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Exegesis of the Qur'ānic *qāba qawsayn* in the Tradition of Muslim Mysticism

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*Who is Muḥammad? [His] soul is solace of the eyes,
The bow of his eyebrows like two bows-lengths.*

This paper focuses on the solution of analysis for a group of Muslim mystical texts. There are a lot of various published Muslim mystical texts including critical editions at the present time. The situation in Islamic studies differs from other oriental studies like Avestan studies, Middle-Persian studies (including Sogdian, Bactrian), Assyriology and Bible studies. On the one hand, there are various edited texts of Muslim theologians, Shi'i and Sufi authors. On the other hand, there are few science publications on the textual criticism of the Islamic studies. The exploration of the topics demonstrates the unity solution in the mystical texts as a special branch of Muslim tradition (essentially Sufi and Shi'i tradition).

This paper deals with one of one famous topic of the mystical tradition. The idiom 'at a distance of two bow-lengths (*qāba qawsayn*)' is regularly referred to in the Muslim literature. It means the close distance at which a man can get closer to God. According to Horovitz's article „Muhammads Himmelfahrt“, this expression goes back to the practice of Pre-Islamic Arabia. During the swearing act two men put their bows alongside, and swear by name of a deity [Horovitz, 1918–1919]. After the arrival of Islam, it was considered that in this way God makes a covenant with His prophets. Thus their words and actions became entirely the words and deeds of God Himself.

The Qur'ān 53:1–18 contains the passage of the first Muḥammad's vision. The Prophet was at distance of «two bow-lengths» (*qāba qawsayn*) (53:9) [Bell, 1934, S. 44–46; Paret, 1957]. The Qur'ān 53:1–18 contains the passage about the first Muhammad's vision.

Qur'ān 53:1–18:

وَالنَّجْمِ إِذَا هَوَىٰ (١) مَا ضَلَّ صَاحِبُكُمْ وَمَا غَوَىٰ (٢) وَمَا يَنْطِقُ عَنِ الْهَوَىٰ (٣) إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا وَحْيٌ يُوحَىٰ (٤) عَلَّمَهُ شَدِيدُ الْقُوَىٰ (٥) ذُو مِرَّةٍ فَاسْتَوَىٰ (٦) وَهُوَ بِالْأُفُقِ الْأَعْلَىٰ (٧) ثُمَّ دَنَا فَتَدَلَّىٰ (٨) فَكَانَ قَابَ قَوْسَيْنِ أَوْ أَدْنَىٰ (٩) فَأَوْحَىٰ إِلَىٰ عَبْدِهِ مَا أَوْحَىٰ (١٠) مَا كَذَبَ الْفُؤَادُ مَا رَأَىٰ (١١) أَفَتُخَارِجُونَهُ عَلَىٰ مَا يَرَىٰ (١٢) وَلَقَدْ رَآهُ نَزْلَةً أُخْرَىٰ (١٣) عِنْدَ سِدْرَةِ الْمُنْتَهَىٰ (١٤) عِنْدَهَا جَنَّةُ الْمَأْوَىٰ (١٥) إِذْ يَخْشَى السِّدْرَةَ مَا يَخْشَىٰ (١٦) مَا زَاغَ الْبَصَرُ وَمَا طَغَىٰ (١٧) لَقَدْ رَأَىٰ مِنْ آيَاتِ رَبِّهِ الْكُبْرَىٰ (١٨)

1. By the Star when it goes down, —
 2. Your Companion is neither astray nor being misled.
 3. Nor does he say (aught) of (his own) Desire.
 4. It is no less than inspiration sent down to him:
 5. He was taught by one Mighty in Power,
 6. Endued with Wisdom: for he appeared (in stately form);
 7. While he was in the highest part of the horizon:
 8. Then he approached and came closer,
 9. And was at a distance of but two bow-lengths or (even) nearer;
 10. So did ((Allah)) convey the inspiration to His Servant — (conveyed) what He (meant) to convey.
 11. The (Prophet's) (mind and) heart in no way falsified that which he saw.
 12. Will ye then dispute with him concerning what he saw?
 13. For indeed he saw him at a second descent,
 14. Near the Lote-tree beyond which none may pass:
 15. Near it is the Garden of Abode.
 16. Behold, the Lote-tree was shrouded (in mystery unspeakable!)
 17. (His) sight never swerved, nor did it go wrong!
 18. For truly did he see, of the Signs of his Lord, the Greatest!
- (Yusuf Ali Translation).

The Muslim tradition attached great importance to this text. The early tafsīrs from al-Ṭabarī's Tafsīr commented it in detail:

دنا جبريل من محمد فتدلى إليه... فكان جبرائيل من محمد على قدر قوسين أو أدنى من ذلك

[al-Ṭabarī, 1405, p. 45].

"Gabriel approached to Muḥammad and came to closer to him... Gabriel was at a distance of two bows from Muḥammad, or he approached to him".

After this al-Ṭabarī cites some different variants of the phrase *qāba qawsayn*, this is a measure of two bows. The interpreter of the sentence "and he was at a distance of but two bow-lengths" noted the string of the bow too:

يقال هو منه قاب قوسين وقريب قوسين وقاد قوسين وقدى قوسين كل ذلك بمعنى قدر قوسين وقيل إن معنى قوله فكان قاب قوسين أنه كان منه حيث الوتر من القوس

[Ibid., p. 45].

"It is said that he was at a distance of two bows, at a length of two bows, at a distance of two bows, and at a length of two bows. All those terms mean the measure of two bows. When it said that "he was at a distance of two bows" it means the string of the bow".

دنا جبريل عليه السلام منه حتى كان قدر ذراع أو ذراعين... ليست بهذه القوس ولكن قدر الذراعين أو أدنى والقاب هو القيد

[Ibid].

“Gabriel... approached to him [Muḥammad] at a distance of one ell or two ells... There is not a bow but a measure of one ell or two ells”.

The main subject of the exegesis of *qābā qawsayn* is the allusion to six hundred wings of Gabriel in Muḥammad's vision:

رسول الله رأيت جبريل له ست مئة جناح... رأى جبرائيل ست مئة جناح في صورته... رأى النبي جبريل عليه السلام له ست مئة جناح

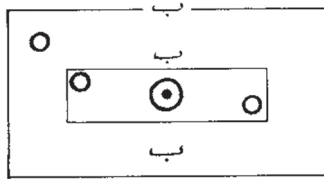
[Ibid., p. 46].

“God's Messenger saw Gabriel with six hundred wings... He saw Gabriel's form with six hundred wings... God's Prophet saw Gabriel with six hundred wings”.

Al-Ṭabarī's *Tafsīr* is a representative example of traditional exegesis, in particular, of the topic of *qābā qawsayn*. The interpretation of *qāba qawsayn* consists in the explanation of this phrase. It is the selection of synonyms for the word *qāba* (particularly, by consonance) *qāba*, *qady*, *qadr*. The interpreter explains the phrase as the string of bow or the measure of one ell or two ells. Mystical tradition used the image of the string of bow.

But the solution of Mystical tradition differs from the tradition handed by al-Ṭabarī. Sufi masters preferred to comment this topic from the early period. The Qur'anic expression «two bows-lengths» begun to signify the highest station of approaching to God. This position is so close to God that the “two bow-lengths”. We find the representative case of the exegesis of al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922). The important part of his *Kitāb al-tāwasīn* is the comments on the Qur'ān. 53:1–18.

2 (*Tāsīm al-fahm*).8



و كان قاب قوسين أو أدنى چون بمفاوزة علم
حقيقت رسيذ خبر از سواد خود داد هر كه بحق
حقيقت رسذ ترك مراد گويذ استسلام كند جواد را
چون بحق رسذ باز آيذ چنين گفت سجد لك سوادى
و آمن بك فوادى چون بغايت غايات برسيد قال لا
أحصي ثناء عليك چون بحقيقت حقيقت ريسذ گفت
انت كما اثبتت على نفسك از هوا بيريذ بمراد رسيذ
ما كذب الفواد ما رأى عند سدره المنتهى يمين ويسار
ننكرست بحقيقت ودر حقيقت خود ننكرست ما زاع
البصر وما طغى

و كان قاب قوسين حين وصل الى مفازة علم
الحقيقة أخبر عن الفؤاد وخبر لما وصل الى حق
الحقيقة ترك المراد واستسلم للجواد وحين وصل
الى الحق عاد فقال سجد لك سوادى وآمن بك فوادى
لما وصل الى [غاية] الغايات قال لا أحصي ثناء
عليك وحين وصل الى حقيقة الحقيقة قال انت كما
اثبتت على نفسك جحد الهوى فلحق المُنَا ما كذب
الفواد ما رأى عند سدرة المنتهى ما التفت يمينا الى
الحقيقة ولا شمالا الى حقيقة الحقيقة ما زاع البصر
وما طغى

There was a ‘two bows-lengths’, when he reached the desert of the ‘knowledge of reality’, he reported from the outward heart¹. When he arrived to the True of the reality he left the object of desire and gave himself up to the Bountiful². When he reached the Truth he returned³ and said: “my blackness has prostrated to You, and my heart has believed in You”⁴. When he reached the limit of the limits he said: “I cannot praise You as You should be praised”. When he reached the True of the reality he said: “You are someone who praises Yourself”⁵. He cleaved the air and gained the object, “heart in no way falsified that which he saw”⁶ “near the Lote-Tree of the boundary”⁷. He did not turn to the right to the reality of things, nor to the left to the reality of reality. ‘His eyes did not swerve, nor disobeyed⁸.

5 (Tāsīn al-nuqṭa). 22–23

—	<p>ثم دنى كأنه دنى من معنى ثم حاجز كعاجز ثم من مقام التهذيب الى مقام التأديب الى مقام الترقيب دنا طلبا فتدلى هربا دنا داعيا فتدلى مناديا دنا مجيبا فتدلى قريبا دنا شهيدا فتدلى مشاهدا فكان قاب قوسين يرمي أين بسهم بين أثبت قوسين ليصحح أين او لغيبة العين أدنى بعين العين كان قاب قوسين ميان دو قوس اين بوذ اين را بسهم بين انداخت انكه قوس را ثابت كرد تا بين صحيح كرد تا برو غالب شود عين</p>
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[al-Hallāj, 1913, p. 34–35].

22. Then he approached [to the God] like the one who approached to the meaning. Then he held back ⁹ like a weak (*‘ājiz*) rather than impotence (*‘ajuz*). Then he passed from the station of emendation (*tahdīb*) to the station of education (*ta’dīb*) and from the station of education to the station of approaching. He approached searching and he came closer running. He approached invoking and came closer proclaiming. He approached answering and returned with Divine Nearness. He approached as a witness (*šahīdan*) and returned as an eyewitness (*mušāhidan*) ¹⁰ (Arabic version).

1 | In the Persian version: «He has informed from his blackness». Two variants with *fu’ād* and *sawād* have parallels in Sufi literature. See, for example [al-Makkī, 1351. 2, §]. 75.

2 | Or “he was entrusted to the racer (*javād*)”, i.e. to Burāq. But the translation of “the Bountiful” also has parallels in the al-Hallāj’s texts [Massignon, 1922. 2, p. 842]. Qur’ān and Sunna inform that Burāq appeared in the Islamic tradition later.

3 | L. Massignon who translated this treatise into French explains such a behaviour of Muḥammad according to the *ḥadīṭ* that was very popular among Sufis. Everything, that appears in the face of the God (when all veils are rejected) burns down [Massignon, 1922, p. 843].

4 | The part of the famous *ḥadīṭ* [see, for example, al-Hīlīmī, 1407. 2, §. 128].

5 | *Ḥadīṭ* was divided into two parts by al-Hallāj [Abū ‘Awnā, s.a. 2, §. 170]. The first part as separate *ḥadīṭ* occurs fairly often [see, for example, Ibn Kaṭīr, 1401. 2, §. 162].

6 | Qur’ān 53:11.

7 | Qur’ān 53:14.

8 | Qur’ān 53:17. Al-Sulamī cites a parallel passage in his *Tafsīr* on the Qur’ān 9:128: “Now hath come unto you a Messenger from amongst yourselves” ... Al-Hallāj said: “He is more majestic than you for [his] soul and higher than you for [his] energy. He has come to replace two beings with the True. He looks neither at the kingdom, nor at the Lote-Tree. “His eyes did not swerve” from the contemplation of the True, and his heart “nor disobeyed” its position” [Solamī, 1954, p. 372].

9 | The term *hājiz* ‘holder, hinderer’ is found in the Qur’ān twice in positive connotation (“who withholds from the evil, evil action”) (Qur’ān 27:62; 69:47).

10 | This paragraph lacks also is absent in the Persian version. L. Massignon believed that this paragraph develops sense of the phrase “he came nearer” and “came down”. He explained this opposition as two stages which are personified by the distance of two bows

23. He was at a distance of only 'two bow-lengths'. He shot to 'where' (*ayna*) with the arrow of 'between' (*bayna*). He stated there two bows for specifying the exact place, and because of the un-delineated nature of Essence (*'ayn*)¹¹. He was 'a little closer' in the Essence of the Essence (*'ayn al-'ayn*) (Arabic version).

23. He was at a distance of only 'two bow-lengths'. 'Where' (*ayna*) was between two bows. He shot to 'where' with the arrow of 'between' for fixation of 'where'. That the Essence wins victory over it (Persian version).

5.25–31

<p>ظن نبردم که فهم کند کلام ما جز انکس که بقوس ثانی رسید قوس ثانی دون لوح است صاحب القوس ثانی را حروف چند هست نه این حرفهای عربی و عجمی آن يك حرف واحدست و آن ميم است آن حرف ميم ما اوحی خواهد ميم است آخرست یعنی اسم قوس ثانی و آن ملك ملکوت است واسم دیگر زه قوس اولست یعنی ملك قوس ثانی و آن ملکوتست و آن زه قوس اولست و آن ملك فعل جبروت قوس اول ملك فعل جبروت وقوس ثانی ملك ملکوت و ملك صفات زه هر دو قوس است و ملك ذات تجلی خاص که سهم قدم است ... سهم قوسین است</p> <p>—</p> <p>صفت کلام در معنی دنو جد معنی است بحقیقت حق</p>	<p>ما أظن يفهم كلامنا سوى من بلغ القوس الثاني والقوس الثاني دون اللوح وله حروف سوى حروف العربية الا حرف واحد وهو الميم يعني الاسم الآخر وهو وتر قوس الاول من زاهد العورة</p> <p>قال رضي الله عنه صنعة الكلام في معنی الدنو فجاد المعنی لحقيقة الحق لا لطريقة الخلق والدنو دائرة الضغط</p>
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[al-Hallāj, 1913, p. 35–37].

Arabic version:

25. I do not believe that our expression is comprehensible for the one who has arrived at the second bow and the second bow is beyond the Tablet of Forms (*lawḥ mahfūz*).

26. He has the letters that are differ from the Arabic letters,

27. except the first letter, and this is the *mīm*,

28. Thus this is the last name.

29. This is also the string of the first bow.

30. It comes from the One who kindles the fire of blindness¹².

31. He said, may God be satisfied with him: "the form of speech for the meaning is closeness, but it exceed the meaning owing to the truth of

[Massignon, 1922, p. 860]. Two oppositions, probably, personify understanding and the world between which the soul of the mystic soars. Unlike the long list of the stages (*maqāmāt*) in the beginning of the second chapter, here their number is reduced to three (emendation, education and approaching).

11 | L. Massignon translated *ḡayba* 'absence' as 'imperceptibility' ('imperceptibilité') [Ibid., p. 860].

12 | The meaning of the phrase *zāhid al-'awra* is unclear. L. Massignon suggested that these words refer to the possessor "who produces a spark of daybreak from the flint" ("celui qui bat à son briquet (?) l'étincelle de l'aurore (??)") [Massignon // al-Hallāj, 1913, p. 168].

the Truth but not owing to the way of creation. The closeness is only the circle of gripping (*dabf*).

L. Massignon suggested that these words are about the fence that fenced the distance between the 2 bows (“l’enceinte circonscrite par les deux jets d’arc”) [Massignon, 1922, p. 861].

Persian version:

26. The master of the second bow has the letters that are differ from the Arabic and the Persian letters.

27. These are only letters only and that letter is the *mīm* whose meaning is ‘what he revealed’.

28. The *mīm* designated ‘the last’. This is the name of the second bow. This is the dominion of Kingdom (*mulk-i malakūt*).

29. The last name is the first bow’s string. Well then the dominion of the second bow’s string is the Kingdom. This is the string of the first bow. This is the dominion of divine omnipotence (*mulk-i fi ‘l-i jabarūt*). The first bow is the dominion of divine omnipotence (*mulk-i fi ‘l-i jabarūt*). The second bow is the dominion of kingdom (*mulk-i malakūt*), and the dominion is the Attributes of the string of the two bows. And the dominion is the special manifestation. It is the arrow of the eternal (*qidam*). It is the arrow of the two strings.

According to the Persian passage it can make a scheme:

قوس اول	ملك فعل جبروت
قوس ثانی	ملك ملكوت
زه	ملك
سهم قوسین	تجلی خاص

the first bow is the dominion of (divine) omnipotence (*mulk-i fi ‘li jabarūt*);

the second bow is the dominion of Kingdom (*mulk-i malakūt*);

the bow string is the dominion (*mulk*);

the arrow of two bows is special manifestation (*tajallī-yi xaṣṣ*);

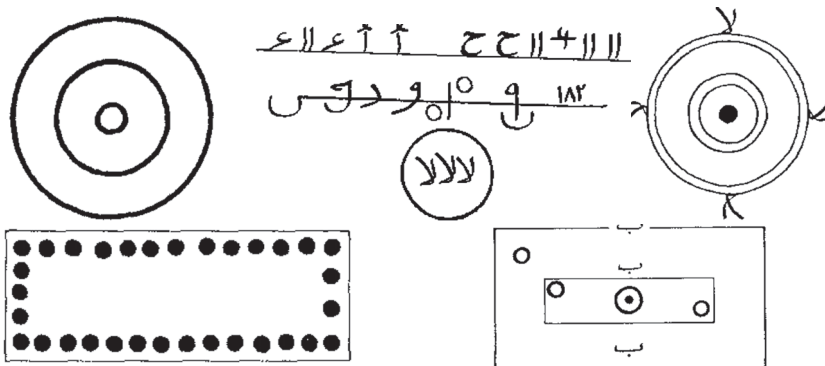


Figure I. The examples of pictograms from the *Kitāb al-ṭāwasīn*.

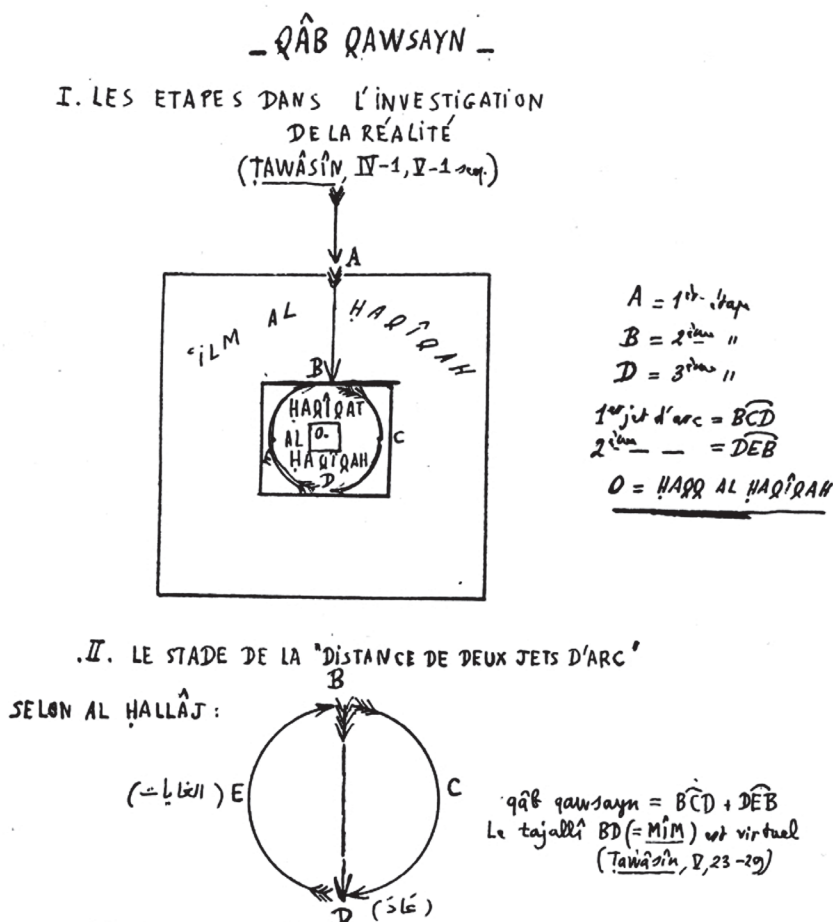


Figure II. The explanations of the *qāba qawsayn* according to L. Massignon.

The next Sufi reception of hallājian exegesis of *qāba qawsayn* was presented in *Šarḥ-i šaṭhiyāt* by Ruzbihān Baqlī (d. 606/1209):

چون حق خواست که مهتر را بعیان عیان رسانند بقوس ازل و (قوس) ابد که از علت این و بین منزه است
آنیت و حیثیت بینداخت آنگه نز دیکش کرد بعین نز دیک عین یعنی آنگه که قوسین نیز بینداخت که از ازل
و ابد نام دارد و سهمین که دنو و مقام نام دارند

قوس ثانی دون لوح است یعنی هر به قوس ثانی رسید در صورت کون نیست
قوس ثانی قرب قرب است و دنو (دنو) اهل دنو دنو بکلمات لوح محفوظ که اصطلاح عموم است سخن
نگویند... آن حرف میم ما اوحی خواهد... نبینی که چون حق سر نگاه... سر آن رمز در میم ما اوحی پیدا
نکرد... هر گز مهتر علیه السلام از آن اسرار با هیچ بشر نگفت دانست که قامت کون باز او نکشد و ارواح
و اجسام در سر عت طلب از آن مشارب و آن مناهل هیچ ذره نچشد مقام محمود بود حواشی آن بحار مرغان
جان کش راست از آن گاه گاه از صدف اصداف حواصل لولو انا الحق و سبحانی بیرون اندازند

[Baqli, 1374, s. 500–501].

“When the Truth wants to bring the worthy to the high essences, to the bow of eternity (*azal*) and to the bow of infinity (*abad*) ([these essences] are cleaned from “where” and “between”), He casts away locality and position. Then he caused to approach the approaching of essence to essence. It means that He cast away the bows called eternity and infinity too and two arrows called closeness (*dunuvv*) and station (*maqām*)... The second bow is under the Tablet (*lawh*), because everybody who reaches the second bow hasn’t any existence’s form. The second bow is beyond the Tablet. It means that anyone reached the second bow have not the being form. The second bow is high approaching and high closeness. The people of high closeness do not use the words of the Tablet of Forms (the utterance of common people)... This letter *mīm* is called “that he sent down”. You do not see how the True consolidated a secret (*sirr*)? It is impossible to discover the meaning’s secret of this *mīm*... The lord [Muhammad] reported these secrets to nobody. He knew that the structure of being (*qāmat-i kawn*) does not bear this burden. The spirits and bodies do not taste from these bowls and sources a drop when they sweep past. It was a station of praise. The birds of souls visit the edge of this sea and drop occasional the pearls of pearls of “I am the Truth (*anā ’l-Haqq*)” and of «Glory be to me (*subhānī*)»”.

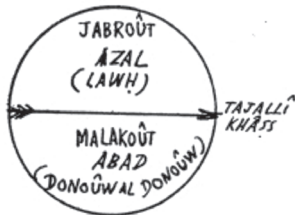
According to Rūzbihān Baqlī, the structure of *qāba qawsayn* is of the following form:

ازل	قوس اول
ابد	قوس ثانی
دنوّ و مقام	سهم قوسین

the first bow is eternity (*azal*);

the second bow is infinity (*abad*);

two arrows are closeness (*dunuvv*) and station (*maqām*).



The text of Baqlī is apology for *ṣaṭhiyāt* practice as the ecstatic expressions. The mystic, who went into ecstasies and uses *ṣaṭhiyāt*, shows that his nature was completely dissolved in God. *Ṣaṭhiyāt* are pronounced on behalf of God. I mean that this counter-evidence of answer for al-Gazālī’s critics of *ṣaṭhiyāt* practice¹³.

Figure III. The explanations of the Baqlī’s *qāba qawsayn*, according to L. Massignon.

BAQLĪ (*ṣaṭhiyāt*)
(publ. ap Taw. p. 84-86)

13 | Al-Gazālī divided *ṣaṭhiyāt* into two groups. The first group is ecstatic phrases with extravagant character. There are the public cries accompanied by such acts, as tearing of clothes. They are extremely reprehensible. The second group of *ṣaṭhiyāt* is not pronounced publicly. It is a Jesus practice [al-Gazālī, 1357. 1, §. 42–45; Ernst, 1985, p. 14].

Sufi explanation is reflected in the definition of *al-Ta'rifāt* by al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1413). He defined *qāba qawsayn* as highest mystical station to unity with the God ('*ayn al-jam'*). At this station there are a relative duality of subsistence of pure (*mahd*) and annihilation for any image:

قَاب قَوْسَيْنِ هُوَ مَقَام الْقَرَبِ الْأَسْمَانِيِّ بِاعْتِبَارِ التَّقَابِلِ بَيْنِ الْأَسْمَاءِ فِي الْأَمْرِ الْإِلَهِيِّ الْمُسَمًى بِدَائِرَةِ الْوُجُودِ كَالْإِبْدَاءِ وَالْإِعَادَةِ وَالنُّزُولِ وَالْعُرُوجِ وَالْفَاعِلِيَّةِ وَالْقَابِلِيَّةِ وَهُوَ الْإِتِّحَادُ بِالْحَقِّ مَعَ بَقَاءِ التَّمْيِيزِ الْمَعْبَرِ عَنْهُ بِالِاتِّصَالِ وَلَا أَعْلَى مِنْ هَذَا الْمَقَامِ إِلَّا مَقَامٌ أَوْ أَدْنَى وَهُوَ أَحَدِيَّةُ عَيْنِ الْجَمْعِ الذَّاتِيَّةِ الْمَعْبَرِ عَنْهُ بِقَوْلِهِ أَوْ أَدْنَى النَّعِيمِ الْارْتِفَاعِ التَّمْيِيزِ وَالِإِثْنَيْنِيَّةِ الْاِعْتِبَارِيَّةِ هُنَاكَ بِالْفَنَاءِ الْمُحَضِّ وَالطَّمَسِ الْكَلِيِّ لِلرُّسُومِ كُلِّهَا [al-Jurjānī, 1405, p. 219].

"The 'two bow-lengths' is a station of closeness for the names on the basis of comparisons between the names of the Divine order (*amr*) called by the circle of existence (*dā'irat al-wujūd*). This is a start, return, descent, ascent, agency (*fā'ilīyya*), ability (*qābīlīyya*). This is union (*ittiḥād*) with the True (*al-Ḥaqq*) in the state of subsistence (*biqā'*) explained by union (*ittiṣāl*). There is no station higher or closer [to God] than this. This is uniqueness of essential unity with God ('*ayn al-jam' al-dātīyya*) explained by His word. And there is no [station] closer to pure sublime bliss".

This definition was very popular among Sufis. Šāh Ni'mat Allah Walī (d. 834/1431) repeated it in his *Iṣṭilāḥāt-i šūfiyya* [Ni'mat Allāh Walī, 1312, §. 58].

Haydar Amulī (born 719/1319 or 720/1320) adopted the Sufi tradition for Ši'i Itna'āshariyya. He describes the process of approaching to God using a graphic. The interpretation of *qaba qawsayn* by Haydar Amulī in his *Naṣṣ al-nuṣūṣ* (*Commentary of Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* by Ibn 'Arabī) demonstrates a mixture of Sufi and Shī'i doctrines amongst the Imāmiyya.

فمُشَاهَدَةُ الْوُجُودِ الْحَقِيقِيِّ الْمَطْلُوقِ وَاجِبٌ عَلَى مَا هُوَ عَلَيْهِ بَرَفْعِ الْخَطِّ الْوَهْمِيِّ الَّذِي يَنْقَسِمُ بِهِ الْوُجُودُ إِلَى وَاجِبٍ وَمُمْكِنٍ الَّذِي كُلُّ وَاحِدٍ مِنْهُمَا كَالْقَوْسَيْنِ مِنَ الدَّائِرَةِ (هَذَا الْمَشَاهِدَةُ هِيَ) عِبَارَةٌ عَنْ وَصُولِهِ (إِي وَصُولِ) صَاحِبِ هَذِهِ الْمَشَاهِدَةِ إِلَى مَقَامِ قَابِ قَوْسَيْنِ لِأَنَّ قَابَ مَعْنَاهُ قَرَبٌ وَتَقْدِيرُهُ أَنَّهُ يَحْصُلُ لِصَاحِبِ هَذِهِ الْمَشَاهِدَةِ الْقَرَبُ الْمَعْبَرُ عَنْهُ بِقَابِ قَوْسَيْنِ الَّذِي لَا قَرَبَ فَوْقَهُ إِلَّا قَرَبٌ أَوْ أَدْنَى كَمَا سَبَقَ تَحْقِيقُهُ لِأَنَّهُ لَوْ لَمْ يَرْفَعْ الْخَطَّ الْمَذْكُورَ عَنِ الْوَسْطِ بَيَقَى مَحْجُوبًا بِهِ بَعِيدًا عَنِ الْحَقِّ تَعَالَى وَقَرَبُهُ وَمَرَّةً أُخْرَى مَعْنَاهُ وَتَقْدِيرُهُ هُوَ أَنَّ كُلَّ مَنْ شَهِدَ الْوُجُودَ عَلَى مَا هُوَ عَلَيْهِ فِي نَفْسِ الْأَمْرِ بَرَفْعِ الْخَطِّ الْوَهْمِيِّ الْوَاقِعِ بَيْنَ تِلْكَ الدَّائِرَةِ فَهُوَ الْعَارِفُ الْوَاصِلُ وَالْكَامِلُ الْمُحَقِّقُ الْمَوْصُوفُ بِقَرَبِ قَابِ قَوْسَيْنِ لِأَنَّ ذَلِكَ الْخَطَّ يَجْعَلُ تِلْكَ الدَّائِرَةَ كَالْقَوْسَيْنِ وَيَحْصُلُ الْحِجَابُ عَنِ الْوُجُودِ بِوُجُودِهِ فَيَصِيرُ رَفْعُهُ وَاجِبًا وَمَعْلُومٌ أَنَّ كُلَّ دَائِرَةٍ فَرَضَ بَيْنَهُمَا خَطَّ فَاصِلٍ لَهَا يَنْصِفُ يَكُونُ كُلُّ نِصْفٍ مِنْهَا كَقَوْسٍ فَلَا بَدَّ مِنَ الْمَشَاهِدَةِ قَوْسَيْنِ أَيْ الْوُجُودَيْنِ وَلَيْسَ فِي الْوَاقِعِ إِلَّا الْوُجُودُ وَاحِدٌ فَيَكُونُ ذَلِكَ الْخَطَّ حِجَابًا وَحَيْثُ إِنْ نَبَّيْنَا صَمَّ قَدْ وَصَلَ إِلَى هَذَا الْمَقَامِ وَرَفَعَ الْخَطَّ الْوَهْمِيَّ مِنْ نَظَرِهِ عَنِ الْوَسْطِ وَصَارَتِ الدَّائِرَةُ كَمَا كَانَتْ... أَعْنَى النِّقْطَةُ الْمُنْتَهَايَةُ تَكُونُ وَاصِلَةً إِلَى النِّقْطَةِ الْمُبْدِئِيَّةِ... وَمِنْ هَذَا صُورَةُ الْعَالَمِ وَالْأَفْلَاقِ وَالْأَجْرَامِ وَالْعُنَاصِرِ كُلِّهَا كَرُوبَةٍ لِأَنَّ الصُّورَتِ الْكُرُوبِيَّةَ الْوُورِيَّةَ أَفْضَلَ أَشْكَالِ الشَّكْلِ كَمَا قَالُوا أَفْضَلَ أَشْكَالِ الشَّكْلِ الْمُسْتَدِيرِ وَلَوْ امْكَنَ أَحْسَنَ مِنَ الشَّكْلِ الْمُسْتَدِيرِ وَأَفْضَلَ لَوْعَ الْعَالَمِ عَلَى صُورَتِهِ... وَهَذِهِ صُورَةُ الدَّائِرَةِ هَذِهِ الدَّائِرَةُ الْمَعْرَاجِيَّةُ الْقَوْسِيَّةُ لِقَوْلِهِ تَعَالَى قَابِ قَوْسَيْنِ أَوْ أَدْنَى الْمَعْبَرِ عَنْهَا بِقَوْسِ الْوُجُودِ وَالْإِمْكَانِ بِاعْتِبَارِ الْخَطِّ الْوَهْمِيِّ بَيْنَ الدَّائِرَةِ الْوُجُودِ الْمَطْلُوقِ الْحَقِيقِيِّ مِنَ الْجَمِيعِ الْجِهَاتِ

[Amolī, 1353, §. 99–101].

“The direct vision of absolute as it is, when the imaginary line that divided the existence into necessary and potential is eliminated. Every one of them is like a bow of circle. This vision is reaching (of the master of this vision) of “two bow-lengths” state because the “bow” means approaching and its measuring (*taqdīr*). The act of approaching for the master of this vision is explained by the “two bow-lengths”. There is no approaching higher than the approaching of the station of “he approached” as well as his truth took priority over because if the mentioned line is not annihilated, it was veiled and was far from the Supreme God and from approaching to Him. Now again, the mean and the measuring [of this passage] is follow. Everybody, who have a direct vision of existence as it is in the soul that commanding [to evil], annihilates the imaginary line of the circle. He knew unity, perfection, and the divine reality. He is described by approaches to the “two bow-lengths” because this line forms that circle as two bows. The veil hides the being from its being. Its annihilation is necessary.

It is know that every circle divides by line into two halves. Each of parts is one bow. The direct vision did not divide two bows as two beings. There is only one being in this reality. This line was covered [from eyes]. When our Prophet... reached this stage, the imaginary line was annihilated for him. Then the whole circle became [visible] as before...

I mean that the last point is united with the first point... The form of whole universe, all spheres, bodies and elements is a sphere because the spherical round form is the most perfect figure. It is said that “The most perfect form is the round figure”. If there is a best possible figure it is the round form... This is an image of the circle of the bow of the ascent. According to the speech of the Supreme God: “He was at a distance of two bow-lengths or (even) nearer” because the necessary and potential bows and the imaginary line [was drown] between [them] in the circle of absolute and true existence in all aspects”.

Ḥaydar Amulī used circle graphic too. Two bows are necessity (*wujūb*) and possibility (*imkān*). Four little circles correlated with four microcosmic and macrocosmic realms are outside the bows.

One of the most famous interpretation of *qāba qawsayn* belongs to ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. about 832/1428). His treatise *Qāb qawsayn wa multaqa’ l-nāmūsayn* (*A Distance of two Bow-lengths and the Meeting Point of the Two Realms*) describes the superlative nature of Muḥammad linked to two realms.

Qāb qawsayn is tenth part of al-Jīlī’s more than 40–Volumes work entitled *al-Nāmūs al-a’zam wa l-qāmūs al-aqdam fī ma’rifat qadr al-nabī* (*The Greatest Realm and the Oldest Ocean in the Cognition of the Stature of Prophet*). Only several parts of this treatise have been found and mostly lost. *Qāb qawsayn* extant as a part of the large work entitled *Jawāhir al-bihār fī faḍā’il al-nabī al-muḥtār* (*The Gems of the seas in the Virtues of the Chosen Prophet*) (4: 218) by the famous Sufi author Yūsuf al-Nabhānī (d. 1350/1931)¹⁴.

14 | See Hoffman, 1999, p. 354, 366; Lo Polito, 2010, p. 29–32.

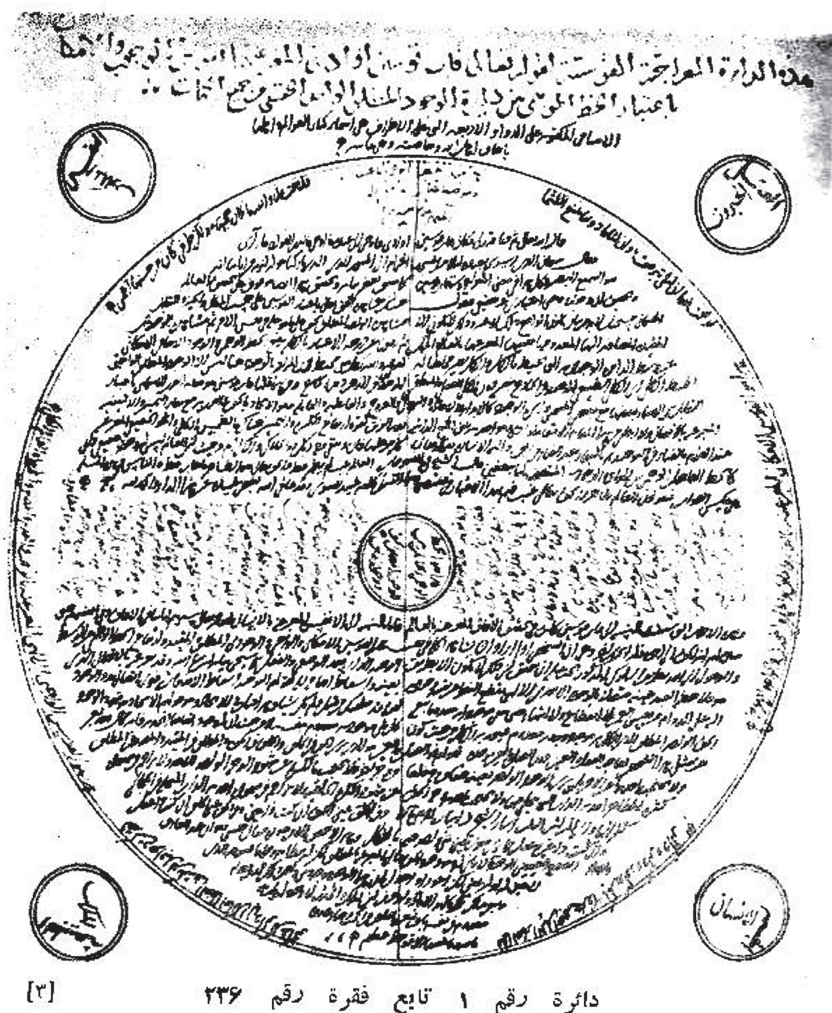


Figure IV. Amulī's *qāba qawsayn*.

In this treatise al-Jīlī developed the ideas of his earlier work entitled *al-Kamālāt al-Ilāhiyya fī 'l-sifāt al-muḥammadiyya* (*The Divine Perfection in the Muḥammadan Attributes*) that was composed under the influence of Ibn 'Arabī's *Futūḥāt* whom he often cited in it. The central ideas of *Qāb qawsayn* were analyzed by V.J. Hoffman. We address readers to her article and hereinafter refer to it [Hoffman, 1999, p. 354–359]. The al-Jīlī's doctrine of *barzaḥ* is important for the tradition of Sufi interpretation of *qāba qawsayn*. *Barzaḥ* personifies Muḥammad as boundary line between divinity and creation that links both realms. According to *al-Kamālāt al-Ilāhiyya*, “You [Muhammad] are a *barzaḥ* between the sea of divinity and the sea of creation

and form” [Ibid., p. 355]. Al-Jīlī used the Qur’ānic metaphor of *barzah* as a barrier between two seas: one sweet, and the other salt and bitter¹⁵.

“All of Reality may be conceived as a single circle divided in two, between the true, necessary, eternal existence and the created, possible, originated existence. Each half of the circle is a bow’s length. The line dividing them is the string of the bow, used by each bow. The division of this line is “the distance of two bow-lengths” “The Muhammadan station combines the divine perfections and the perfections of creation in form and meaning. He is the barrier between the divine and created realities because he is the reality of all realities. Therefore his station on the Night of his Ascension was above the Throne, and you know the Throne is the upper limit of created things. So all created things were beneath him, and his Lord was above him” [Ibid., p. 358].

Thus Muḥammad who personifies *barzah* between two realms has a place of the arrow of the other Sufi texts. But the metaphor of arrow lacks in al-Jīlī’s treatise. This peculiarity is connected with another line in Sufi exegesis.

The line of “ḥallājian” exegesis has continues later. L. Massignon found this line in the conception of Abū ’l-Ḥayr ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Suwaydī (d. 1200/1786) in *Kaṣf al-ḥujub*. In this work al-Suwaydī used “ḥallājian” topic more than another authors. The arrow is a barrier for two bows. The first bow consists of four divine manifestation of divine nature in the world: knowledge (*‘ilm*), light (*nūr*) existence (*wujūd*) and testimony (*ṣuhūd*). The second bow is presented as *mīm*. According to the Persian version of *Kitāb al-ṭāwasīn*, this bow is the dominion of Kingdom. This bow characterizes as divinity uniqueness (*aḥadiyya*). But this conception dating back to the 17th century goes beyond chronological limits of this paper [Massignon, 1922, 2, planche XXV (p. 852–853)].

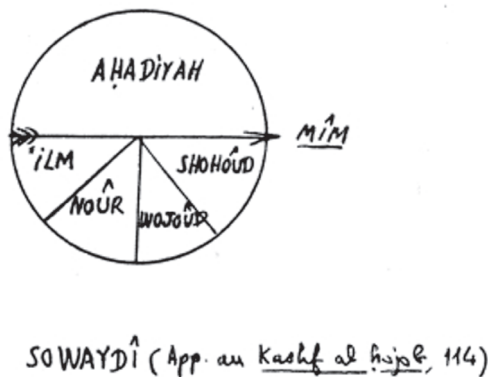


Figure V. Suwaydī’s *qāba qawsayn*, according to L. Massignon

15 | “It is He Who has let free the two bodies of flowing water: One palatable and sweet, and the other salt and bitter” (25:53) (Yusuf Ali translation).

To conclude, the most interesting line in mystical exegesis is connected to the tradition that described *qāba qawsayn* as circle divided into two halves by the line. The line that divides them is the string (or strings) of the bow or the arrow (arrows) as visible manifestation, used by each bow (al-Ḥallāj, Ruzbihān Baqlī). The seeker after the example of the Prophet must annihilate this division. This idea was developed by Ḥaydar Amulī and al-Jīlī. We find the compendium of this discourse in al-Jurjani's definition in *al-Ta'rifāt*.

The example of the exegesis of *qāba qawsayn* demonstrates the wholeness for mystical discourse in Muslim tradition. These topics can be touchstone for textual analysis of difficult and nontrivial texts, including fragmentary materials.

The important of *qāba qawsayn* for whole mystical tradition of Islam demonstrates the verses written by Hamza Faṣṣūrī (d. after 1693), the eminent Indonesian Sufi master:

Erti 'qāb qawsayn aw adnā'
Pertemuan dengan Tuhan yang a 'lā
Pada 'Mā kadhāba 'l-fu'ād mā ra'a'
Tiada lagi lain 'illā mā yarā'

The meaning of “two bow-length off or nearer”
 Is the meeting (of the servant) with the Lord most high
 The words “The heart did not falsify what it saw”
 Mean, “There was nothing but what it saw”¹⁶.

16 | Transliteration and translation of G.W.J. Drewes and L.F. Brakel [Drewes, Brakel, 1986].

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