch* (1937) 55-77; id., «L'homme parfait et son originalité eschatologique», in *Opera Minora*, I, 107-125, excerptum from *Eranos-Jahrbuch*, t. XV (1948) 287-314; id., «Inventaire de la littérature hermétique arabe», in *Opera Minora*, I, 650-666, in A. T. FESTUGIÈRE, *La révélation d'Hermès-Trismégiste*, Gabalda, Paris, 1944, app. III, pp. 384-400; I. GOLDZIHNER, «Neuplatonische und gnostische Elemente in Ḥadīth», in *Gesammelte Schriften*, G. Olms, Hildesheim, 1970, V, pp. 107-134; id., «Les sectes», in *Le dogme et la loi dans l'Islam*, pp. 157-209.

interiorization (*istinbāt*) of its religious texts. This point has been strenuously defended by Louis Massignon (d. 1962) in his life-long work on Sufism⁹². The history of Sufism, in this respect, appears to be quite in line with other Islamic sciences such as philosophy, theology, law, and also natural sciences. These show that Islam has been from its very beginning a religion and a civilization open to others, in an attitude of receiving and giving. It is now generally accepted by many scholars that it was through Sufism in particular (and also, one should add, through Shi'ism), that a number of religious ideas present in the Middle East religious environment entered into the Islamic world, opening it to new horizons of thinking. In conclusion, the semantic development of the language of love, attested in the hadith, should be explained both as a result of the new experience Sufis lived in their pious circles and as fruit of the assimilation and appropriation of a number of ideas coming from outside Islam⁹³.

4-3. A «purified» language of love?

As noted above, the language of love of the official collections of hadiths does not reflect in full the whole spiritual experience going on among the Sufis in the first two centuries of Islam, as we know it from the historical sources. Some particular topics, such as the «vision» of God (*ru'ya*), the «union» with God (*waḥda-itḥād*), which were already popular among Sufis of the time, such as Ibrahīm b. Adham, Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya and others, are not recorded in the official hadith material. It seems to us that the collectors of hadiths have carried out their work as through the screen of a «purified» language, so as to expunge from it everything that was felt to be in contradiction with the predominant Sunni vision of Islamic orthodoxy. Thus, the official hadiths only partially reflect what was going on in those first circles of pious and ascetic people (*zubbād*, *nussāk*, *'ubbād*). Actually, Sufis preserved outside the official collections a number of particular «Sufi» hadiths that were transmitted in their circles and in which too they found inspiration for their spiritual experience⁹⁴. Further research in this field would most probably shed new light on some aspects of the development of the Sufi movement.

92. This is the central thesis of Louis Massignon expounded in his complementary doctoral research published with the title of, *Essai op. cit.*

93. The whole question about the origin and development of the Sufi movement in Islam should be addressed anew, adding some new insight drawn from a comprehensive scrutiny of the hadith material, completing, in this way, what is found in the classical Sufi manuals such as those of Reynold Alleyne Nicholson, Louis Massignon, Arthur John Arberry, Margaret Smith, Paul Nwyia, Annemarie Schimmel, and recently in Alexander KNYSH, *Islamic Mysticism - A Short History*, Brill, Leiden, 2000.

94. For these hadiths see note n° 2.

4-4. The Sufi language: a language of experience.

In spite of the limits of the official sources of Islam, the language of love continued to play an important role in the development of Sufism. A great number of hadiths transmitted on this topic have become in time part of Islamic spirituality in general and of that of Sufis in particular. This hadith material offered an accepted «scriptural» basis, together with the Koranic text, for the developing Sufi experience and language. A lot of these hadith, in fact, are mentioned in the classical manuals of Sufism, such as al-Qushayrī's (d. 465/1072) *Risāla*, al-Ghazālī's (d. 505/1111) *Ihyā'*, and others, as the main sources of the Sufi experience. Through them Sufis could always claim to have a sure ground justifying their innovative usage of «erotic» language in respect to God. Moreover, the extra-canonical hadiths, transmitted apart in the Sufi circles, were of the greatest help in building and expanding their spiritual experience. All this «hadith material», transmitted and accepted by Sufis as «authentic and authoritative» traditions handed down from the Prophet himself, enjoyed in their view the highest consideration. Only by taking into account the sum of all these factors can the development of Sufism and its language of love receive an adequate explanation.

In the end, however, one must always bear in mind that the true source of Sufi life, as well as of any other kind of spiritual or mystical life, can never be considered just a literal exegesis of religious texts. Also L. Massignon's idea of *instinbāt*, i.e., of the interiorization (through repetition) of a religious text delving into its deep meaning, does not offer a wholly satisfactory account for the development of the Sufi language of love. Personal experience (*tajriba*) and personal intuition (*dhawq*) have always played a prominent role in all mystical life and its language, in Islam as well as outside it. For this reason, we agree in the end with what Paul Nwyia states in his research on Sufi language: «It has been through the Sufis that an authentic language, that is the one of experience, has been born into Arabic speech... The Sufi... is that human being who discovers his language while he discovers (*wajada*) his own experience⁹⁵». In this respect too it is proved that experience and language are strictly connected in all historical human phenomena, particularly in the mystical life.

In the present research, which continues and completes my previous one carried on the Koranic text, I have tried to shed some light on the early development of the language of love in Islamic mysticism. The hadith material has shown that a great linguistic development took place in it compared with the prevailing atmosphere of *jihād* of the Koranic text. Its background is to be found in an atmosphere of intimate

95. P. NWYIA, *Exégèse coranique*, op. cit., p. 4; this is the main point of Nwyia's study.

