CLAUDE ADDAS

Quest for the Red Sulphur

The Life of Ibn ʿArabi

Translated from the French by Peter Kingsley
Tell me, friend, which place you want me to take you to . . . .
— I want to go to the city of the Messenger, in search of the Station of Radiance and the Red Sulphur.

Ibn `Arabi, The Book of the Journey by Night

TRANSLATOR’S NOTE

This is not just a translation of the book which appeared in French in 1989 under the title Ibn `Arabi ou La quête du Soufre Rouge, but effectively a second edition. The author has modified a number of passages; sometimes new material has been added; and what was originally just an index of select Arabic terms has been expanded into a full glossary for the convenience of readers with no knowledge of the language. As a rule the author’s practice of omitting the al- prefix in proper names has been adhered to.

I owe a special debt of gratitude not only to Claude Addas but also to Michel Chodkiewicz for their constant help.

P.K.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Bīdāya: al-Bīdāya wa l-nihāya, by Ibn Kathīr.
B.E.O.: Bulletin des études orientales.
Dhikr: Dhikr bilād al-‘arabī al-ma‘lūd li mī ‘allīf majhūl.
Dībaj: al-Dībaj al-mudīhab, by Ibn Farhūn.
E.T.: Études traditionnelles.
GAL: Geschichte der arabischen Literatur, by C. Brockelmann.
I.F.D.: Institut français de Damas.
Nāgīl: Nāgīl al-ibthāhī, by Ahmad Bābū.
Seal of the Saints: Seal of the Saints, by M. Chodkiewicz.
Shahārāt: Shahārāt al-dhahab, by Ibn al-‘Imād.
Tak.: Takmilah, by Ibn al-Abbār.
Tālī: Tālī waqayāt al-‘aṣāf, by Ibn al-Suqā’ī.
Tashawwuf: al-Tashawwuf ilā riḥāl al-taṣawwuf, by Ahmad Tādīli.
Wāfī: al-Wāfī bi l-wafayāt, by Ṣafādī.

Foreword

When, several years ago, I decided to set off on the track of Ibn ‘Arabi, I was aware that the journey would be long and adventurous, and I would not have set out at all unless I had been certain at the time that I would find help and comfort in the company of other pilgrims. Of those travelling companions—of whom there have been so many that it would not be possible to mention them all—there are five in particular to whom I owe a special debt: Professor Pierre Thillet, who agreed to supervise my thesis; my father Michel Chodkiewicz, through whom I discovered the universe of the Shaikh al-Akbar while still a child, through whom I came to love him while a teenager and understand him as an adult; my husband, who during these years of research shared daily in my venture and accepted all the sacrifices it involved; my daughter Walaya, who joined up with us in mid-journey to bring us freshness and peace; Dominique de Ménil, who through her generous support and friendly enthusiasm made my work so much easier at a practical level. I would have them all now how grateful to them I am. Finally, my sister Agnès devoted weeks to the difficult and tiresome task of typing up a manuscript which was often virtually illegible. She knows how dear she is to me, but I wish also to express a sister’s gratitude.

Above and beyond these direct sources of assistance I am indebted to the lineage—still very much alive—of Ibn ‘Arabi’s disciples for helping me bring this work to completion. Whether famous or unknown, they have ensured the transmission and preservation of the legacy of Ibn ‘Arabi over a period of eight centuries. I trust I am not unworthy to inscribe my name in turn in their silsila.

Paris, October 1987
Introduction

Over the past few years the space given by publishers to works on Sufism in general and on Ibn 'Arabi in particular has grown considerably. This has been the case in Arab countries as well as in the West, and has often involved the publication of works outside of the more strictly specialised series. The number of critical editions, translations and monographs has multiplied. A number of different aspects of the teaching of Ibn 'Arabi—called the 'Shaikh al-Akbar', 'Greatest of the Masters'—have certainly benefitted from this attention; however, any search in recent bibliographies for a work on his life which meets the basic requirements of historical research will be in vain. The only work of any extent which is at all accessible today remains the study by Asín Palacios in his Islam cristianizado: at the beginning of this book, published in Madrid in 1931, he attempted in less than a hundred pages to reconstruct the principal stages in the terrestrial journey and spiritual path of the author of the Futūhât makkîyya. But although Asín was living and writing after both Nicholson and Nyberg, he was much more of a pioneer in Ibn 'Arabi studies than either of them and unfortunately, at the time when he produced his Vida de Abenarabi, research on the subject of the Shaikh al-Akbar was virtually non-existent. This means that he did not have access to all the information now available: I refer especially to O. Yahia's History and Classification of the Work of Ibn 'Arabi, which is the result of a long and patient inventory of the manuscripts. Also, many of the monographs that have been devoted to the mystical path (tasawwuf) during the sixth and seventh centuries of the Hegira—for example the works of Fritz Meier and Henry Corbin—had not yet been written, and inevitably this made it more difficult than it is nowadays to situate Ibn 'Arabi in his environment.

As a result, even though the biographical sketch which we owe to the great Spanish Islamologist has down to the present time remained the principal

1. These works are too numerous to be listed here, and are referred to in the bibliography.
source used by most writers when referring to Ibn 'Arabi’s life, it is largely outdated. It should be added that, in addition to these shortcomings for which history alone is responsible, there are also serious deficiencies in his work which are due to his unfamiliarity with a considerable number of Ibn 'Arabi's own writings and also with the historiographic and hagiographic literature composed in the Shaikh al-Akbar's time or shortly afterwards. In fact Asin only used the information preserved in just a few of Ibn ‘Arabi’s works—mainly the Futuḥat and the Rūḥ al-quds—and in two compilations of considerably later date: the Naṭf al-tib by Maqārī (d. 1041/1631) and the Shadharat al-dhuhāb by Ibn al-'Imād (d. 1083/1673). In other words, on the one hand he failed to utilise a large number of internal sources—especially the samā's or reading certificates included in Ibn ‘Arabi’s works which, as we will see later, make it possible to retrace and date with precision his travels in the East. This is not even to mention the many unpublished treatises by Ibn ‘Arabi which sometimes contain invaluable information about his encounters, his journeys and his spiritual experiences. On the other hand he failed to exploit external sources which, as well as being of fundamental importance, are also readily available: for example the Takmiila of Ibn al-Abdār (d. 658/1259), published in Madrid as far back as 1888, the ‘Unwān al-dirāya by Chubrini (d. 704/1304), published in Algiers in 1910, or the Tashawwuf illa riqāl al-taṣawwuf of Yusuf Ibn Yahyā al-Tādīlī (d. 627/1230). These and other similar documents supply various pieces of information about Ibn ‘Arabi as well as about the men and women who—directly or indirectly—played a role in his development. Similarly, it is clear that Asin never consulted the Wafā' of Saftādi (d. 764/1363), the Dhaqāl al-kitāb al-rāwdatayn by Abū Shāma (d. 665/1268) or the Dhaqāl mir’āt al-zamān by Yūnīnī (d. 726/1326). And yet these documents, along with a considerable number of others which I will not list here, provide detailed information about the reception Ibn ‘Arabi was given in the East and about his companions in Syria.

For these reasons it is not surprising that even the most superficial examination of the Vida de Abenarabi reveals inaccuracies, instances of confusion and numerous errors. For example, Asin Palacios states that Ibn ‘Arabi was in Mosul in 601H, and in Cairo in 603H. In fact we can now be much more precise: it can be established that in 601H Ibn ‘Arabi also went to Jerusalem;5 that in 602 he went to Konya;6 and then back to Jerusalem7 before going on to Hebron in 603 and finally to Cairo in 603. Elsewhere Palacios makes a mistake—persistently repeated by later writers, who as a rule merely copy his conclusions—regarding the date of Ibn ‘Arabi’s meeting in Konya with the Seljuq sultan Kaykä’us. Ibn ‘Arabi’, he writes, 'arrived in Konya, capital of that part of the Byzantine Empire which had submitted to Islam: it was there that the king Kaykä’us had ascended to the throne in 607/1210. Word of Ibn ‘Arabi’s fame had reached the court ahead of him, and the king went out to meet him in person and welcome him with every possible honour...... This period of relative calm allowed Ibn ‘Arabi to resume his writing and it was there, during that year, that he produced two of his works: the Risālat al-anwār and the Kitāb mashhāḥid al-asrār’.8 Corbin for his part briefly refers to the meeting between the king and the Sufi in the following terms: 'Three years later, in 607/1210, Ibn ‘Arabi was in the heart of Anatolia, in Konya, where the Seljuq sovereign Kaykä’us I accorded him a magnificent reception'.10 In fact, however, the Risālat al-anwār was written in Konya in 602, not 607; this is stated explicitly by Ibn ‘Arabi himself at the end of the text.11 As for the Kitāb mashhāḥid al-asrār, it was composed in Seville in 590: this also is stated by the author, in the very first lines of the work.12 Finally, the 'magnificent reception' by Kaykä’us cannot possibly have taken place in 607H for the simple reason that the king only ascended to the throne in 608/1210.13 It is worth noting that neither Palacios nor Corbin gives the slightest reference which would help to substantiate the claim that this particular meeting took place at that particular date.

One other fact to be borne in mind is that as a rule Asin simply repeated the information contained in the short biography which the Egyptian editor appended to the text of the Futuḥat, and which is essentially a résumé of Maqārī’s Naṭf al-tib.14 Hence for example his account of the famous incident in Bougie in 597/1200, when Ibn ‘Arabi saw himself united with the stars and with the letters of the alphabet. In fact, however, this event is reported in detail not only by Chubrini15 but also on two separate occasions

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6. Ibid., R.G. §§ 28, 13, 70.
8. Ibid., R.G. §§ 63, al-bulān § E.
9. Islamic cristianismo, p.89.
11. O. Yahia, R.G. § 33.
12. Ibid., R.G. § 431.
13. See EI2 s.v. Kaykä’us.
14. In the 1293 edition which Asin consulted, it is printed at the beginning of the first volume: in the Bulaq edition (1323), at the end of volume IV.
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by Ibn ‘Arabi himself.\textsuperscript{16} It is the same in the case of the meeting between Ibn ‘Arabi and Suhrawardi at Baghdad; according to Asin he [Ibn ‘Arabi] arrived in 608 at Baghdad. his final destination: his aim was to meet in person a certain great Sufi who had opened a school for homiletics and mystical exercises in the city. This man was the famous Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi, author of the ‘Awārif al-ma‘ārif ... The biographers relate all the details of this initial meeting between the two masters: “They looked at each other in silence for a long while, then they parted without saying a word”.\textsuperscript{17} Unfortunately Asin fails to tell us who these biographers were. For his own part O. Yahia cites Ibn al-Imad as authority for locating the event in Baghdad in 608.\textsuperscript{18} However, the relevant passage in the Shadharat\textsuperscript{19} gives neither a place nor a date for the event, which raises the question as to whether it took place at all.

On the other hand Asín Palacios makes no mention whatever of the marriage between Ibn ‘Arabi and the mother of Shihab al-Din Qunawi, even though it is referred to in several Arabic and Persian sources. As a matter of fact this event in the private life of the Shaih al-Albar was to have very important consequences for the diffusion of his thought in the Islamic world. On the other hand, Asin concocted—without any supporting evidence whatsoever—a meeting between Ibn ‘Arabi and Abū Madyan at Bougie in 590.\textsuperscript{20} In fact Ibn ‘Arabi states explicitly in the Rūh\textsuperscript{21} that he never encountered ‘physically’ the man whom he considered his master par excellence.

Finally, it is important to emphasise the extent to which the reliability of the Vida de Ahenarabi is compromised by the fact that it is profoundly marked—sometimes even disfigured—by its author’s religious prejudice. This is already evident in the very title of the work: Islam cristianizado. There is no point in dwelling on the offensive expressions (‘mental imbalance’, ‘pathological case’) which often accompany Ibn ‘Arabi’s name.\textsuperscript{22} However irritating they are, they can at least be ignored. To a certain extent this kind of prejudice is understandable in the case of a churchman living at the time of Asín Palacios; but when it leads him to assert—without any justification whatsoever—that Ibn ‘Arabi was motivated by a ‘political hatred against the Christians’ which made him return to Anatolia in 612 ‘so as to direct the anti-Christian policy’ of Kaykäuś, his bias is something much more serious. Interpreting inner states of the soul is one thing; rewriting history is another.

If Asin had gone to even the slightest trouble to acquaint himself with Near-Eastern chronicles for the period of Ibn ‘Arabi’s lifetime, he would have discovered that the policy of Kaykäuś was so far from being anti-Christian that Muslim writers accused him of colluding with the Franks.\textsuperscript{23}

* * *

If Asin can to some extent be excused for the shortcomings of his work, the same cannot be said for those more recent writers who have tackled the subject of Ibn ‘Arabi’s life. The fact is that they in turn failed to consult the works mentioned above even though they had become easily accessible. For instance, Ibn ‘Arabi’s Rasā’il were edited in Hyderabad in 1948, a first critical edition of Tādili’s Tashawwuf was produced in 1954, and the majority of the Ṭabāqāt have appeared in print starting from 1950. Instead of taking the trouble to check Palacios’ assertions, these later writers have simply reproduced the errors contained in Islam cristianizado—or, even worse, added to them.\textsuperscript{24} In this respect Ruspoli’s introduction to chapter 167 of the Futuḥāt is typical. In the four unfortunate pages which he devotes to the life of Ibn ‘Arabi, he manages to invent for him a marriage with Nizām, the inspirer of the Tarjumān al-ashwāq,\textsuperscript{25} and to have him return to the West after his definitive departure for the East in 598.\textsuperscript{26}

There is no denying that O. Yahia has made a serious effort to achieve precision in the chronological table of Ibn ‘Arabi’s life which he presents at the start of his General Index. However, here too one notes a considerable number of omissions and inaccuracies. For example, for the year 586/1190 he limits himself to reporting the visit made by Ibn ‘Arabi to one of the women who were his spiritual masters in Marchena; but strangely he fails to point out that it was during the same year that Ibn ‘Arabi went to Cordoba, where

\textsuperscript{23} On this subject see S. Humphreys, From Saladin to the Mongols, New York 1977, pp.440-41, and below, chapter 9.

\textsuperscript{24} I am referring specifically to the introduction by Ruspoli to chapter 167 of the Futuḥāt (L’Alchimie du bonheur parfait, Paris 1981) and to the even more recent introduction by M. Glotin to chapter 178 of the Futuḥāt (Traité de l’Amour, Paris 1987). Austin, in his introductions to Sufis of Andalusia and to his translation of the Fasīq al-īṣām (The Bees of Wisdom, London 1980) presents a biographical summary that is much more precise and contains far fewer mistakes: he also took the trouble to follow up the references to Ibn ‘Arabi’s masters in the Takmilā. Even so, we will see that at times he made the error of relying on Asin’s assertions without checking whether they were correct.

\textsuperscript{25} L’Alchimie du bonheur parfait, p.13.

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., ‘During those years (1210-24) Ibn ‘Arabi remained settled for most of the time in Anatolia while continuing to travel between Mecca, Egypt, the Maghreb and Tunisia’. 

17. Islam cristianizado, p.91.
20. Islam cristianizado, p.60.
22. See for example pp.79, 103, 104-5.
INTRODUCTION

a decisive event in his spiritual destiny occurred. In fact this piece of information is given in a famous passage of the Fusus al-hikam.27 Similarly, he omits to mention that in 595/1198 the Shaikh al-Akbar returned to Cordoba, where he attended the funeral of Averroes which he describes in the Futuhat;28 or that on the 27th of Jumādā 599/1202 he went to Taif where, as he tells us at the start of the Ḥilyat al-abdal,29 he meditated at Ibn 'Abbās' grave. And one learns with astonishment that in 598 Ibn 'Arabi stopped off in Casablanca—even though the city which bears this name was only built in the eighteenth century.30

*  

This all goes to show that at the present time no dependable and detailed study of Ibn 'Arabi's life is available in a Western language. Those who are fortunate enough to be able to cope with the subtleties of Arabic are left with the option of referring to the Arab sources, either ancient or modern; they are then faced with a choice between two different kinds of document, or more precisely between two different types of information. On the one hand there are the details provided by the entries—often brief, always lifeless—in the tābaqāt, those vast biographical dictionaries in which the author confidently sums up a whole lifetime in a few lines. Boring and dull, these curricula vitae are all very much the same and are repeated from writer to writer, century to century: names, first names, surnames, masters, travels, writings. To spare oneself the labour one could simply refer, like Asín, to the Naft al-tib—a work in which its author meticulously noted down and assembled most of the entries referring to Ibn 'Arabi which existed in his time.31 But Maqārī was no different from many other Arabic compilers in his disregard for historical truth; what is more, he was a fervent supporter of Ibn 'Arabi. As a result, he reproduced a number of fairly incredible anecdotal stories which, as we will see when we come to examine them, very probably derive from Fayruzābādī (d. 817/1414).

The second type of document consists of hagiographical writings. For example, there are a few rather fine pages at the start of al-Qārī al-Bağdādî's Manāqib Ibn 'Arabi32 which present a summary of Ibn 'Arabi's life in the same kind of anecdotal style which Farîd al-Dîn 'Aṭṭâr used in his Tadhkīrat al-a'wilâyā. But the author does not stop there. Keen to rally his reader to

the cause of the Shaikh al-Akbar—for whom he expresses a profound veneration—he goes to great lengths to demonstrate that there were 'ulamâ' or theologians with the very best of reputations, and hardly likely to raise any suspicions as to their orthodoxy, who acknowledged Ibn 'Arabi's sainthood. To achieve this he simply puts into their mouths statements which they never made. So, for instance, Dhhahâbî's sober assertion that Ibn 'Arabi was 'the model for those who teach the Oneness of Being' is transformed in the Manāqib into 'the shahīkh, the ascetic, the imām, the saint, the ocean of truths...'.33 This kind of golden legend was then perpetuated in later centuries by Sha'rānī34 and, to a lesser degree, by Maqārī.

What is true of some of Ibn 'Arabi's supporters is also true of virtually all his opponents. They too were not bothered with scruples. Both sides were writing ad maiorem Dei gloriam and piously relegated historical truth to its proper place. For example Dhhahâbî does not think twice about reporting that Ibn 'Arabi had married a jîm who used to beat him black and blue.35 Others, not quite so prone to such flights of fantasy, asserted that he had perverse sexual habits36—an accusation which admittedly is hurled at anyone who is open to suspicion of heresy in the eyes of the Doctors of the Law.

During the last decade Shaikh Maḥmûd Ghrârî of Damascus has gone to considerable lengths to make Ibn 'Arabi better known to the Arab world. He has published ten or so different works which assemble various texts of Ibn 'Arabi according to theme: 'the Imaginal World', 'the Perfect Man', and so on. One of these monographs, published in Damascus in 1983, is called The Life of Ibn 'Arabi according to Ibn 'Arabi.37 Faithful to the method he has laid down for himself, the author simply reproduces one after another various texts (extracted only from printed works of Ibn 'Arabi: he makes no use of manuscripts) in which the Shaikh al-Akbar speaks in the first person. This anthology could be genuinely useful, but unfortunately Maḥmûd Ghrârî fails to give the references for this patchwork of quotations. In the case of a literary output as vast as Ibn 'Arabi's—adding up to thousands of pages—this is, to say the least, inconvenient.

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32. Al-Dârî al-thannîn fi manaqib Mahîj i-Dîn, Beirut 1959 (henceforth referred to as Manaqib Ibn 'Arabi).
33. Ibid., p.38. The editor of the Manaqib, Dr Sulâh al-Dîn Ma'naqî, took the trouble to cite the original text of Dhhahâbî which al-Qârî al-Bağdâdî claims to be quoting. It was recorded by Yâvîî (cf. Mîrât al-jâmi', 1338 edition, IV, p.100) and no doubt derives from Dhhahâbî's Ta'rikh al-tidâm, although I have not been able to confirm this. The same kind of fulsification occurs in the case of Ibn Kâthîr's biographical note in the Bilāyâ (cf. Manaqib Ibn 'Arabi, p.36).
34. Sha'rânî, al-Yawâqût wa l-jawahir, Cairo 1369, ad init.: al-Tâbaqāt al-khâbû, I, p.188.
37. This is a free translation of the original title (Ibn 'Arabi, tarjamat haqiqâtî min kalâmîhî, Damascus 1983).
INTRODUCTION

All in all, any contemporary reader of Ibn ‘Arabi who would like to consult a biography of him is—even if he happens to know Arabic—faced with only two options. Either there is the study by Asin Palacios, which apart from its major deficiencies is also extremely prejudiced, or there are the frequently fantastic stories told by the Arab biographers which, depending on the author’s bias, provide a vast wealth of either fabricated anecdotes or pious defamation. This is, to say the very least, a highly paradoxical situation when one considers on the one hand the immense significance (acknowledged even by his detractors) of Ibn ‘Arabi and his school in the history of Sufism, and when on the other hand one notes how the number of studies and translations in these areas keeps increasing from year to year. It was no doubt presumptuous to try to set matters right, but that is the task I have set myself in this book. To study the Greatest of the Masters as if he was just a brilliant metaphysician, without any roots, without a history of his own, without a homeland, is to risk falling to interpret correctly the nuances of a way of thinking which is inseparable from his personal experience. Certainly he was destined to fulfill an eminent function in the subsequent history of Sufism, both as a major point of reference in matters of doctrine and, less overtly, as source of a spiritual influx which even today is not exhausted. But this function, which is illustrated and encapsulated in his title ‘Seal of Muḥammadan Sainthood’, is not something which can be understood in some nebulous void unpeopled by men and women and devoid of any points of reference in space or time. Ibn ‘Arabi’s companions are not just walk-on parts, his contemporaries were not just onlookers, the countries which he lived in were more than theatrical backdrops, and the events he experienced were for him far more than the simple reversals in a dramatic plot. In this respect all the biographies of Ibn ‘Arabi which were mentioned earlier share one major shortcoming. Not once do they try to delineate the cultural, social and political landscape in which his destiny unfolded, and never do they attempt to evoke the epoch, so rich and sumptuous but also so grave, into which he was born and in which he died: the era of the Reconquista in the West, the era of the Crusades and soon afterwards of the Mongol invasions in the East. It is quite true that works written about this period are extremely inadequate. Even today there is still no study which deals specifically with the Andalusia of Ibn ‘Arabi’s time—that is, with Andalusia under the Almohads. This means that anyone interested in discovering information which could help to shed light on Andalusian society during that period is obliged to consult the historiographical works written at the time. However, history as it was conceived of then is something very different from the discipline which bears the name today. Any attempt to find details about the living conditions of the general population in, say, Ibn al-Abbār’s Taḵmila or Ibn ‘Idhārī’s Bayān al-

mughrib is totally in vain. Their concern was not with writing history in the way this is understood today—at least alone with sociology. Their aim was to transmit a very specific type of information regarding the key figures and the political and military events which in one way or another characterised their century.

The East under the Ayyūbids is slightly better documented. The studies by C. Cahen, E. Sivan and S. Humphreys carefully document the Ayyūbid system of government and its interactions with the Christian world. The doctoral thesis defended by L. Pouzet in 1981 assembles the historical data concerning religious life in Damascus during the seventh/thirteenth century. More recently, D. Gril’s edition and translation of a seventh-century hagiographical text provides invaluable information about the Sūl circles which existed in Egypt at that time. But a great deal still remains to be done, and I venture to express the hope that this book will contribute towards a better understanding of a period which witnessed such major upheavals in the Islamic world.

My aim is essentially biographical. In the first instance it consists of retracing Ibn ‘Arabi’s spiritual and intellectual journey while, wherever possible, situating this journey firmly in the religious and historical context of the time. Within this framework there could be no question of undertaking a detailed analysis of Ibn ‘Arabi’s doctrine and teaching. My intention has been much more modest: to contribute a little to clarifying the origin of his teachings and also to emphasise how closely they are related to the ‘states’ (ahwāl) and ‘stations’ (maqāmāt) which he experienced, as well as to an already lengthy tradition which he inherited and in turn transmitted. Besides, the principal themes of his thought have already been the subject of meticulous examination for a number of decades. There is no need to go back as far as Nyberg or Asin: one has only to think of the work done by Corbin and Izutsu (and more recently by another Japanese scholar, Masataka Takeshita), or of the penetrating commentaries by Michel Valsan which accompany his translations, to gain an idea of the number of publications which have been devoted to deciphering the corpus of Ibn ‘Arabi’s writings—although of course this is not to say that the deciphering is even nearly complete. And yet for obvious reasons it has proved impossible to confine myself to simply citing these studies; frequently I found it essential to refer in passing to the main ideas which run through Ibn ‘Arabi’s work, although I make no claim to have done so exhaustively.

INTRODUCTION

‘I only speak of what I taste,’ states the author of the Futūḥāt.¹⁹ In a sense his entire work is nothing but the record of his inner experience: visions, dialogues with the dead, ascensions, mysterious encounters in the ‘Imaginal World’ (ʿālam al-khayāţ), miraculous journeys in the celestial spheres. Whether they are a psychopath’s fantasies, as Asin Palacios believed, or genuine spiritual perceptions as Corbin claimed, the fact is that for Ibn ‘Arabi they were not only as real but much more real than the Andalusian earth on which he walked as a child. Everyone who devotes himself to studying the Shaikh al-Akbar—whether as a biographer or as a historian of ideas—must take this into account.

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‘It takes a saint to understand a saint,’ wrote Julien Green about Francis of Assisi.⁴⁰ Indeed I make no claim to have understood—let alone made understandable—that elusive figure whose existence I will be describing. Many enigmas remain. In saying this I have in mind not so much those historical riddles for which some document, lost today, may tomorrow provide the answer, as those illuminations for which we can record both date and place but without being able to share in their light. I have in mind those contradictions which no doubt resolve themselves sub specie aeternitatis, but which from the terrestrial point of view remain unsolved: those certainties that are inaccessible to the reason of mortals, and the privilege of the muḥaqiqūn or realisers of the Truth. To the best of my ability I have followed Ibn ‘Arabi down those strange trails that are not always contained within the four points of the compass. During the course of this journey one can sometimes feel one has lost one’s way; sometimes one can feel a prisoner in a labyrinth from which there is no way out. But the Shaikh al-Akbar asserts that ‘all paths are circular,’⁴¹ which among other things means that the journey which the reader is about to embark on will lead him back to himself.

1. Home Land

‘ANDALUSIA BELONGS TO GOD’

‘You who live in Al-Andalus, with its waters, its shade, its rivers, trees—how blessed you are!’

The Garden of Bliss is nowhere else than in your country, and if it was possible for me to choose between them it would be your country I would choose.

Don’t be afraid of going to Hell tomorrow: whoever has known Paradise will never enter Gehenna.”¹¹

COUNTLESS poets have sung the charms of the Andalusian countryside, with its green gardens, its rivers, its flowers, its fragrances and scents; these verses by Ibn Khafaja (d. 533/1139) are far from unique.² Andalusia, land of enchantment, land of Paradise—the native Arabic literature abounds with these enthusiastic eulogies. ‘Andalusia and everything in it belongs to God’, another poet declaims.³ From statements such as these to making the prophet Muhammad say what he never said is just a small step; the Andalusians took that step by piously inventing some hadīths.⁴ After my death a peninsula will be conquered in the West; its name is Andalusia. Whoever lives there will live in a state of blessedness; whoever dies there will die a martyr . . . .⁴ Or again: ‘God spread out the Earth before me and I was

². See further Henri Péres, Poésie andalouse en arabe classique au Xe siècle. Paris 1937, chapters 2, 3 and 4.
⁴. This hadith is cited by Zubir (6th/12th century) in his Kitāb al-jahārafiḥa, ed. M. Hadi Sadok in B.E.O., Damascus 1968, XXI, p.226, and in Dhikr, 1, p.16 and II, p.22; he does not, however, vouch for its authenticity. The anonymous author of the Dhikr also quotes another twenty or so ‘hadiths’; but he gives no chain of transmitters (taṣdīḥ) and simply refers indiscriminately to Ibn Badiskuwāl, Muslim and so forth. On the fabrication and dissemination of this type of hadith, extolling the virtues (fadilat) of towns and cities which did not even exist in the time of the Prophet, see I. Goldzweig, Études sur la tradition islamique, Paris 1984, pp.153–57.

19. Fut., II, p.24; see also Fut., IV, p.75.
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able to see how much of it my community would possess. I saw that Andalusia would be its final conquest. I asked Gabriel: "Gabriel, what is that peninsula?" He replied: "Muhammad, that is the peninsula of Andalusia, which your community will conquer after your death. Whoever lives there will live in a state of blessedness; whoever dies there will die a martyr".12 Put together from bits and pieces, these 'hadiths' testify just as much to the strength of sheer passion which the Arab conquerors felt for Andalusia as to the complete and utter absence of that scientific scrupulousness which the compilers were sometimes quite capable of.

Let us take a closer look at this land which became the inspiration for so many eulogists. It is common knowledge that by 'Al-Andalus' Arabic writers meant not only the region equivalent to what is Spain today but also 'Islamic Spain irrespective of its geographical extension, which diminished bit by bit as the Christian reconquest proceeded'.

During the Almohad Empire, which is the period that concerns us, Al-Andalus designated the provinces—or more accurately the kāras, according to the geographical terminology used by the Arabs—of Valencia, Tudmir (provincial centre Murcia) and Jativa in the Levant (sharāq al-andalus); of Jaen, Elvira (near to Granada), Almeria and Malaga in the East; of Cordoba, Seville, Ecija, Carmona and Niebla in the West; in the South, Moron, Sidona, Calsena and Tacoranna (provincial centre Ronda), and in the Algarve (yahr al-andalus)—present-day Portugal—Osconoba (with Silves as its centre) and Beja.

Apart from some disagreement as to whether Spain should be situated in the fourth or fifth climate, the fact is that Arab geographers followed each other closely in their descriptions of Andalusia and that there is not much difference between one account and another. The following example is also typical of the rest:

'Andalusia is a fertile peninsula, remarkable for the immense size of its lands and sea, for the great variety of its fruits and for its natural resources. It is favoured with a considerable population and enormous advantages. There are many wild animals, birds and fish for game. Its soil is good, its water drinkable... Uninhabited regions are rare: fortresses and castles are everywhere. It also has a rich quantity of mines, of rock crystal, ore, sulphur, lead and tin.' Add one further comment by the same author—"The inhabitants of Andalusia are more courageous and more difficult to govern than any other people; even the great Caesar himself..."—and the picture is complete!

7. See A. Miquel’s article in EP s.v. "ilm.

'St Andalusia belongs to God'

Stereotyped as it is, this idyllic description does none the less contain a substantial degree of truth. There is no denying that the regions of Cordoba and Seville—in particular the Aljafera, the range of hills stretching to the West of Seville—and also the regions of the Levant and Algarve have been favoured by nature to a much greater extent than the rest of the Iberian peninsula. Abundantly watered by the Guadalquivir (al-wādī al-kabīr) and its tributaries (chief of which is the Guenil. al-wādī al-sinjil), and perfectly irrigated from the Umayyad era onwards, the soil in these areas is fertile and favourable for the cultivation of fruits and vegetables. The Andalusians took special pride in the variety and abundance of the fruit: apples, pears, apricots, cherries, pomegranates and especially figs grew in profusion. The olive groves in Jaen, Malaga and particularly in the Aljaraf stretching into the distance as far as the eye could see: the Aljaraf was also a centre of intensive agriculture. As for the sea, it was a generous source of fish for the Andalusians, who were prodigious sardine-eaters.9

The complete absence of statistical data, plus the Arab geographers' lack of concern with demographic matters, renders impossible any serious attempt at estimating the population of Islamic Spain in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.10 On the other hand we are well informed as to the elements that went to make up this extremely mixed population.11

Those who were Arabs in the true sense of the word came for the most part from Syria and the Yemen, after the conquest. They represented a privileged and affluent minority and formed a closed caste, a nucleus of great families (buyūtīūt) who owned the best land and most often occupied important administrative posts.

From the eleventh century onwards, as the Almoravids and then the Almohads came to power, the number of Berbers in Andalusia increased considerably. These nomads from North Africa were recruited en masse as mercenaries; disliked by Arabs and Andalusians, they were regarded as coarse and uncouth. The Almohad dynasty brought a change in their social status: previously confined to the lower classes, a large number of them now

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took up judicial posts while others excelled in the religious sciences. We will also see that several of Ibn 'Arabi's spiritual masters came from this class of uneducated and illiterate Berbers.

Among these non-native elements in the population of Andalusia, mention should also be made of the existence of a small number of blacks from Sudan. Brought to Andalusia by the slave trade, they were for the most part employed as mercenaries.

The aboriginal population consisted of three groups. Statistically the most significant one was the muwattalādhīs, or Spaniards converted to Islam. Farmers, craftsmen and traders, they also made up most of the working population.

Then there were the Christians and Jews. Both were minority groups. There had been a major emigration of Christians to the north of Spain after Toledo was captured by Alphonso VI in 478/1085. However, a small nucleus of this Mozarab community stayed on in Andalusia. Under the Almoravids, and even more so under the Almohads, they were increasingly ill-treated and humiliated. The religious tolerance which had characterised the caliphate of Cordoba was no more than a distant memory. Admittedly times had changed: the Muslim realm in Spain was shrinking from day to day as the Reconquista continued to gain more ground. When 'Abd al-Mu'min came to power, he declared that he would no longer tolerate anyone but Muslims on his territory; churches and synagogues were systematically destroyed.12

The situation was even worse for the Jews. In face of the Almohad persecutions many of them emigrated to Toledo or to the Maghreb—as for example in the case of Maimonides, who fled Cordoba in 544/1149 and took refuge first of all in the Maghreb and then in Egypt, where he died in 601/1204. Those who stayed on lived together in special quarters of the great cities. Especially in Granada, but also in Seville and Cordoba, they formed an important and prosperous community until 557/1162; but in that year the city was recaptured by the Almohads, and most of them were either killed or expelled.13

The manual of hisba (‘inspection’) by Ibn 'Abdun, written at the beginning of the twelfth century, provides a remarkable insight into the attitude of intolerance which was sweeping through Andalusia at that time. A magistrate at Seville, he used every possible opportunity to express his profound contempt for the dhimmis, non-Muslims: ‘It is forbidden’, he writes.


'to sell a coat which has belonged to a leper, a Jew or a Christian without disclosing the fact to the potential buyer...'. Elsewhere he advises that 'no tax-collectors, policemen, Jews or Christians should be allowed to wear the dress of a member of the aristocracy, of a lawyer or of a man of means; on the contrary, they should be abominated and shunned...'. And that is not all. According to Ibn 'Abdun, priests are fornicators and the churches are brothels! 'Members of the clergy are debauchees, fornicators and sodomites. Women Franks are to be forbidden to enter the church on any day except when there are services and on holy days, because it is their custom to go there to banquet, drink and fornicate with the clergy...'. Finally, Jews and Christians must be absolutely forbidden to educate themselves and above all to act as tutors to Muslims.17

One other very special characteristic of Andalusia was the number of its towns, many of which dated from Roman times, and its fortresses. If the land may well have been a paradise, it was also highly coveted.

Whatever the views of lyrical eulogists as to the country's charms, the fact is that from the eleventh century and even more so from the twelfth century onwards Al-Andalus presents the picture of a landscape devastated by war. With the capture of Toledo in 478/1085 by Alphonso VI of Castile, and then of Saragossa in 512/1118 by Alphonso the Warrior of Aragon, the Reconquista— which had made little progress up until then—inexorably tightened its grip around the Islamic realm in Spain. Certainly the Almoravid Berbers from North Africa rallied to the cry for help from the reyes de Taifas, and still managed to hold the Christians in check beyond their frontier. But very soon they were to be crushed in turn by other Berbers—the Almohads. In 539/1145, with the conquest of Morocco and Ifriqiya scarcely completed, the Almohad troops landed in the Iberian peninsula under 'Abd al-Mu'min, who had succeeded to the Mahdi Ibn Tumart in 527/1133. Two years later they took Jerez, Niebla, Silves, Beja, Mertola—and finally Seville, where the Almohads set up their administrative capital.

By the time of 'Abd al-Mu'min's death in 558/1162 almost all of Andalusia had been conquered and subdued. The rebellions which flared up here and there in reaction to the abuses perpetrated by the rank and file of the Almohad army were rapidly put down. The famine and penury which had ravaged Seville were averted.

On his father's death Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf seized power, although only after eliminating a few rival candidates who were something of a nuisance. He inherited a vast empire which was prosperous and strong economically.

15. Ibid., p.115.
17. Ibid., p.128.
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politically and also from a military point of view. But even so, a shadow darkened the scene. The shadow had a name: Ibn Mardanish.

‘Demented and cruel’: that is the image which the medieval Arab chroniclers liked to present of the Levantine sovereign, Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Ibn Mardanish. The chroniclers in question were men such as Ibn Ṣāḥib al-Salāt18 (d. 594/1198) and Ibn Ḥadhāri19 (d. c.700/1300)—that is, men whose impartiality is to say the least open to question.20 The verdict of the great Orientalist R. Dony is quite different. He does not conceal his admiration for the great opponent of the Almohads, and observes that ‘He liked to dress in the same way as his neighbours, the Christians, and carry the same weapons as they did; he liked to fit out his horses in the same way, and he took pleasure in speaking their language. Most of his soldiers were from Castile, Navarra and Catalonia: he had homes built for them—and a large number of taverns as well, which caused a major scandal among strict Muslims . . . . In every Christian prince he saw an ally, a friend, a brother . . . . He was a man of great shrewdness: he knew when to pardon with nobility and when to punish severely, according to the circumstances. He had prodigious energy and was an excellent horseman: his bravery was a match for any ordeal. In battle he was so ready to sacrifice himself and endanger his life that he had to be reminded that a general-in-command has other duties than those of an ordinary soldier’.21

With the assistance of Christian mercenaries Ibn Mardanish defied, harassed and menaced the Almohad Empire for nearly fifteen years. In 554/1159 he attempted to take Cordoba, then descended on Seville; encouraged and commanded by their future sultan Abū Yaʿqūb Yūsuf,22 the inhabitants of Seville put up a resistance and after three days managed to repel the besieger. This did not prevent Ibn Mardanish and his troops from regularly ravaging the campañā of Seville during the years that followed: his ally and son-in-law even succeeded in taking Granada in 557/1162, although admittedly only for a short time.23

However, in 560/1165 Ibn Mardanish had his first setback. The Almohad armies, reinforced by contingents from North Africa, crushed his troops not far from Murcia: he himself fled to Murcia for refuge. The capital of Tudmir, founded in 216/831 during the reign of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān II, was surrounded by high walls and strong fortifications which made it impossible for the Almohads to take the city by storm. So began a test of strength between the Almohad sovereign and the Levantine king which was to last seven years.

THE DESCENDANTS OF ḤĀTIM AL-ṬĀʿI

‘I am al-ʿArabi al-Ḥātimi, the brother of magnanimity: in nobility we possess glory, ancient and renowned.’24

In the vast corpus of his writings it is not unusual to come across verses such as these in which the Shaikh al-Akbar, Muḥyi l-Dīn Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-ʿArabi al-Ṭāʿī al-Ḥātimi, celebrates his pure Arab origin and the legendary generosity associated with the name of his ancestors, the Banū Tāyi’.25 Arab26 and of noble descent, Ibn ʿArabi’s family belonged to the khḍasa or high society of Andalusia. Although it cannot be established conclusively, there is every reason to believe that part of the Yemenite clan of the Banū Tāyi27 emigrated to Spain during the initial years of the Arab conquest, which attracted several great families (buyūṭāt) to the Iberian peninsula from Syria and the Yemen.28 At any rate we know that already in the time of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān I (d. 172/788) some members of the clan were

22. Abū Yaʿqūb Yūsuf had been sent as governor to Seville by his father, ʿAbd al-Muʿmin, in 551h. In 557/1161 ʿAbd al-Muʿmin decided to make Cordoba the administrative capital of Andalusia, but he died soon afterwards: Abū Yaʿqūb, strongly attached to Seville, re-established it as the Andalusian capital of the Almohad Empire.
23. On the capture of Granada by Ibn Hamushik and then by the Almohads see EI2 s.v. Gharnata; Dony, Recherches, I, pp.367–88; Ibn Ṣāḥib al-Salāt, al-Munn, II, p.186.
24. Diwan, Bulaq, 1271h, p.47; Muḥḍarāt, I, p.155.
25. See for example Diwan, pp.44, 259, 308. It is important to note that the correct form of the Shaikh al-Akbar’s nasab is in fact Ibn al-ʿArabi, although he is generally referred to as Ibn ʿArabi—no doubt to distinguish him from the qādī and muḥaddith who will be mentioned later on. One of his ancestors was the famous Ḥātim al-Ṭāʿī, who became legendary for his chivalry and generosity; cf. Muḥḍarāt, I, p.259 and EI2 s.v. Ḥātim al-Ṭāʿī.
26. It must be remembered that according to the Arab system of kinship only the origin and descent of the father are significant (on this subject see P. Guichard, Structures sociales orientales et occidentales dans l’Espagne musulmane, Paris, La Haye 1977, chapter III, pp.102–361). This is the reason why Ibn ʿArabi considered himself a pure-bred Arab even though there is little doubt that he had some Berber blood from his mother’s side of the family.
27. On emigration to Spain from Syria and the Yemen at the start of the conquest see J. Bosch Vila, Sevilla Islamica, pp.24–43; Levi-Provencal, Histoire, I, pp.73–85.
settled in the city of Jaén; in his Jamhurat al-ansāb Ibn Ḥazn noted their presence in Baza and Tijola, while Maqṣarī gave their locality as southern Murcia—which is precisely where the Shaikh was born.28

It was in fact in precisely the year 560/1165, inside the fortress which was under siege and threat from the Almohads, that Ibn ʿArabi came into the world. In his own words, 'I was born during the rule of this caliph [i.e. Al-Mustanṣir bī-llāh], in the realm of Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muhammad b. Saʿd b. Mardanīsh in Andalusia'.29 When he met the historian Ibn Najjār (d. 643/1245) in Damascus, he gave him his exact time of birth as during the night of Monday the 17th of Ramadan, 560.30 For his parents it was a major event: Muhammad was and would remain their only son.31

What precisely was the position held by Ibn ʿArabi's father in Ibn Mardanīsh's government? To my knowledge none of our sources is specific on this point. However, it would appear that up until the time of Ibn Mardanīsh's downfall he was one of the high-ranking dignitaries in the realm. The Almohad sultan Abū Yaʿqūb Yusuf retained in his own service the majority of his opponent's courtiers, and entrusted Ibn ʿArabi's father with what seems to have been a major post. This he continued to hold during the reign of the third Muʿminīn sovereign, Abū Yusuf Yaʿqūb al-Mansūr.32 One day he would be sharply criticised for his participation in power—which for some unavailing meant participation in corruption—by one of Ibn ʿArabi's Andalusian masters.33

It would be wrong, however, to conclude that he was a luke-warm Muslim devoted by ambition and lust for power. There are some details regarding his death34 which on the contrary suggest that he was—perhaps in extremis—one of the ṣawāyaʿ, or saints, and more precisely that he was among those who have realised the "Dwelling-place of Breaths" (man tahaqqqa bi manzil al-anfis).35 This category of spiritual men is also designated by the Shaikh al-Akbar as al-raḥmānīyyūn, because they are governed specifically by the divine name al-Rahmān, 'the Merciful',36 which is a reference to the hadith of the Prophet: 'The Breath (nafas) of the Merciful comes to me from the Yemen'.37 They are characterised by the ability to perceive spiritual and sense-perceptible realities through the sense of smell (al-shamām). To quote Ibn ʿArabi: 'One of the distinguishing features of someone who has attained to this station (maqâm) is the fact that at the time of his death he is declared alive even though he is dead; but if his pulse is taken, he is declared to be dead ...'

'I experienced this in the case of my father. God have mercy on him. For a while we hesitated to bury him, so closely did he resemble a living person by the expression on his face, even through by the cessation of his pulse and breathing he resembled someone who was dead. A fortnight before his decease he told me he was about to die, and that his death would take place on a Wednesday. So it was. On the day when he died he was seriously ill. He sat up without any support and said to me: "My child, today is the day of departure and meeting". I replied: "In this journey God has written your salvation, and in this meeting He has blessed you". He was delighted by these words, and he said to me: "May God reward you! My child, everything that I heard you say and which I did not know and at times reproved you for: that is my profession of faith!" (huwa dhā anā ash-hadithu). Then a white glow appeared on his forehead—in contrast to the colour of the rest of his body—but it caused him no pain; it was a radiant light which my father was able to see. This glow then spread over all his face and finally covered the whole of his body.

'I embraced him, bade him farewell and, as I was leaving, said: "I am going to the Great Mosque; [I will remain there] until I am brought news of your death". He replied: "Go, and do not allow anyone to come and see me". Then he called his wife and daughters to his side.

'At midday I was told he had died; I went to him and found him in the state in which one wondered on seeing him whether he was alive or dead. It was in this condition that he was buried.'38

29. Muḥāṭarāt, l. x, p. 488.
31. Ibn ʿArabi frequently refers in his writings to the various members of his family (his father, his mother and his two sisters), but never does he even make the slightest allusion to a brother. We will also see that when his father gathered the family together just before his death, it only consisted of Ibn ʿArabi himself plus his mother and two sisters.
32. Al-Qāri al-Baqhdādī (d. 821/1418) states in his Manāqib Ibn ʿArabi, p. 22, that Ibn ʿArabi's father was the vizier to the sultan of Seville (in other words of the Almohad sultan). However, the assertions made by this writer need to be treated with caution: they are more often than not exaggerated, if not downright false. But apart from this report, it emerges clearly from two passages in the Rūḥ al-ṣawāya and Durrat al-fakhīrīn that Ibn ʿArabi's father was in the service of the Almohad rulers: cf. Rūḥ, p. 108 with R.W.J. Austin's translation, Sufis of Andalusia, p. 114, and Durrat § 3, in Sufis of Andalusia, pp. 75-6.
34. We will see later that he died in about 590/1194, when Ibn ʿArabi was thirty years old.
35. Ibn ʿArabi describes this category of spiritual men in chapters 24, 34 and 35 of the Futūḥāt. For the idea of nafas rahmān in the writings of the Shaikh al-Akbar see H. Corbin, Creative Imagination, pp. 115-20; Suʿūd al-Ḥakim, al-Muṭṭam al-sağf, § 614.
37. Fut., l. p. 185. This hadith is cited by Ibn Hanbal (II, 541) with the variant nafas rabbikum instead of nafas al-raḥmān.
38. Fut., l. p. 222.
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On his own admission, Muḥyi l-Din’s father did not always share his son’s sense of religious vocation or his certainty in matters of doctrine. None the less he felt a certain pride in the face of spiritual talents which were so remarkable that they attracted the praise of his friends—for example of Averroes, who requested that he arrange a meeting with the exceptional child; we will come back to this famous episode later. As for Ibn ‘Arabi himself, there can be no doubt that he suffered inwardly as a result of his father’s reserved attitude towards him (and also towards Sulimān, al-tṣawawuf) and one day he took him to a great saint in Cordoba, whom he asked to pray for him. But whatever their disagreements in matters of opinion, when they were confronted with the danger of death only tenderness remained. Muḥyi l-Din recounts how ‘One day I became seriously ill and plunged into such a deep coma that I was believed to be dead. In that state I saw horrible-looking people who were trying to harm me. Next I became aware of someone—kindly, powerful, and exhaling a delightful fragrance—who defended me against them and succeeded in defeating them. “Who are you?” I asked. The being replied to me: “I am the sūra Yā-Sīn; I am your protector!” Then I regained consciousness and found my father—God bless him—standing at my bedside in tears; he had just finished reciting the sūra Yā-Sīn.’

In Ibn ‘Arabi’s family his predisposition had no lack of antecedents. Three at least of his uncles—Abū Muhammad Abū Allāh b. Muḥammad al-‘Arabi al-Tā’i on his father’s side, and Abū Muslim al-Khwālānī and Yahyā b. Yughān on his mother’s—were distinguished for their spiritual aspirations. It was clearly the first of these—Abū Muḥammad al-‘Arabi—who made the most profound impression on the young Muḥammad. Later he would describe his remarkable experience three times, in the Rūḥ al-quds, the preceding biographical sketch, where Ibn ‘Arabi declares that he belonged to the elite of spiritual men; Rūḥ, p. 96; Sufs of Andalusia, p. 96. 44. Only one manuscript of the shorter version of the Durūṣ al-fākhira appears to survive (the longer version is lost), and unfortunately I have not been able to consult it. However, Austin provides a partial translation of it in Sufs of Andalusia; the biographical sketch of Ibn ‘Arabi’s uncle is on pp. 98-100. 45. Fust., I, p. 185.

The descendants of Ḥātim al-Tā’i

Durūṣ al-fākhira and the Futūḥat al-makkiyya. This man is a typical example of that frequent phenomenon in the history of sahiḥīt everywhere in the world: the literal ‘conversion’—suddenly and abruptly—of a person who up until that time had shown no real inclination towards piety and asceticism. The event in question, related in detail by Ibn ‘Arabi in his Rūḥ, occurred when his uncle was already well advanced in years.

One day a young boy came into the pharmacy in which the old man happened to be sitting and asked him for a remedy. The uncle made a sarcastic remark in response to the boy’s ignorance in pharmaceutical matters. His youthful interlocutor was clearly someone who was spiritually advanced beyond his years, and he retorted that whereas his own ignorance of drugs was of no consequence the old man would, on the contrary, pay dearly for his heedlessness and stubborn disobedience with regard to God. The effect of the retort was immediate and devastating. The man placed himself in the service of the child and dedicated himself to God up until the time of his death, which occurred three years later. Ibn ‘Arabi states in the Durrat that during that period he attained a high degree of sahiḥīt. In the chapter of the Futūḥat which is devoted to the category of spiritual men whose hearts are attached to breaths (ḥath al-qulūb al-murtuṣ ashshīyqa bi l-ḥamīs) —apparently identical to the category his father belonged to—Muḥyi l-Din actually specifies that his paternal uncle ‘Abd Allāh b. M. al-‘Arabi possessed this station (maṣqūm) on both the sense-perceptible and the spiritual plane (ḥissan wa ma‘nan). This is confirmed by the following anecdote in the Rūḥ: ‘Sitting at home he often used to say: “Dawn is breaking”. One day I asked him, “How do you know that?”’. He replied: “Child, from His throne God sends a breath which blows from Paradise; it descends from there at dawn so that every true believer inhales it every day”.

Finally, it is worth noting that Ibn ‘Arabi refers to his uncle’s death as occurring before his own ‘entry into the Way’ or to use the expression he himself commonly used, during the period of his jāhilīyya, or ‘ignorance’. This means, as we will see, that it happened before 580H.
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Equally interesting and rather similar is the case of another member of his family: his maternal uncle, the prince Yahyā b. Yughān al-Sanhāji (d. 537H), who was the ruler of Tlemcen. This man’s remarkable story is preserved in three texts: in Ibn ʿArabī’s Futūḥāt⁴⁸ and Muhādarat al-abrār,⁵⁰ and in the Tasawwuf⁵¹ by Yusuf b. Yahyā al-Tāḍlī (d. 627/1230).

Of these three versions it is the one in chapter 73 of the Futūḥāt which provides the most detailed and complete account of the circumstances which led up to that fateful time when the Berber prince abandoned his throne and his possessions in order to dedicate himself body and soul to God. In this chapter the Shaikh al-Akbār is enumerating and defining the various categories of awliyāʾ; in the passage in question he is describing the category of ascetics (al-zuhḥād)—those who of their own free will have renounced the goods of this base world,⁵²—who have preferred God (al-ḥaqq) to His creatures (al-khalq).⁵³

‘One of my maternal uncles (baḍdu akhwāl) was one of these ascetics (zuhḥād). He was the ruler of Tlemcen and his name was Yahyā b. Yughān. During his time there was a man called Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Tunisi:⁴⁴ a jurist, a deeply religious person and a hermit (ʿabīd munqaf) who came originally from Tunis. This man had settled in a place called al-Ubbād, just outside Tlemcen. He had isolated himself in a mosque, in which he devoted himself to the worship of God. His tomb is still to be found there: it is famous and frequently visited.

‘One day this saintly man was walking in Tlemcen, between Aqadābir and the town centre, and my uncle Yahyā b. Yughān, the king of Tlemcen, surrounded by his retinue and followers, crossed paths with him. He was told: “There is Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Tunisi, the holy man of our age!” The king reined in his horse and stopped; he greeted the old man, who greeted him back. The king, who was magnificently dressed, asked him: “Shaikh, is it permitted for me to do my prayers in the clothes I am wearing?” The old man burst out laughing: “What are you laughing at?”, the king demanded. He replied: “At the pettiness of your understanding, at the ignorance of your soul, and at your state! Nothing resembles you more closely than a dog which wallows in the blood of a carcass and devours the flesh in all its uncleanness, and then lifts its paw when it passes as if not to soil itself. You are a bowl filled with dirt. You ask me about your clothes while you are responsible for all the injustice that your subjects are suffering!” The king burst into tears, dismounted from his horse and there and then renounced his kingdom. He placed himself in the service of the shaikh, who put him up for three days but then came to him carrying a piece of rope and said: “King, the three days of hospitality which are prescribed have passed; get up and go and collect wood”. “So it was that he started gathering wood, carrying it on his head and taking it to the market; there the people wept when they saw him. He would sell the wood, take what he needed to feed himself and distribute the rest in ams. He stayed in his town doing this until he died; he was buried alongside the shaikh [Abū ʿAbd Allāh]. The shaikh had the habit of saying to people who came to him to ask him to intercede with God on their behalf: “Go and ask Yahyā b. Yughān; he is a king who renounced his kingdom. If God had subjected me to such a task, perhaps I would not have abandoned my kingdom!”⁵⁵

In the Muhādarat al-abrār Ibn ʿArabī adds that one day he made a pilgrimage to Ubbad to meditate at the graves of his uncle Yahyā and of Abū Madyan, who many years later would be buried in the same place.⁵⁶

So here, too, we are face with a spectacular case of tawba, of a sudden and unexpected conversion: a new awareness violently shakes the individual and brings him to a total metamorphosis of his being. Is the story too good to be true? The dialogue between the prince and the ascetic presents one of the most familiar situations in hagiographical literature all over the world: dramatic confrontation, instantaneous transformation of the sinner. It is difficult not to see in this one of those rhetorical formulae which are a common element of every golden legend. But Ibn ʿArabī, who was so careful in describing the innumerable stages and many perils of the Path, was not at all prone to theatrical simplifications. At the very least we must assume that he transcribed a family tradition just as he heard it; and we must not forget that a metanoia which strikes like lightning may be a rare phenomenon, but it is by no means simply impossible.⁵⁷ In this connection it is worth noting

52. In principle someone is considered a zahīd if he possesses goods which he then voluntarily renounces. As for the person who is poor and without possessions and who renounces the acquisition of material goods, Ibn ʿArabī explains that there is a divergence of opinion among the Masters: some consider him a zahīd, others do not.
54. According to Tāḍlī. Tasawwuf, p. 123, this was Abū M. ʿAbd al-Salam al-Tunisi, of whom he gives a biographical sketch elsewhere (§ 13, pp. 110-13).
56. Muhādarat, II, p. 68: he must therefore have made the journey some time between 594—the date of Abū Madyan’s death—and 598, which was when he left for the East for good.
57. Similarly Shaʿrān, in a biographical sketch of his ancestor Shaikh Mūsā Abū ʿImrān, who was a disciple of Abū Madyan, states that he renounced the throne which he was destined to inherit from his father (al-Tahāqat al-khāṣū, Cairo 1945, II, pp. 20-21).
that Tādîl’s version—more succinct but similar in its essential details—contains no reference to texts by Ibn ʿArabi (of which he apparently had no knowledge), but is based on an oral tradition received from one of his contemporaries. This would suggest that the story of the prince of Temcen’s sudden conversion was told independently in this form and that—whether historical or legendary—it was this particular version of the events which continued to be propagated.

It was also in similar circumstances that, as we will see, the process of rujûʿ—of return to God—was triggered in Muḥyī l-Dīn suddenly, and according to some sources during a high-society evening. The fact that there were two precedents for this in the family is not insignificant.

Finally there was his maternal uncle, Abû Muslim al-Khwâlîh, who according to Ibn ʿArabi belonged to a different category: the class of devotees (al-ʿubbd). The ʿubbd, distinguished by him from the zuhhâd, are explained by him as being men of legal obligations (ahl al-farâʿîd). Some of them live cut off from other men, while others have chosen to remain among them. They are free from greed and lust but, he specifies, ‘they do not perceive either the divine objects of knowledge and the divine secrets or the subtle spiritual world (al-malak).’ However, even at the instant they contemplate Retribution (al-thawâb), Resurrection and the terrors it entails, Paradise and Hell...

My maternal uncle Abû Muslim al-Khwâlîh was one of the greatest of their kind. He would stay standing in prayer all night long, and when his strength started to fail him he would hit his legs with sticks which he kept specifically for this purpose and say to them: “You deserve more blows than my horse does. If the companions of Muhammad believe they will have the prophệt all to themselves then, by Allah, we will push them up around him until they realise they have left behind them men (rijâl) who are worthy of the name!”58

Râhmâniyyûn, zuhhâd, ʿubbd: definitely there was no lack of spiritual vocations in Ibn ʿArabi’s family. What about his mother? His writings seem not to contain even the slightest allusion which would help us to form at least an approximately accurate picture of her personality. However, she is mentioned twice in the Râh al-quds. From the first passage it emerges that Ibn ʿArabi was an obedient son who was extremely respectful towards his mother: a normal attitude for a Muslim, a fundamental one for a saint.59 From the second passage we learn that his mother died shortly after his

58. Fat., II. p.18.
59. Râh § 18. p.111: Sufis of Andalusia. p.118. This account tells how Ibn ʿArabi asked permis-

father, and that from then on Muḥyī l-Dīn was obliged to become the sole provider for his family: as we will see, this was to provoke a few family conflicts.60 However, a reference in the Futûhat does reveal that his mother assiduously frequented Fâtimah bint Ibn al-Muthâmâh, who was one of Ibn ʿArabi’s spiritual masters.61 At the very least this suggests an orientation on her part towards Sufism, the taṣawwuf.

To complete this family picture one final person needs to be mentioned: Abû l-Walîd Ahmad b. Muḥammad al-ʿArabî. By some he has been identified with one of Ibn ʿArabi’s paternal uncles, but I believe this identification is wrong. Whenever it is a case of the three uncles already mentioned, Ibn ʿArabi specifically states his bond of kinship with them by referring to them as khâl (meaning a maternal uncle) or ʿamm (in the case of a paternal uncle). However, no such designation occurs in the various passages where Ibn ʿArabi quotes Abû l-Walîd al-ʿArabî in connection with certain hadîths which this man had transmitted to him.62 On the grounds of his nasîb ‘al-ʿArabî’, O. Yâhia63 and subsequently R. Austin64 have drawn the conclusion that in him we have another paternal uncle of Ibn ʿArabi. This is hardly likely: apart from the absence of the term ʿamm, we must also not forget that there was another bayt al-ʿArabî in existence in Andalusia at this time, which as it happens consisted of the parents and descendants of the famous qâdi Abû Bakr Muḥammad Ibn al-ʿArabî (d. 543/1148), who was a celebrated expert in hadîth.65 What is more, when we turn to the long list of masters in the religious sciences which Ibn ʿArabi enumerates in his famous Ijâza li-l-Malîk al-Muzâffar, we read that ‘Another of my masters was Abû l-Walîl b. al-ʿArabî; from him I received the Sirâj al-muhtadin of the qâdi Ibn al-ʿArabî, who was his cousin; he also transmitted hadîths to me from him, and gave me an ijâza (authorisation)’.66 Finally, when Ibn ʿArabi refers to this same
transmitter in the Mishkāt al-anwār he applies to him the nisba ‘al-Maʿāfīn’, which belongs to the qādir’s family but not his own.67

So the first eight years of Ibn ʿArabi’s childhood were spent behind the high walls of this small independent kingdom—the final bastion of anti-Almohad resistance. Situated on a plain on the banks of the river Segura (wādi shakāra), Murcia and its surrounding region enjoyed a fertile and rich soil, with gardens, orchards and farmed land everywhere which enabled the population to provide for its own needs. But this prosperity was to be of short duration. War was approaching, bringing in its wake famine and misery. In 1168 Abū Yaʿqūb Yusuf, who had proclaimed himself Amir al-muʿminīn, signed peace-treaties with the kings of Leon and Castile.68 A year later Ibn Ḥamushk, son-in-law and right hand man of Ibn Mardanish, deserted his father-in-law and rallied to the cause of the Almohads. From then on the Muʿminide sultan could engage all his forces in the final assault against the ruler of the Levant. He would no doubt have launched the assault straight away if certain events had not intervened to thwart his plans. In that year (565h) there was an earthquake in Andalusia; Cordoba, Seville and Granada were severely hurt. Murcia seemed to have been miraculously spared.69 But Abū Yaʿqūb also suffered a more personal setback: at the very same time the Almohad sultan fell seriously ill in Marrakech. It would take almost two years for him to recover. As soon as he was better he returned to Seville; there he gathered his troops and threw them against Ibn Mardanish who, defeated and wounded, took shelter one more time behind the walls of Murcia. There, if we are to believe the chronicles, his madness unleashed itself. He tortured his companions, assassinated his sister and drowned his children, immured his two viziers alive and—to the great relief of those close to him—finally breathed his last in Rajab 567h.70

His sons left immediately for Seville to pledge their allegiance to the Almohad ruler, and took with them several of the city’s notables. Was the father of Ibn ʿArabi included in the delegation? Very probably he was. In any case, in 568h Ibn ʿArabi’s family left Murcia once and for all and settled in the capital of Andalusia, where his father entered the service of the sultan Abū Yaʿqūb.71

The young Ibn ʿArabi was confronted with a spectacle which was at once fascinating and disturbing. Except perhaps for its innumerable gardens and fountains, Seville bore little resemblance to the introverted and reclusive city of Murcia. It was a gigantic city, overpopulated, swarming with people, noisy, gaudy. Arabs mixed with Berbers and Andalusians. Muslims with Christians and Jews; the most distinguished jurists kept company with poets and philosophers; the most depraved of libertines rubbed shoulders with the greatest of saints. It was a city of great—almost irresistible—temptation.

‘IN THE TIME OF MY SINFUL YOUTH’

When Francis of Assisi—that other saint of the Mediterranean who died roughly ten years earlier than the Shaikh Al-Akker—referred to the tumultuous and turbulent period which preceded his dramatic conversion with the time of my sinful youth, it is quite clear what he meant. But what exactly did Muḥyī l-Dīn mean when, evoking the same period in his life, he spoke of the time of my jahiliyya—using a term which in the history of Islamic civilisation is a traditional way of referring to the period of ignorance, of paganism, that precedes the coming of Islam? Is it because, like many others, he succumbed to the irresistible attractions of Seville—that ‘flâneur’ of whom so many poets have sung eulogies?72

Cordoba and Seville were always rivals. Although in the first few centuries after the Islamic conquest preference was given to Cordoba, she was finally outmatched by Seville. With the coming of the Almohad dynasty, and especially under the reign of the second Muʿminid king Abū Yaʿqūb Yusuf, Seville experienced her hour of glory. She owed this economic and political supremacy to the fact that she held two major trumps: the Guadalquivir, whose right bank skirts the Andalusian capital, and the Aljarafe which stretches off to the west of the city.

The river Guadalquivir—which has its source at Cordoba—is compared time and time again by Arab writers with the Nile, the Tigris or even the Euphrates. With its port and shipyards it was Seville’s most important economic centre of activity and the city’s chief artery of communication. Countless different kinds of merchandise—grains, coal, cotton, oil—were brought there by boat, some intended for import, others for export; so were all sorts of travellers, both foreign and native.73 However, even in spite of the surveillance maintained by the amin who, along with his aides, was responsible for ensuring respect for the law and the maintenance of good

67. Mishkāt § 14; in this case the difference in kunja (Abū l-Walid in Fat. I, p.32 and Ruh. p.22, Abū l-Walid in If. p.177) is to be explained as an error or incorrect reading in the ms. of the If. 

68. Ibn ʿIdhārī, Başān, III, p.78.

69. Bosch Vila, Sevilia islámica, p.257; Başān, III, p.84.

70. Başān, III, pp.87, 95.


72. On the poets who have celebrated the charms of Seville see H. Pérès, Poesie andaluze, pp.134ff.

behaviour, the Guadalquivir was also a place of debauchery. Wine, music and women were able to circulate more freely than anywhere else—much to the indignation of Ibn ‘Abdūn, who wrote: ‘Bargemen should not allow across a woman who looks like a woman of bad living . . . There must be an absolute ban on women organising pleasure outings and drinking parties along the river, especially when they deck themselves out in all their finery’.74

According to the poets the Guadalquivir was the necklace of the ‘fiancée’, and the Aljarrafe her diadem. It was there that all the agricultural production of the Seville region was located, along a stretch of twenty or thirty miles: olive groves, fields of cotton and grains, orchards and so on.75

When emigrants such as Ibn ‘Arabi’s family disembarked in Seville in 568H they discovered a city undergoing rapid expansion. In the year before, the sultan Abū Ya‘qūb Yūsuf, enchanted by the Andalusian capital, had initiated a series of large-scale building projects which were to change the urban landscape considerably. First of all he decided to construct a bridge connecting the two banks of the Guadalquivir—in other words linking Seville to Triana, the port for the Aljarrafe—and so facilitate both communication and commerce between the city and the surrounding countryside.76 In the same year he ordered his architects to build a group of small palaces on the outskirts of Seville, known as ‘baḥayra’, they were surrounded by vast gardens, orchards and fields of olive trees brought from the Aljarrafe.77 Also in the year 567H, he drew the plans for a great mosque to replace the mosque of Ibn ‘Addabās which had been damaged in the last earthquake and which was in any case too small to accommodate the growing population of Seville. According to Ibn Shāhib al-Salāt the mosque—whose famous minaret, the ‘Giralda’, still survives—was completed in 571H: strangely, however, it was only inaugurated in 577/1182.78 But of all the projects undertaken by the king, the most useful for the inhabitants of Seville, even if not necessarily the most prestigious, was the restoration of the ancient Roman conduit system. As a result the entire population of the city was supplied with drinking water. The inauguration of the Seville water reservoir on the 15th of Jumādā II, 567/1172, provided the occasion for a grand ceremony attended by the sultan and all of the city’s top dignitaries.79 Seville witnessed a prosperity and splendour she had never known before.

75. For the Aljarrafe see Sevilla islámica, pp.335–39.
76. Ibid., pp.159, 271.

‘In the time of my sinful youth’

However, what must have been the most fascinating aspect of the city for a visitor was the strange mixture of austerity and luxury, of piety and debauchery, which seemed to impregnate Seville. To begin with, the Almohad movement was essentially religious.80 The disciples of the Mahdi Ibn Tumart had defined their mission as being to restore a pure and rigorous Islam, to purge the decadent morals of the Andalusians and to re-establish the true tawhid, or pure monotheism. The Almohad State was a theocratic state in which religion governed all one’s daily actions. ‘Abd al-Mu’min was faithful to his master’s way of thinking and applied the doctrine of the Mahdi without any leniency. A very pious man himself, and naturally inclined to asceticism, he was severe in punishing any deviation from Qur’ānic law. Alcohol was strictly forbidden; anyone who failed to perform the required prayers was considered a renegade; Jews and Christians either had to convert to Islam or leave.81

His son and successor, Abū Ya‘qūb Yūsuf, was well-versed in theology and could boast that he knew the two Shāhib, or collections of prophetic Traditions, by heart. But he had an inquiring and sophisticated mind, and was equally interested in medicine, philosophy and astrology, surrounding himself with famous individuals such as Ibn Tukayl, Ibn Rushd and Ibn Zuhri.82 In the words of the author of the Mu‘jib. ‘He knew better than anyone else the language of the Arabs, their battles, their achievements and their history, both before and after the coming of Islam; he devoted himself to the study of all this while he was the governor of Seville . . . There was no one more skilled than he in reciting the Qur’ān, no one who was faster in solving a grammatical problem, no one more expert in philology. As a king he was firm, energetic, generous and magnanimous . . . Consequently his nobility of soul and his lofty aspirations prompted him to learn philosophy . . . In short, neither before nor after him was there a king among the Mu‘mins to compare with Abū Ya‘qūb’.83 After due allowance is made for exaggeration, we are left with the picture of a man whose education and interests were not limited to the narrow sphere of the religious sciences stricto sensu.

Following the example of their new king, the Almohads gradually

83. Mu‘jib, pp.170ff.
succeeded to the seductive refinements of Andalusian society in general, and of Seville society in particular. Seville was a melting pot. Every possible race and religious denomination came together, as did the most diverse of talents: singers, poets and musicians mixed with "idulah" and philosophers. Debauchery and asceticism, depravity and sainthood were the two different faces of the 'fiancée'. Ibn 'Arabī certainly experienced the second: was there a time when he was also on close terms with the first?

As the son of a noble and rich family, Muhīy al-Dīn's years of adolescence were peaceful and carefree. He seems not to have attended the Qur'ānic school, where according to Ibn 'Abdūn the teachers were ignorant and the teaching mediocre.

He no doubt had private tutors in his own home, like any other son born into high society. Anyway, one thing we know for certain is that he studied the Qur'ān with "a man of the Path". Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Khayyāt, to whom he would always remain deeply attached. As he says in the Rūḥ: 'When I was a child I studied the Qur'ān with him [i.e. Abū Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Khayyāt] and had a great affection for him: he was our neighbour .... Of all the spiritual men I have met since returning to the Path, there is not one of them I have wanted to be like—except for him and his brother'.

Many years later, during his journey to the East, Ibn 'Arabī would meet up again with the Khayya't brothers in Cairo and spend an unforgettable month of Ramadan together with them.

Of those Sufis whom Ibn 'Arabī knew as a child, mention must also be made of Abū 'Ali al-Shakkarāz. He was closely linked in friendship with his paternal uncle, Abū Muḥammad al-'Arabī, and would subsequently become one of his spiritual teachers.

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In the annals of Seville 574/1178 was a black year. The Guadalquivir—upon which, a source of riches and prosperity—now became the cause of desolation and loss. The river burst its banks, flooded the countryside and devastated the crops. The peace treaties signed in 568–691 with the kings of Leon, Castile and Portugal had expired; the king of Portugal, Alphonso

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84. Seville masalmane, pp. 54–5.
85. Rūḥ, §§ 9 and 10; p 93: Sufis of Andalusia, p. 92 and, for the sketch in the Durra, p. 94. See also Muḥādharat, II, p. 31.
86. Rūḥ, p. 93: Sufis of Andalusia, p. 91.
87. Rūḥ, § 12, pp. 96–8: Sufis of Andalusia, pp. 96–8, where Ibn 'Arabī states that he continued to visit him from the time of his entering the Path down to Abū ‘Ali al-Shakkarāz’s death.
89. Huici Miranda, Historia, I, p. 278.
90. Fut., IV, p. 540.
92. Sūra 108, the shortest in the Qur’ān.
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Couldn’t he have made do with the al-Infāṭār or the al-Fajr? Did’t the Prophet himself recommend that prayers be kept short?

This confession is too precise, too realistic to be simply a case of the kind of literary artifice which aims—as so often in conventional accounts of ‘conversion’—at producing an edifying contrast between the ‘before’ and the ‘after’. It helps to shed some light on the state of mind of the youthful Muḥyi l-Dīn, and on the contradictory feelings that moved him. He admired his old uncle who one fine morning left the pharmacy to devote himself to God; he revered Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Khayyāt, with whom he was discovering the mysteries of the Qur’ān, and secretly he dreamed of one day being like this saintly man. And yet at the same time he would not renounce—at least not yet—those long nights of music in the company of his friends. He was ḥāʾil, ignorant: he had not yet taken the plunge. And yet, if we restrict ourselves solely to the reliable sources of information which are available to us, it appears that Ibn ‘Arabī’s tawḥīd was not a sudden renunciation of a life of debauchery. This period of ḥāʾiliyya from which he was to emerge seems to have been no more than a phase of ghshaṭr: of heedlessness or ‘distraction’.

93. The sūras al-INFāṭāR (8.2) and al-FajR (89) are short. the al-ḤasāR (59) and al-Wāqī’ā (56) are long.


2. Vocation

‘WHEN GOD CALLED ME TO HIM’

WHEN? How? Why? These are the questions the ‘ordinary’ man asks himself every time he is confronted with the case of an individual who, all of a sudden, chooses God.

Sometimes he has a detailed autobiographical account, such as Saint Augustine’s Confessions, to help him find the answers. But even in the most favourable circumstances, even in the case of a completely ‘naked’ account which has managed to stay free from the pious conventions to which this literary genre so often fails a victim, is that enough for us to fathom the inmost depths of a soul and understand this strange, disconcerting course of events? Most of the time, as if to force us to follow him down the same path he has already trodden, the saint keeps silent and history remains dumb. This, in effect, is what has happened in the case of Ibn ‘Arabī: his writings offer nothing in the way of a systematic account, including dates, of the stages of his conversion. However, among the thousands of pages that make up his work, he often happens to corroborate a point of view he has just been elaborating on by citing his own spiritual experience. On those occasions he allows extremely valuable autobiographical details to slip out in a few brief words or phrases. By gathering these scattered pieces of information and supplementing them with the reports of his disciples and his biographers, an attempt can be made to provide the answers to the questions posed above.

In those passages from his books in which Ibn ‘Arabī refers—explicitly or implicitly—to his ‘return to God’, one notes immediately the recurrence of certain key terms: khalwa (‘retreat’), fath (‘illumination’), mubashshira or

1. Although he describes—often several times over—many of the episodes belonging to the later phase of his spiritual destiny, in his writings Ibn ‘Arabī remains very reserved about the circumstances and the motives behind his ‘conversion’. The more detailed information which he gave his disciples orally (and which I will be making use of) in my opinion rules out the hypothesis of deliberate reticence.
VOCA TION

sometimes waqı‘a ('vision'), tawba ('conversion') and rufū‘ ('return'). These terms represent so many asymmetrical pieces which, once brought together and arranged in a coherent manner, will allow us to reconstruct a plausible account of the successive phases in Ibn `Arabi’s 'return to the past'.

One of the most famous passages in the Futūḥāt provides the answer to the question, 'When?'. This is the passage which describes the notorious meeting between Ibn `Arabi and Averroes. O. Yahia, on the basis of another passage in the Futūḥāt where Ibn `Arabi mentions the date 580/1184 in connection with his 'entering the Path', places this interview between the saint and the philosopher in around the same year. However, the account in question contains certain details which appear to contradict such an assumption. Ibn `Arabi describes how 'One fine day I went to Cordoba to visit the qādī Abū l-Walid Ibn Rusp (Averroes). He wanted to meet me, as he had heard of the illumination which God had granted to me during my retreat (mā fatahu l-lāh bihī 'alayya fi khalwati); he had expressed amazement on learning what he had been told about me. My father was one of his friends, and accordingly sent me to him on the pretext of doing some errand or other, although his real purpose was to allow him to speak with me. At that time I was still just a boy (sabiyun) without any down on my face or even a moustache (mā baqala wajhi wa lā tarrā shāfī).'

Muhīy i-Dīn was therefore an adolescent who was hardly older than fifteen at the most. If, as O. Yahia supposes, the meeting with Averroes occurred in 580, he would have been twenty years old—and no doubt his growth of hair would have been much more pronounced. This makes it extremely improbable that the famous interview took place any later than 575/1179. No doubt it will seem amazing that someone as important and renowned as Averroes—a man who was confidant and personal physician to the sultan Abū Ya‘qūb Yūsuf, and who at that particular time held the position of qādī at Cordoba—should have requested an interview with a youth who for his part claimed to be a confidant of Heaven. But the Arab biographers would not have been too surprised: according to them Averroes was a very modest man, and above all someone who had a curiosity and thirst for knowledge that were never satisfied. As Ibn al-Abbār (d. 658/1260) wrote about him: 'Never


7. For the notion of kha:wa in Ibn `Arabi see chapters 78 and 79 of the Futūḥāt and his Risālat al-anwar (Hyderabad 1948), which is translated and annotated by Michel Chodkiewicz in The Seal of the Saints: Prophecy and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn `Arabi, trans. L. Sherrard. Cambridge 1993, ch. 10.

8. For the notion of fatḥ in Ibn `Arabi see his islāhāt al-sīyās (where he uses the form fatiḥa). Hyderabad 1948, p. 11; § 103; Fut., IV, p. 220.

9. Risalat al-anwar. Hyderabad 1948, p. 5; Seal of the Saints. p. 152. It will be noted that in this passage Ibn `Arabi also advises novices only to enter into retreat after first having practised iṣāla, which is clearly not what happened in his own case.


man as he was, to withdraw from the world. On this point Ibn ‘Arabi’s own writings remain stubbornly silent, and it is elsewhere that we need to look to find the answer. The only one of his biographers who seems to have addressed the problem is a writer who lived considerably later than him: al-Qârî al-Baghdâdî (d. 821/1418). As was noted earlier, all the statements in this author’s Manâqib Ibn ‘Arabi need to be treated with considerable caution. A fervent supporter of Ibn ‘Arabi, he was determined to convince his reader at all costs of the orthodoxy and sainthood of the Shaikh al-Akkar. and to this end he did not hesitate (in entirely good faith, no doubt) to falsify texts so as to make them say what they do not say. However, as this is the only account which appears to exist, I quote it for what it is worth: ‘He [Ibn ‘Arabi] was among those who are sons of princes and of the great ones of this world: his father was the minister of the master of Seville, the sultan of the Maghreb. A prince who was one of his father’s friends invited him to dinner, along with other sons of princes. When the shaikh Muhîyî l-Dîn and the others were all present they ate to repletion, and then the goblets of wine began circulating. When it came to the turn of the shaikh Muhîyî l-Dîn, he grabbed the goblet and was just about to drink when he heard a voice call out to him: “Muhammad, it was not for this that you were created!” He threw down the goblet and left in a daze. When he arrived at the door to his home he met the vizier’s shepherd, dirty and dusty as usual. He had him accompany him to the outskirts of the town and swapped clothes with him. Then he wandered along the streets and came to meet me, showing me every possible token of friendship and consideration and finally embracing me. Then he said to me: “Yes”. I in turn replied to him: “Yes”. Then his joy increased as he saw that I had understood him. But next, when I myself became aware of what it was that had caused his joy, I added: “No”. Immediately Averroes tensed up, his features changed colour and he seemed to doubt his own thoughts. He asked me this question: “What kind of solution have you found through illumination and divine inspiration? Is it just the same as what we receive from speculative thought?” I replied to him: “Yes and no. Between the yes and the no spirits take flight from their matter and necks break away from their bodies”. Averroes turned pale; I saw him start to tremble. He murmured the ritual phrase, “there is no strength save in God”, because he had heard my allusion.”

Before leaving the subject of this decisive retreat, one final piece of evidence remains to be cited which is hardly less trustworthy than the evidence just mentioned. It is the account which Mu’ayyad al-Dîn Jândî (d. approx. 700/1299)

1.5. The text is incomprehensible.


17. The translation of this passage is based on the version by Henry Corbin (cf. Creative Imagination, pp.41-2). At first sight this dialogue between Ibn ‘Arabi and Averroes, as quoted by Corbin, seems enigmatic, and Corbin himself offers no interpretation. However, as Michel Chodkiewicz noted during a seminar at the École des Hautes Études in 1986, a reading of the pages directly preceding this particular passage indicates quite clearly that the subject of debate between the philosopher and the young saint was the question of the resurrection of the body.
Vocation

1300—author of a famous commentary on the Fusūs al-hikam—received from his teacher Sadr al-Dīn Qūsawī (d. 672/1274), who was a disciple and step-son of Ibn ‘Arabi; He [Ibn ‘Arabi] withdrew from the world at the start of his vocation, at Seville in Andalusia, for a period of nine months, and during this time did not break his fast. He went into retreat at the beginning of Muharram and was instructed to come out of it on the day of the ‘Id al-ﬁtr...

Do these three testimonies (Baghdādi, Ibn Sawdakīn, Jandi)—of which it is important to remember that only one, Ibn Sawdakīn’s, is direct—all refer to one and the same retreat or to several quite distinct retreats which took place at different points in time? As far as the khalwā alluded to by Jandi is concerned, one detail at the end of the text and which we will come back to in a later chapter suggests that it refers specifically to a retreat undertaken by Ibn ‘Arabi at Seville in 586H—that is, a considerable time after his entry into the Way. As for the accounts given by Baghdādi and Ibn Sawdakīn, in spite of the discrepancy regarding the period of duration it would seem that both of them are descriptions of the very first khalwā undertaken by the young Muḥyī l-Dīn: a retreat that took place some time before his encounter with Averroes, and during the course of which he became aware that he had obtained not only fath but also—in a synthetic sense, no doubt—all of the sacred sciences which he would later expound in his writings. However, it is important to emphasise that throughout his life Ibn ‘Arabi undertook innumerable retreats; certain people such as Dhahabī, whose interpretations are never exactly benign, were of the opinion that these seriously affected his mental health. This means we must allow for the possibility that the two accounts refer to two separate retreats which were among the earliest that Ibn ‘Arabi undertook.

Whatever the case may be, one certain fact emerges in the light of these various texts. This is the fact that the very first stage in Ibn ‘Arabi’s spiritual journey consisted of an immediate fath or illumination, or more precisely of a jадdbba, the state of being drawn out of oneself in ecstasy as the result of a divine intervention which is direct and abrupt: and that he obtained this illumination straightaway and without any prior effort during the course of a retreat—very probably in the same cemetery in Seville in which, as we will see later, he would continue isolating himself many years later.

19. He often alludes in his writings to such-and-such a retreat that he had performed; as we will see, he increased the frequency of these khalwas in the year 586H.

‘When God called me to Him’

However extraordinary and dazzling it may be, if a sincere spiritual vocation is to avoid ending in failure it must inevitably pass at some time through the stage of tawba, conversion. Whereas fath and jadhibba arise independently of the will of the wali, or saint, tawba is a voluntary and conscious act of repentance and the firm desire to return to God and put an end to one’s state of distraction. Here history encounters metaphysics: for it was in the presence of Jesus, his real ‘first teacher’, that Ibn ‘Arabi claims he underwent conversion: ‘It was at his hands’, he states in the Futuḥāt, although without dating the event, ‘that I was converted (‘ālā yadhibbī tutub); I prayed for me that I should persist in religion (din) in this low world and in the other, and he called me his beloved. He ordered me to practise renunciation (zuhd) and self-denial (tajārī);’ Elsewhere he says again about Jesus: ‘He was my first teacher, the master through whom I returned to God (shaykhunā al-awwal allahdi rajnhā ‘ālā yadhayhi); he is immensely kind towards me and does not neglect me even for an instant.’ The mutual affection and the privileged relationship which were established from the very start between Ibn ‘Arabi and the prophet ‘Isā—who according to Islamic tradition will return to earth at the end of time to re-establish peace and justice by acting in conformity with Islamic law—are not just accidental; as we will see later, there is one fundamental point which they shared in common. But even if this was not so, it would still be surprising—in view of the frequency and extreme explicitness of these references to ‘Isā and to his role as ‘first teacher’—that Henry Corbin missed the significance of the relationship, insisting instead on making Khadir the ‘initiator’ of the Shaikh al-Akbar. The intervention of Khadir was certainly very real. However, it occurred much later and was considerably less decisive.

Reinforced in his conviction by the continual encouragement he received from Jesus, Muḥyī l-Dīn redoubled his efforts and finally decided to renounce the luxury in which he found himself and to strip himself of his possessions, just as his supernatural teacher had prescribed. Ibn ‘Arabi explains that, when a disciple has no family to provide for, he strips himself of all his possessions and entrusts them to his shaikh, if he has one. ‘So it was that I myself stripped myself of everything that belonged to me: however, at that time I had no [terrestrial] teacher to whom I could entrust my affairs and hand over my possessions. I accordingly turned to my father and, after consulting with him, gave him everything I possessed. I did not appeal to anyone else because I did not return to God through the intermediary of a teacher, for at that time I knew none. I parted from my possessions just as a dead man is parted from his family

and from all he owns. When I consulted with my father concerning the matter, he asked me to return everything to him, and I entrusted to him all I had. Never did I subsequently ask him what he had done with it.”

Two essential points emerge from this account. Firstly, Ibn ‘Arabi clearly specifies at the start of the text that the obligation of stripping oneself of one’s possessions only applies to someone who has no family to provide for. This makes it difficult to suppose that Ibn ‘Arabi himself would have acted any differently and that he would have disposed of his fortune if he had a wife to look after at the time. However, Asín Palacios asserts—without giving the slightest reference—that Ibn ‘Arabi was married at an early age to Maryam bint Muhammad b. ‘Abdun in Seville. To my knowledge this is neither stated nor even suggested in any source at all or in any text of Ibn ‘Arabi. On the contrary, he declares in the Futūhāt that for the first eighteen years after entering the Way he fled from women: ‘Of all men, there was no one who felt greater aversion for women and for sexual union than I did, starting from the moment when I entered the Way and for the eighteen years that followed’. It is perfectly possible that Ibn ‘Arabi only contracted a marriage after his arrival in the East, at Mecca in 598H, where a number of people from the Maghreb—including the Banū ‘Abdun—were temporarily resident. The second important point is that Ibn ‘Arabi states specifically that at the time when he parted with his possessions he had as yet not encountered any teachers of the Way. Considering that—as we will see—he began frequenting masters in 580/1184 at the latest, we can conclude that this episode occurred at an earlier date, when he was not yet twenty years old.

This gesture of total renunciation marks a decisive turning-point in the destiny of Ibn ‘Arabi: he had chosen the path of poverty and renunciation and would never turn from it. From that time on through to the end of his days his only means of subsistence would be the gifts and alms which he received from his companions on the Way and from some princely families once he had settled in the East. For him it was a matter of realising pure servitude (al-‘ubūdiyya al-mahdiyya), which demands of the wali or saint that he abandon all rights and all possessions that might keep alive in him the illusion of rubūbiyya, of sovereignty. Furthermore, the things he owns exert by that very

fact a right over him, and so their ownership secures in a certain sense the ‘ubūdiyya, the servitude, which is due to God alone: in the words of the Shaikh al-Akbar, every servant of God over whom someone exerts a right falls short in his servitude to the extent of that right.” In short, he who possesses nothing is possessed by nothing save God. As Ibn ‘Arabi himself writes: ‘Ever since the moment when I attained to this station [of pure servitude] I have possessed no living creature and not even the clothes I wear, for I only wear the clothes that are lent to me and that I am authorised to use. If I happen to come into possession of something I part with it at once, either by giving it away or by freeing it in the case of a slave. I made this commitment when I wanted to realise supreme servitude (‘ubūdiyyat al-ikhtīṣās) in relation to God. I was told at the time: “That will not be possible for you as long as one single being has the right to demand something of you.”’ I replied: “God Himself will not be able to demand anything of me!” I was asked: “How could that be?” I replied: “Demands are only made of those who deny [their ontological poverty], not of those who recognise [it]; of those who claim to be possessors of rights and goods, not of he who declares ‘I have no right, no share in anything!’”

The youthful Muhyīl-Dīn’s efforts and zeal were soon rewarded with a vision in which he saw himself under the protection of Jesus, Moses and Muhammad. This spiritual event was, as we will see later, of major significance in the process of Ibn ‘Arabi’s conversion. Fortunately we possess two autobiographical accounts of it, contained in two short and as yet unpublished treatises: the Diwān al-ma’ārif and the Kitāb al-mubashshirat.

In the first of these texts, Ibn ‘Arabi provides a concise but comprehensive version of what happened. During this vision, he explains, while Jesus urged him on yet again to asceticism (zuhd), Moses announced to him that he would obtain the knowledge called ‘Ladunni’: the very same knowledge which the Qur’an (18:65) attributes to that interlocutor of Moses whom Islamic tradition calls by the name of Khadir. As for the prophet Muhammad, he advised him to follow him step by step: ‘Hold fast to me and you will be safe!’ (ismāṣik bi taslām).

In the Kitāb al-mubashshirat, on the other hand, we have an account which although only partial is also very detailed; in addition, it contains some chronological references. As its title (The Book of Visions) suggests, this short work is a record by Ibn ‘Arabi of certain visions of his which he thought could be useful to others. The passage that concerns us occurs in the first section, which deals with the subject of attachment to ḥadith (al-tamassuk bi-l-ḥadīth).
VOCATION

During the period when as yet I knew nothing of learning (qabla an 'a rif al-'ilm), some of my companions had planned to encourage me to study books of ra'ya,30 at the time I was completely ignorant of this science as well as of hadith. In my sleep I saw myself in a huge space, surrounded by armed people who intended to kill me; there was nowhere at all where I could find refuge. Then I saw in front of me a hill on which the Messenger of God was standing. Immediately I took refuge beside him: he opened his arms wide and pressed me very forcefully against himself, saying: 'My beloved, hold fast to me and you will be safe!' I then looked around me to see my assailants, but there was no longer a single one of them to be seen. From that time onwards I gave myself to the study of hadith.'

In this account one notes immediately that Jesus and Moses are absent. However, this omission is nothing surprising: in the preface to the treatise Ibn 'Arabi promises specifically to convey only as much of these visions as contains a teaching which will be useful to anyone and everyone, and to remain silent about what is just of personal concern to himself (wa ma yakhfassu bi dhātī falā ahtā ilā dhikrihi).11 The text also confirms—although further confirmation is hardly needed—that Ibn 'Arabi’s conversion occurred much earlier than §80h. To be more specific, Ibn 'Arabi himself states that at the time when he experienced this vision he had no knowledge at all of hadith: but, as we will soon see, starting from 578/1182—and possibly even earlier—he applied himself very intensively to the study of hadith.

Two passages in the Futūḥāt highlight the importance in Ibn 'Arabi’s eyes of this triple prophetic intervention: for him, his conversion to God really dates from that particular point in time. Hence his statement in the Futūḥāt that ‘My return to the Way was accomplished through a vision under the guidance of Jesus, Moses and Muhammad’, 32 Elsewhere he writes, without giving any further details: ‘It was as a consequence of this vision that I returned to God.’13

After this conversion—pleasing to Heaven, as it would seem—came the most painful and most perilous test: ‘abandonment’ (al-fatra). In Islamic prophethood this term is used to designate the period of ‘divine silence’ which separates the coming of two prophets. In the technical vocabulary of Sufism, fatra refers to a period of inescapable ‘slackening’, of acedia, when the

spiritual man feels himself somehow abandoned by his Lord14 and fears that this state of abandonment could be permanent: for sometimes He remains silent forever. In Ibn 'Arabi’s own words: ‘Know that I received this verse15 from God as an invocation (dhikr) when He called me to Him, and that I responded to His call. I practised it for a time, and then came a period of “abandonment” (fatra). This is the “abandonment” which is well known in the Way of the men of God; it inescapably befalls everyone who travels the Path. When it strikes, one of two things happens: either it is followed by [a return to] the initial state of adoration and spiritual effort (muḥālīda), which is the case for those men of divine Providence (ahl al-‘ināya al-ilāhiyya) whom God protects, or for others the fatra persists and never leaves them: they will never succeed. When the state of “abandonment” took possession of me and dominated me, I saw God in a vision (wāq‘a).16 He recited to me these verses: “It is He who sends the winds announcing His Mercy…” (Qur’an 7:57). I understood that these verses were a reference to me, and I said to myself: “By means of these He is indicating my initial success through which God guided me under the protection of Jesus, Moses and Muhammad, peace be upon them.”17

So Ibn 'Arabi emerged victorious from this ordeal to which many before him had succumbed. Strengthened by a divine vision, he was able to follow the path that would lead him to the pinnacle of sainthood.

To summarise briefly, but also as precisely as possible, what on the basis of the documentary evidence already cited can be inferred as to the probable sequence of events in Ibn 'Arabi’s ‘conversion’: as a fifteen-year-old teenager

34. Regarding fatra, cf. ‘Iltiḥāṣ, p. 8, § 66, where Ibn 'Arabi defines the term as the ‘extinction of the fire which from the start had been consuming’ (khumud nār al-bīdāya al-muḥdrag). It should be emphasised that the Prophet himself experienced such an ‘abandonment’. For a period of time—ranging from fifteen to forty days according to the commentators—Gabriel stopped visiting him and the Revelation was temporarily interrupted, until the verse was revealed to him: ‘Your Lord has not abandoned you or taken an aversion to you’ (Qur’an 9:33). Cf. Rāzī, al-Taṣfīr al-kabīr. Tehran, n.d., XXXI, p. 209.

35. I.e. ‘The good earth produces vegetation with God’s permission’ (Qur’an 7:58).

36. In Fut., II, p.491. Ibn 'Arabi explains that waq‘a (plural of wāq‘a) are annuncatory visions (muḥāshāhāt) and constitute the beginning of divine revelation (wāq‘a al-wāq‘a al-ilāhiyya); they come from the depths of the being (min dākhil) and from the man’s essence (min dāh al-ḥsan). He goes on to specify that by some they are received in sleep, by others when they are in the state of extinction (jād), and by yet others when they are awake. In the ‘Iltiḥāṣ, p. 12, § 111, he defines a wāq‘a as that which enters the heart in some form or other from the other world.

he was dividing his time between studying the Qur'an in the company of a 'man of the Way' and his nocturnal 'distractions' in the company of his mischievous comrades. When God abruptly called him to order. Shaken, he fled and for a while withdrew far from the world. During this voluntary seclusion he received illuminations and spiritual knowledge. He then submitted to tawhīd or conversion at the hands of Jesus; why command him to strip himself of his possessions. As he had not yet met any worldly teacher to whom he could attach himself, he abandoned his possessions to his father and found himself received under the protection of Jesus, Moses and Muhammad. But he would still have to undergo ḫatra, the crossing of the desert; after he had done so God received him and welcomed him among His own.

In a sense Ibn 'Arabi arrived at the goal of spiritual realisation straight away. Following the example of the maḏḥabī, the 'ecstatics', he burned all the stages and in one single leap completed the journey of the Quest. But how can someone who has not confronted the dangers, faced his adversaries and traversed each of the stages one by one possibly claim to be a guide to others? Accordingly Ibn 'Arabi was obliged to make the journey again, step by step: to perform the wayfaring or suluk patiently and enter truly on the Way.

**ENTERING THE WAY**

'Told fast to me!', the prophet Muhammad had said to Ibn 'Arabi. To hold fast to the Prophet is to attach oneself to his Sunna and become impregnated with the Qur'an, which 'A'isha described as 'the very nature of the Messenger of God' (kāna khuluqhu al-qur'ān). The young Muhhyi l-Din understood the message. At the same time as waging the 'great holy war' under the direction of Jesus, he undertook to deepen his knowledge of the Qur'an and the hadith. At Seville in 578/1182, when he was eighteen, he followed the courses of the famous reader (muḥaddith) of the time. Abū Bakr Muhammad b. Khalaf al-Lakhmi (d. 585/1189). From him he learned the seven readings of the Qur'an and the Kitāb al-kāfī of Muhammad b. Shurayḥ (d. 476/1083), which al-Lakhmi had received from his author's son. Abū l-Hasan Shurayḥ al-Ru‘aynī (d. 537/1142). The same work was mentioned in the majority of chains of transmission at the time. Cf. Da‘ībi. Buḫyayat al-mulāmaris, ed. Coder, 1858. S. 849.

43. Ḥāfiz al-muḥaddith and highly-reputed linguist, al-Suwayhī was the author of numerous works. He died in Marrakech, where he had settled in approximately 579/1184, which means that his teaching of Ibn 'Arabi must have occurred at an earlier date. Cf. Iltik, p. 181; Muḥaddarat, 1, pp. 67; 2: 36; also Ibn Farhūn, Dībaj, Beirut, n.d. p. 150; Muṣam al-mu‘allīm, v. 1, p. 147.
46. Ibn 'Arabi always makes a point of distinguishing in his oral teaching that he actually received and a mere ḫatra al-qur‘ān, which was an authorisation usually issued by correspondence. The ḫatra 'in absentia' was in fact very widespread at this time; cf. D. Urvoy, Le Monde des Ulemas andalous, Geneva 1978. S. 166.
madhhab. In fact, in contradiction of the thesis upheld by the majority of jurists, he considered that the door of ijtihad, of personal effort at legal interpretation, is not closed but will remain open until the end of time. Accordingly every ijtihad is valid—provided of course that it does not contradict what is expressly prescribed by the Muslim law or shari'a. In the Futuhat he confides: 'I have the intention, if God gives me a long life, to compose a major work which will deal with all legal questions as they appear in their external aspects, first of all expounding and elaborating on each question from the external point of view and then examining its status in relation to the internal side of man (fuqaha fi batin al-insan).'

Ibn 'Arabi would never really carry out this project. However, he did devote several hundred pages of the Futuhat to discussing the pillars of Islam and the legal problems to which they give rise. Within the framework of this present study it is obviously impossible to analyse and explain Ibn 'Arabi's method and position relative to each one of these points. It should be sufficient to say as a generalisation that his position in matters of shari'a was to consider and at the same time validate every conceivable interpretation which Islamic law provides, and it is characterised by the systematic intention to lighten as much as possible the burden of tahlil or legal obligation which weighs upon every Muslim. One typical passage in the Futuhat sums up his position well, and shows how severe he was in his judgement of the doctors of the Law: 'God has made the divergence in legal questions a mercy for His servants and a broadening (iltissaf) of what He has prescribed they should do to testify to their adornation. But in the case of those who follow the jurists of our time, these jurists have prohibited and restricted what the sacred Law had broadened in their favour. They say to the person who belongs to their school, if for example he is a Hanafite: “Don't go looking for a rukhsa (an alleviation or exemption) from Shafi'i regarding this problem you are faced with”'; and so on with all of them. This is one of the greatest calamities and heaviest constraints in the matter of religion. God Himself has said: "In religion he has not imposed anything difficult on you” (Qur’an 22:78). The Law has affirmed the validity of the status of anyone who makes a personal effort at interpretation for himself and for those who follow him. But in our days the jurists have condemned this effort. claiming it encourages people to make a mockery of religion. For them to say this is the height of ignorance.'

However, it is important to point out that the extreme leniency in matters of jurisprudence which Ibn 'Arabi recommended in his works is intrinsically linked to the function of mercy with which (as we will see later) he considered himself to be invested: in other words, it must be understood within the context of his teaching as a whole. It is not to be interpreted as a form of latitudinarianism; in fact, on the contrary, it goes hand in hand with an exceptional personal rigour in observance of the shari'a. For himself and for his disciples Ibn 'Arabi was far from choosing what was easiest. As he explains: 'I trust I am one of those who fulfill their commitment to God and do not betray the pact (mithaq). . . . It is towards this that I guide men and it is upon this principle that I train my disciples. I do not allow anyone who has undertaken a commitment (ahad) towards God and to whom I transmit my teaching to betray this commitment, regardless of how large or small its benefit will be. I do not permit him to do this—not even in the name of a legal mitigation (rakhsha) which would authorize him to do so without committing a sin.'

In a chapter of the Futuhat where Ibn 'Arabi discusses the divine Names and their power and effects on the different categories of spiritual men who are governed by him, he states: 'I myself obtained these stations (maqamat) when I had just started on the Way, in only a short period in 580'. He will have been twenty years old at the time. Some four or five years had passed since his meeting with the philosopher Averroes at Cordoba. The asceticism and extreme austerity which he had imposed on himself during that period had produced a prodigious metamorphosis in him which sometimes had particularly astonishing aspects. For example, he declares that thanks to the spiritual influx (ruhaniyya) of Jesus he obtained at the start of his wayfaring the station of the famous Qudib al-Ban, who through his ‘imaginal strength’ (quwwat al-khayal) had the power to assume any form he desired. Elsewhere he states specifically that in his own case he only assumed either human or angelic forms, never the form of animals. Further, according to his disciple Qunawi Ibn 'Arabi 'had the power of meeting with the spirit of any of the prophets or saints of the past whom he

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chose. This he was able to do in three ways. Sometimes he made their spirit descend into this world, where he perceived them in a subtle corporeal form similar to the one they possessed while alive; sometimes he induced them to present themselves to him in his sleep; and at other times he cast off his own corporeal form so as to meet them. 57 But even that is not all. Chapter 178 of the Futūḥāt—a long chapter devoted to the subject of the station of Love (maqām al-mahabbah)—reveals that, during an episode which we will examine later, Ibn ‘Arabi’s imaginal power had attained to such a height that he saw God at every instant, just as the Prophet used to see Gabriel.

But these supernatural powers were far from being the only indications as to his spiritual progress: at the most they were just external signs, and eventually dangerous temptations which sometimes punctuate the course of sainthood. The fundamental change that occurred in Ibn ‘Arabi had to do with his perception of beings and things. Every single thing is sublime when viewed in its relation to God. In fact from the point of view of the divine essence there are no superior beings and inferior beings, things that are noble and others that are not. There is not one single substance (jawhar fard) in the entire universe—at however high or low a level—which is not linked to a divine reality (haqiqa ilahiyya), and from the point of view of the Almighty there is no pre-excellence (taṣāfūl). 58

This is not just some metaphysical assertion; on the contrary, it is the statement of an intimate and self-evident fact which transforms the very being along with its perception of the world. This is shown by the following story. ‘One day it happened that, openly and in public, I was carrying something disgusting in my hands, which was hardly in keeping with my social rank (mā kāna yaqūdati min mansabfi li-dunya). A foul stench of salt fish was emanating from it. My companions imagined I was carrying it with the intention of mortifying my soul (mujāhadatni li-nafs), because in their eyes I was much too lofty to stoop to carrying such a thing. They said to my shaykh: “So-and-so has gone beyond the bounds of propriety in his efforts at self-mortification.”’ The shaykh replied: ‘Well, let’s ask him what his reason was for carrying the thing’. So it came about that the shaykh questioned me in front of them and told me what they had said. I replied to them: ‘You are mistaken about me in your interpretation of my action; by God, that was not my intention in doing what I did! It was simply that I saw that God, in spite of His Greatness, did not disdain to create such a thing. How then am I to disdain to carry it?’’ The shaykh thanked me, and my companions were left stupefied. 59 Ibn ‘Arabi refers again to this episode in another passage of the

Futūḥāt, where he provides some additional information. 60 Firstly, he remarks that this was the first experience of this kind which happened to him on the Path (awwal mashhad dhungāhu min hādhā l-bāb fi hādhā l-tariq) and that it happened right in the middle of the souk—in other words in the busiest place in town. Secondly, he states that the shaykh upbraided him with the words ‘the people of your rank among those who are great in this world (ahl mansabikh min arbāb al-dunyā)’. This expression, together with the statement at the start of the first account (which was hardly in keeping with my social rank), provides ample proof—if proof were needed—of the prestige and high social standing of Ibn ‘Arabi and his family in the society of Seville.

However, the most important point to emerge from this incident is the fact that it occurred when he had only just started on the Path—in other words in approximately 580/1184—and that at the time he was frequenting a spiritual master. To whom does the expression shaykhī, ‘my master’, refer? There would seem to be only one person to whom it could possibly refer at that particular time: Abū l-‘Abbās al-‘Uyabi, the first murshid whom Ibn ‘Arabi frequented on the Path. Because, as we will see, he had a very large number of teachers, the Shaikh al-‘Akbar was almost always careful to specify the name of any master he happened to mention—except on a few occasions such as in the present instance, where he restricts himself to ‘my master’ or some similar expression. But by cross-reference between these few passages and other texts it can be established without any doubt that the master in question was the shaikh al-‘Uyabi. This is how Ibn ‘Arabi describes his first encounter with the man whom, in the incident described above, he refers to as ‘my master’: ‘The first time I appeared in front of my master (shaykhī) I said to him, “Give me a counsel (awšini) before you look at me! I will keep your counsel and you will only look upon me again when you will see me invested in it”’. He said to me: “That is a noble and sublime aspiration (himma). My child, close your door, break all ties and keep company with the All-Bounteous; He will speak to you without a veil.” I put this counsel into practice until I had seen its benediction for me. I then went back to him and saw me invested with it. He said: “Like this it is good; otherwise, not.”’ 61

We can now compare this account with the one given by Ibn ‘Arabi in the Rūḥ of his first meeting with the shaikh Abū l-‘Abbās al-‘Uyabi. The first person I met on the Way was Abū Ja‘far Ahmad al-‘Uyabi. He had arrived in Seville at a time when I had only just started to become acquainted with this noble Path. I was the first of those who hastened to him. I found a man totally devoted to invocation (dhikr). I presented myself to him and he knew immediately the spiritual need which had brought me to him. He asked me:
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"Are you firmly resolved to follow the Way of God?" I replied: "The servant is resolved but it is God who determines the matter!" He then said to me: "Close your door, break all ties and keep company with the All-Bounteous; He will speak to you without a veil." I put this into practice until I received illumination." 62

Quite obviously, then, it is the shaiikh 'Uraybi who is referred to in the first of the passages quoted above; comparison of other passages corroborates this conclusion. All the other places in the Futūhāt where Ibn 'Arabi refers to this master without naming him are concerned with the practice of invocation (dhikr) using the divine Name Allāh. This divine Name (Allāh) was the one I used in practising invocation and it was also the one used by the teacher through whom I entered the Way. 63 One day I went to see one of those men who are present with God, one of my masters who practised the invocation "Allāh, Allāh" without adding anything else, and I asked him "Why do you not say 'là ilaīha illā illāh' ['there is no god but God'] instead?" Because I hoped as a result of my question to benefit from a spiritual teaching. He replied to me: "My child, the breath of everyone who breathes is in the hands of God, not in his own hands, and every letter (ḥāfẓ) is a breath. I am therefore afraid in case by saying 'là' ['no'] as part of the formula 'là ilaīha illā illāh', that 'là' might be my last and as a result I will die in the terrible solitude of negation (fi ṭalashat l-nafṣī)." 64

Let us now compare these two texts with two others in which Ibn 'Arabi alludes to the dhikr practised by his master Abū l-'Abbās al-'Uraybi, 'Some men of God practise dhikr with the name "Allāh, Allāh." This was the form of dhikr used by my master Abū l-'Abbās al-'Uraybi." 65 One day I went to my master Abū l-'Abbās al-'Uraybi, a native of Ulyan, who devoted himself entirely to invocation of the Name "Allāh" without adding anything else. I asked him: "My master, why do you not say 'là ilaīha illā illāh'?" He replied to me: "My child, breaths are in the hands of God, not in mine. I am therefore afraid in case He calls me back to Him at the moment when I am saying 'là', and of dying as a result in the terrible solitude of negation!" 66

The juxtaposition of these various passages requires no commentary. When Ibn 'Arabi simply speaks of 'shaykhī' without being more specific, it is unquestionably Abū l-'Abbās al-'Uraybi to whom he is referring.

62. Ṣūfī, p. 76; Sufis of Andalusia, p. 63. In this text it will be noted that Ibn 'Arabi attributes to the shaiikh 'Uraybi the kunya 'Abū 'Ja'far' instead of 'Abū l-'Abbās'. This may be due to a lapsus calami on his part, or because the Andalusian shaiikh was known by both of these kunyas.


Entering the Way

If Ibn 'Arabi's first 'supernatural' teacher was Jesus, it was through 'this illiterate peasant who was unable to write or even count' 67 that, at about the age of twenty, he began his sulāk. It is in fact interesting to note that there happens to have been a close connection between 'Uraybi, the terrestrial teacher, and Jesus, the supernatural one. As he himself writes: 'My master Abū l-'Abbās al-'Uraybi was Christ ('Īsāwī) at the end of his life, whereas I was at the beginning." 68 In another passage from the Futūhāt which we will later need to examine in greater detail, Ibn 'Arabi states again: 'My master Abū l-'Abbās al-'Uraybi was 'on the foot' of Jesus ('āla qādam ḫādi'). 69

There is no need here to analyse the notion of prophetic inheritance (wirātha), which occupies an important place in Ibn 'Arabi's hagiology. This has in fact already been done and, besides, belongs to an analysis of doctrine which cannot possibly be undertaken here. 70 The essential point to bear in mind is that for Ibn 'Arabi the saints are fundamentally heirs of the prophets (warāṣṣat al-anbiya'); the predominance of the inheritance from this or that prophet determines the spiritual type of any given saint. It also sometimes happens that a saint inherits successively from a number of prophets, and this is precisely what happened in the case of the Shaiikh al-Akbar, who explains that after having been 'Christic' he became 'Mosaic', 'Hūdic' and so on until he inherited from the prophet Muhammad himself. 71 However, from whichever of the hundred and twenty-four thousand prophets a saint inherits, indirectly it is the inheritance of the prophet Muhammad—'tabernacle' (misāḥ) of all the successive prophets—which he really receives. The fact that Ibn 'Arabi defines himself as having been a 'Christic' type in his youth is hardly surprising in view of the major role which Jesus clearly played at the start of his spiritual vocation. And yet, as we will soon discover, this relationship with the Son of Mary also had another aspect. For the moment it is enough to remember that, through the intermediary of his first teacher who was also 'Christic', Ibn 'Arabi was under the influence of Jesus.

67. Ṣūfī, p. 76; Sufis of Andalusia, p. 63.

68. Fut., I, p. 223. Also in Fut., I, p. 365 Ibn 'Arabi mentions the following snippet: 'It was said to our master, 'You are Jesus the son of Mary.' In his translation of this chapter of the Futūhāt Michel Vásan correctly identifies the master in question as 'Uraybi, Cf. Études Traditionnelles, July/October, 1962, p. 169 and n. 12.


70. The first systematic analysis of Ibn 'Arabi's doctrine of sainthood is the one made by Michel Chodkiewicz in his work Soul of the Saints. Regarding the particular point in question here see especially chapter 5.

71. Fut., I, p. 223 ('Īsāwī, misāḥ, ḫādi').
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WESTERN SUFISM IN IBN ‘ARABI’S TIME

In Ibn ‘Arabi’s time two major movements dominated Sufism in the Islamic West. The first was known as the ‘school of Almeria’, and its chief representatives were Abū l-‘Abbās Ibn al-‘Arif72 and Abū l-Ḥakam Ibn Barrajān.73 Three letters which were written by Ibn al-‘Arif to Ibn Barrajān, and published in 1956 by Father Nwyia,74 leave no possible room for doubt as to the nature of the relationship between these two Andalusian Sufis: Ibn al-‘Arif considered himself a humble disciple of Ibn Barrajān.

Ibn al-‘Arif settled in Almeria, which at the start of the sixth/seventh century had become one of the main centres of Andalusian Sufism, and there he gathered around himself a considerable number of disciples; meanwhile, his master Ibn Barrajān had been proclaimed ‘imām’ in a hundred and thirty villages in the region of Seville.75 Their popularity, as well as the doctrines that they taught, rendered them suspect in the eyes of the Almoravid authorities. In 536h Sultan ‘Alī b. Yūsuf b. Tashfin commanded them to appear at Marrakesh, and he also summoned another Sufi, Abū Bakr al-Mayūrī, according to Ibn al-Abbār all three men taught the same doctrine.76 However, they did not all receive the same treatment. According to Marrakushi,77 Mayūrī was arrested, whipped, and then released; after this misadventure he went to stay for a while in the Mascridi, where he taught hadith in Bougie. As for Ibn Barrajān, the Takmila simply states that he met with his death at Marrakesh78—but without being any more specific about the circumstances in which he died. However, in the Tashawwuf ‘Alīdīlī follows the familiar story: ‘When Abū l-


76. Muʾjam, p. 19.


78. Takmila, § 1797.

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Ibn Barrajān was taken from Cordoba to Marrakesh he was interrogated regarding some things he had said which had been held against him, and he debated the issues after the fashion of taʿwil. He extricated himself from what had given rise to the criticisms and then declared: ‘I will not live [long], but he who summoned me here will not survive my death’, He died, and the sultan gave instructions to have his body thrown on the city’s rubbish dump.’ However, as Tādīl goes on to explain, Ibn Hirzīm (one of Shaikh Abū Madyan’s teachers) was informed by a disciple of his about the sultan’s decision and issued a call to the population of Marrakesh to attend a funeral ceremony for Ibn Barrajān.79

And finally, there is Ibn al-‘Arif. While Ibn Bashkawawī is as evasive as could be about the causes of his death, he is very precise regarding the date when he died: ‘He died on Thursday night, and was buried during the day of Friday the 23rd of Safar. 537.’ Ibn al-Abbār gives two versions of what happened.80 According to the first, the sultan was convinced of Ibn al-‘Arif’s excellence and piety and ordered him to be released and escorted to Cèuta, where the shaikh died as the result of an illness. According to the second—to which Ibn al-Abbār says he is unwilling to give much credence—Ibn al-‘Arif was poisoned on his return journey, while making the sea crossing.

A year after the death of Ibn al-‘Arif another Sufi, Ibn Qasī, claimed he was the Mahdī and organised an anti-Almoravid rebellion in the Algarve.81 With the help of his disciples he managed to seize a number of strongholds in the region. When the Almohads landed on the peninsula, Ibn Qasī initially rallied to their cause in 540/1145 but eventually dissociated himself from them and died, also assassinated, at Silves in 546/1151.

Of these three representatives of Almoravid Sufism it was unquestionably Ibn al-‘Arif who exerted the greatest influence on the evolution of Ibn ‘Arabi’s teaching. The numerous references in the Futūḥat to the Maḥāsin al-majālis—a work in which Ibn al-‘Arif describes the different stages of the Way—and the various allusions to the man himself testify both to Ibn ‘Arabi’s interest in his work and to his profound respect for his author, whom he praises for his perfect knowledge and describes as ‘one of the men of spiritual realisation’ (min al-muhaqqiqin).84 It is important to emphasise in this connection that, of the three men mentioned above, Ibn al-‘Arif appears to have been the only one whom Ibn ‘Arabi specifically refers to as shaykhūnà, ‘our master’.


80. Sīla, ed. Còdéra, § 175.


83. Cf. e.g. Futuḥ, I. pp. 93, 279; II. pp. 97, 290, 318, 325; III. p. 396; IV. pp. 92–3.

84. Futuḥ, II. p. 318.
Several of Ibn 'Arabi's Andalusian teachers were associated directly or indirectly with the Almerian school. This was the case for example with Abū 'Abd Allāh M. b. A. al-Anṣārī al-Ghazzālī, who according to Ibn 'Arabi was a disciple of Ibn al-'Arif.85 Yūsuf b. Yahyā al-Tādirī, who as noted earlier died in 627/1230, also cites a contemporary of his to the effect that Shaikh al-Ghazzālī was one of Ibn al-'Arif's greatest disciples (min akbar talāmhahā ibn al-'Arif).86 But as the editor of the Tashawwuf, Ahmad Tawfiq, correctly points out,87 this would seem to be chronologically impossible: Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Ghazzālī, known as Ibn al-Yatūm al-Andarashi, is said by his biographers to have been born in 544/1154—that is, eight years after the death of Ibn al-'Arif. Yet according to these same compilers Ghazzali's father, Abū l-Abbās (d. 581/1185), was a disciple of Ibn al-'Arif,88 which clearly suggests that different people have been confused. Ibn 'Arabi himself cannot have been entirely responsible for inventing the stories he tells about al-Ghazzālī's presence in Almeria together with his master Ibn al-'Arif. He knew him far too well (a poem in the Diwan and one of his Risālat show that he exchanged correspondence with him)89 to confuse him with his father.

Similarly, both 'Abd al-Jalīl b. Mūsā (d. 608/1211)90—the author of the Masā'il shurāb al-imān,91 and frequently visited by Ibn 'Arabi at Qasr Kutāma (Alcazarquivir)92—and Shaikh Abū Şafr Ayyūb al-Fihri (d. 609/1212), with whom he studied hadith in Ceuta, were disciples of Ibn Ghaliḥ al-Qurashi (d. 568/1172),93 who was himself a disciple of Ibn al-'Arif. There were also Ibrāhīm b. Tariq and his friend 'Abd Allāh al-Qalāfi, whose company Ibn 'Arabi frequented between 589 and 594. These two men (we will have more to say later about them as well as about al-Fihri) were disciples of Abū l-Rabī al-Maʿlaqa, himself a disciple of Ibn al-'Arif.94

Finally it should be mentioned that Shaikh 'Uryabī, in spite of the fact that he was totally illiterate, was a familiar with Ibn al-'Arif's doctrinal arguments and used to debate them with his disciple Ibn 'Arabi. This emerges from the following passage in the Rūḥ al-quds. The last time I visited him—God have mercy on him—in the company of others... he announced: "Let us examine a problem which I have already put to you. Abu Bakr [here he pointed to me with his finger], for I have always been astonished by the saying of Abū l-Abbās Ibn al-'Arif which runs, 'Until what has never been has been extinguished and what has never ceased to be remains'. We all know that what never was is extinguished and what has never ceased to be endures, so what does he mean by these words?" As none of my companions was able to provide an answer, he turned to me. Even though, in contrast to them, I knew the answer, I refrained from speaking because I had adopted the habit of forcing myself to keep silence. The shaikh understood, and did not insist."95

In 590/1194 at Tunis, Ibn 'Arabi studied Ibn Barrajan's Kitāb al-hikma under the direction of his teacher 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Mahdawi.96 Possibly he had already obtained some knowledge of the work through another teacher of his, 'Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Iṣbāli (d. 581/1185), who according to the Dībāj was a disciple of Ibn Barrajan.97 In any case, Ibn 'Arabi's opinion of this other representative of the Almeria school appears to have been more reserved. He undoubtedly possessed knowledge of some of the spiritual sciences—especially the science of astrology ('ilm al-falak), which enabled him to predict Saladin's victory at Jerusalem—but Ibn 'Arabi emphasised that he had not mastered this knowledge completely.98 He does however acknowledge the value of Ibn Barrajan's exposition of the 'divine Reality out of which everything is created' (al-ḥaqiq al-makhlūq bihi),99 which is an idea that occupies an important place in his own teaching.100

As for Ibn Qasi, contrary to the general opinion shared by Western specialists the Shaikh al-Akbār did not think highly of him. To be fair, it must be admitted that the frequent references in his writings to this disciple and his work, the Kitāb khaṭ al-nīla'yin,101 to mention the eulogistic expressions which he sometimes uses in referring to him,102 would seem a priori to support such an interpretation; indeed, this interpretation appears never to have been questioned. However, even the most cursory reading of Ibn 'Arabi's commentary on Ibn Qasi's Khaṭ al-nīla'yin (a work often referred to in the literature but apparently rarely consulted) shows just how mistaken

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85. Cf. e.g. Fut., I, p.228; II, p.201; IV, p.550; Rūḥ, § 14, p.99; Sufis of Andalusia, p.104.
86. Tashawwuf, p.119.
87. Ibid., p.111.
89. Diwan, p.46; O. Yahia, R.G. § 611, Risāla 'in ... al-Ghazzālī.
92. For Ibn Ghaliḥ cf. Tashawwuf, § 81, p.228.
94. Rūḥ, p.78; Sufis of Andalusia, p.66.
96. Ibn Farhūn. Dībāj, pp.175-76.
97. Fut., I, p.60; IV, p.220.
100. Cf. e.g. Fut., I, pp.136, 312, 749; II, pp.52, 257, 686, 693; III, pp.7, 165, etc.
101. As for example in Fut., I, p.136, where he declares him min sādāt al-qawm.
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Asín Palacios, and after him Henry Corbin, are quite categorical in stating that the 'school of Almeria' was simply an extension and continuation of the famous 'Masarra' school. And yet Asín was quite aware that there is nothing—no document or any other source of information—to support this thesis, or rather hypothesis. He also attempted in the studies he devoted to Ibn Masarra al-Jabali (d. 319/931) and his school to demonstrate that this shai'kh was not so much a mystic as a 'Bātinīte philosopher' whose teaching was inspired in its essentials by pseudo-Empedocles. 'Beneath the appearance of Mu'tazilism and Bātinism, Ibn Masarra was the defender and propagator of the inner meaning of the Plotinian system of pseudo-Empedocles and of its spiritual First Matter. Unfortunately, on this point as well Asín Palacios was unable to refer to any documents which might have enabled him to substantiate his thesis, for the simple reason that neither of the two works attributed to Ibn Masarra—the Kitāb al-hurūf and the Kitāb al-tasbīra—had been rediscovered at the time when he was writing. As Professor Stern was to emphasise many years later in a paper that criticises and takes issue with Asín Palacios' theory, his argumentation is in fact based ultimately on nothing more than a remark by the historian Ibn Sa'id al-Qurtubi (d. 402/1070) to the effect that certain šaykhīn such as Ibn Masarra professed the doctrine of Empedocles. As to Ibn Masarra's philosophical system, the only substantial evidence available to Asín Palacios to help him form some idea of

102. Ibn 'Arabi seems to be referring here to Ibn Qasi's claim that he was the Mahdi. It is interesting to note that, although he challenges this claim, nowhere does he appear to have expressed any similar criticism of Ibn Barrāṣan. Regarding the relations between Ibn Qasi and the sultan 'Abd al-Mu'min cf. Marra kī, Mu'jīb, p. 130.
105. Ibid., p. 143.
its nature consisted of two passages from the Futūḥāt in which Ibn ‘Arabī refers to him. \(^{114}\) Stern himself consequently came to the conclusion that Shi`ah al-Jabaili was not so much a Neoplatonist philosopher as a mystic who derived his teaching from Sufism. The debate is not yet closed, and we must wait for further studies to bring additional facts to light before the issue can be settled one way or the other. This will be made much easier by the fact that in 1972 Dr. Kamāl Ibrāhīm Jāfar discovered the two treatises by Ibn Masarra—the Kitāb ḥuwārīs al-ḥurūf and the Kitāb al-ḥībar—which up until then had been known by the name of Kitāb al-tabsira. From the lengthy account of these texts which he has provided\(^ {115}\) it emerges that, although there is undoubtedly a Neoplatonic tone to Ibn Masarra’s doctrine (itself far too common a feature in Sufi literature and philosophy to enable one to draw any significant conclusions), it is hard to establish any filiation between this tendency in Ibn Masarra and the doctrine of pseudo-empedocles—let alone to justify any reference to it in terms of ‘Bātinist philosophy’. Ibn Masarra’s Neoplatonism is in itself not at all surprising. The influence of Neoplatonic ideas had already become widespread, especially through the so-called ‘Theology of Aristotle’, and the reconstruction which Asīn Palacios went on to produce would appear—to say the very least—highly conjectural.\(^ {116}\) Whatever the final truth of the matter, one thing which is certain is that Ibn ‘Arabī knew—and appreciated—the work and teaching of Ibn Masarra, whom he describes as ‘one of the greatest masters of the Way in terms of knowledge, spiritual state and revelation’.\(^ {117}\) He refers to him explicitly twice in the Futūḥāt, and once in the Kitāb al-mīm—where, with regard to the secrets of the science of letters’, he states that he will tackle the subject ‘in the manner of Ibn Masarra’.\(^ {118}\) Of these three texts (to which we should also add an allusion in the Fausū),\(^ {119}\) the one that offers the clearest evidence for supposing Ibn ‘Arabī was influenced by Ibn Masarra is chapter 13 of the Futūḥāt, which deals with the symbolism of the Throne, the Intellect and the Universal Soul. And yet Ābū l-‘Alā ‘Aṭīfī has very correctly pointed out that the Neoplatonism of the Shi`ah al-Akbar is in fact closer to that of the Ḥikwān

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114. Fut., I, p.149; II, p.581; J.W. Morris has drawn up a list of the sources that refer to Ibn Masarra in a long unpublished article, ‘Ibn Masarra: a reconstruction of the primary sources’, which he has been kind enough to show me.


116. For the influence of Neoplatonism on Islamic thought see e.g. J.R. Netton, Muslim Neoplatonists: an introduction to the thought of the Brethren of Purity, London 1982.

117. Fut., I, p.147.

118. Kitāb al-mīm wa l-waw wa l-mi`in, in Rasā’il, p.7.

119. Fausū, I, p.84.

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al-Safā’, or ‘Brethren of Purity’, than to the Neoplatonism of Ibn Masarra.\(^ {120}\) In fact already long before Ibn ‘Arabī’s time the Epistles of the Brethren of Purity—composed during the second half of the fourth/tenth century\(^ {121}\)—had penetrated both philosophical and Sufi circles in Andalusia, where they encountered considerable success. In spite of the fact that Ibn ‘Arabī does not seem ever to have referred explicitly to the Epistles, the similarities and coincidences between his teaching and the teaching of the Brethren of Purity on a number of points—for example regarding the vegetative soul\(^ {112}\)—reveal their direct influence on his thinking.

In parallel to the ‘school of Almeria’—which so tangibly left its mark on Andalusian Sufism, giving it a character and originality that are quite unique—we also see another trend emerging. This trend was specifically associated with the Maghreb, and its chief representatives were Ābū Ya`ṣār (d. 572/1177), Ibn Ḥirzihim (d. 559/1163) and, slightly later, Ābū Madyan.\(^ {123}\) In this case there was certainly no question of a ‘school’ as such: the names of these saints are not associated with any specific doctrine or even with any particular written text. Essentially it was due to their extraordinary personalities that they made such an impression on their contemporaries and even down to today are numbered among the most venerated saints of the Maghreb. This is particularly true of Ābū Ya`ṣār:\(^ {124}\) a Berber who was unable to express himself correctly in Arabic, his karāmāt or charismatic powers were—as Ibn ‘Arabī himself observes\(^ {125}\)—famous throughout the Maghreb. He seems to have had the ability to read people’s thoughts, penetrate their hearts—and, above all, to master wild cats. Ibn Ḥirzihim, described by Tādīlī as a jurist (faqīḥ) and ḥāfiz,\(^ {116}\) was more erudite. He had studied the works of

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123. ‘Aṭīfī, Mystical Philosophy, p.121.

124. A third trend or current—more marginal and less representative in quantitative terms—began to emerge in the time of Ibn ‘Arabī, with Ābū ‘Abd Allāh al-Shūdī and his disciple Ibn al-Mārād (d. 611/1214) as its chief representatives. (For these two men cf. Masségnon, Le Passion des Halal, II, pp.309–17, and E. Dermenghem, Le Culte des saints en Islam maghrébin, Paris 1982, pp.89–95.) This trend became established with Ibn Sab`in (d. 669/1270) and his school.


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Muhāsibī and expressed great admiration for Ghazālī’s Ḭaṣīyāt al-dīn. According to Tādīlī, it would seem that he spent some time in prison.

It was with Abū Madyan that the Sufi trend which is unique to the Maghreb really asserted itself. Originally from the region of Seville, Abū Madyan lived for a while in Fez, where he met Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Daqqāq—a rather extravagant Sufi, according to the hagiographers—who seems to have passed on to him the kührāta. In Fez he also met Ibn Hīrīzihm, who taught him the works of Muhāsibī and Ghazālī; and in addition he became a disciple of Abū Ya’zū. After a voyage to Mecca where he possibly encountered ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jāfānī (d. 560/1165), he settled in Bougie.

The sheer number of Abū Madyan’s disciples—some of whom spread his teaching in the East—helps to explain the privileged position he occupies in all Sufism, both Western and Eastern. This makes it all the more regrettable that no proper and comprehensive study has yet been devoted to such a major figure in the tasawwuf of the Maghreb. Ibn ‘Arabi was to have many teachers who were disciples of Abū Madyan: Yūsuf al-Kūmī, Abū al-‘Aziz al-Mahdawī, Abū Allāh al-Mawrūrī and a considerable number of others, as we will see. References in his writings to the saint of Bougie are far too numerous to be listed here: a statistical study would easily show that of all the Sufis whom he mentions, it is Abū Madyan—whom he never even met—to whom Ibn ‘Arabi refers most often. This preference is due just to the influence which Abū Madyan exerted on him through the medium of his disciples: there were also certain points that they shared in common, as we will soon see.

To sum up: there can be no doubting whatever that Ibn ‘Arabi was influenced by elements of doctrine which derived from representatives of both these two trends—the one Andalusian, the other from the Maghreb—and that his own writings bear their imprint in numerous places. However, the extraordinary bulk of his writings, plus the sheer diversity and complexity of the themes he develops, makes it difficult (and, within the framework of this particular study, impossible) to attempt any precise evaluation of the extent to which he is indebted to Andalusian Sufis for his own ideas—ideas that in many respects are so subtle and original. And yet regardless of their particular leanings or affiliations, his teachers did not confine themselves to transmitting metaphysics. Through the advice they helped him acquire and through the practices prescribed for him they helped him overcome the many different obstacles which stand in the way of whoever undertakes the quest for the Red Sulphur.

The Masters of Seville

After Abū Madyan, the teacher whom Ibn ‘Arabi probably mentions most frequently in the Futūḥat is Abū l-‘Abbās al-‘Uryābi. Clearly the times he spent in the company of this illiterate peasant from Ulya in the Algarve had a profound effect upon him. It is also significant that among the recommendations (waṣyiq) of Ibn ‘Arabi which Ismā‘īl b. Sawdakūn transcribed in his Kitāb waṣa’il al-sa‘īl, several derive from Abū l-‘Abbās al-‘Uryābi. So, for example, the following prayer which Ibn ‘Arabi was to make his own: ‘Oh Lord, nourish me not with love but with the desire for love’ (Rabbi ʿaraqīna shuwwat al-hubb lā l-hubb).

This influence—which is especially evident in Ibn ‘Arabi’s initial attachment to the practice of dhikr using the divine Name ‘Allah’ alone—is hardly surprising. For a start, ‘Uryābi was his murshid al-a‘wālī, his first teacher: a relationship which is always of special significance in Sufism. Secondly—and this is probably the most decisive factor of all—‘Uryābi was governed by the state of ʿubādiyya, or total servitude. ‘My master Abū l-‘Abbās al-‘Uryābi, who was the first teacher whom I served and received Grace from, had one foot planted firmly in this domain—the domain of servitude.’ Now in Ibn ‘Arabi’s eyes the state of ʿubādiyya surpasses all...


130. It is worth emphasizing that Ibn ‘Arabi greatly contributed to making him known in Oriental Sufi circles through his own works, in which he cites Abū Madyan repeatedly and with extreme veneration.

131. For a table listing Ibn ‘Arabi’s affiliations with the various Sufi currents in the Islamic West see Appendix 2.

others. It is the state every disciple must aspire to and the goal of spiritual realisation, because it represents the return to the original state: to the ontological nothingness of the creature or created being. Whoever has realised 'ubūdīyya or servitude has stripped himself of rubūbīyya, of the 'Lordship' which really belongs to God alone but which ordinary men in their arrogance claim for themselves. According to Ibn 'Arabi the state of such a person is comparable to a stone that falls where it is thrown: he is literally 'abd Allāh, the slave of God. In a sense it can be said that Ibn 'Arabi's entire teaching as embodied in his writings has as its sole aim to guide his 'spiritual children' (we will see in due course why the term 'children', rather than 'sons', has to be used) towards that state of servitude to which 'Uryabi had guided him. Be a pure servant! (kun 'abdun mahdān) . . . That is what I was advised by my shaikh and master Abū l-'Abbās al-'Uryabi.' 138 It will emerge later that the only people who realise the state of 'ubūdīyya fully are the mukāmiyya, the 'People of Blame'.

Finally, there is the fact that Shaikh 'Uryabi was in a sense responsible for the first meeting between Ibn 'Arabi and Khadir, that mysterious interlocutor of Moses: the master of the 'masterless', he who is the supreme possessor of the ilm ladūnī, the 'knowledge inherent in God'. 139 This initial meeting took place in Seville when Ibn 'Arabi was still a youth, and it was to be the first in a series of interventions by Khadir in his spiritual destiny which would culminate in his double investiture with the khirqa khadirīyya, the 'initiative mantle' transmitting the baraka of Khadir: firstly at Seville in 592 and then at Mosul in 601.

Before telling the story of this first encounter with Khadir, it is worth pointing out that Muḥyī l-Dīn was only around twenty years old when he met 'Uryabi. The following episode occurred at the start of this companionship, as he himself says (fi bidayati amrī). His youthfulness excuses—or at least explains—the lack of adab or propriety which, on his own admission, he showed. He still had a great deal to learn about the rules of proper behaviour which normally govern the relationship between disciple and master. 'A difference of opinion arose between me and my master Abū l-'Abbās al-'Uryabi, regarding the identity of a person whom the Prophet had announced. He [Shaikh 'Uryabi] said to me, 'The reference is to so-and-so, son of so-and-so', and he mentioned someone whom I knew by name: I had never seen the person but I had met his cousin. I expressed scepticism and refused to accept what the shaikh said about this individual, because I had an infallible perception (basīra) regarding the man in question. As it happens, there can be no doubting the fact that later the shaikh changed his opinion. But he suffered inwardly [as a result of my attitude], although I was unaware of this because at the time I was only in my early stages. I left him to return home. On the way I was accosted by someone whom I did not know. First of all this person greeted me, with a great deal of love and affection in his gesture. Then he said to me: 'Accept what Shaikh Abū l-'Abbās says about so-and-so!' I understood what he was asking. I immediately returned to the shaikh to let him know what had happened to me. When I appeared before him he said to me: 'Oh Abū 'Abbās Allāh, is it going to be necessary for Khadir to come to you every time you hesitate to admit what I say, and tell you: 'Accept what so-and-so says?' And how is that going to happen each time you refuse to accept my opinion?' I replied: 'The door of repentance is open'. He said: 'The repentance is accepted'! 140

Ibn 'Arabi refers again to the incident in another passage from the Futūhāt: He gives this time, as well as mentioning the traditional ideas about Khadir he gives some additional details. Khadir's name is Bālyā b. Malikān . . . He was in an army and was sent by the commander in search of water, which they had run short of. He discovered and drank from the Source of Life, and so it is that he is still living now; he had no idea that God had granted immortality to whoever drinks that water. I met him in Seville, and he taught me to submit to spiritual masters and not contradict them. In fact on that very day I had contradicted one of my teachers on a particular issue, and was just leaving him. I then encountered Khadir in the quarter of the Qurān al-ḥaniyya, 141 and he said to me: 'Accept what the shaikh says!' I returned immediately to the shaikh. When I arrived at his place, even before I could speak a word he said to me: 'Oh Muhammad, does this mean that every time you contradict me I will have to ask Khadir to instruct you in submission to the masters?' I replied: 'Master, are you saying that the person who gave me this instruction was Khadir?' He answered: 'Yes!' I said in reply: 'Glory be to God for this teaching. But even so, things will turn out just as I said they would!' Some time later I visited the shaikh and saw that he had come round to my opinion. He said to me: 'It was I who was wrong and you who were right'. I replied: 'Master, now I understand why Khadir only instructed me in submission and did not say that you were right in the matter. To the extent that legal statutes (ahkām mashru'a) were not involved, I ought not to have contra-

138. Fut., I, p.482.
139. For Khadir cf. EP, s.v.: Massignon, Opera minora, I, pp.142–61; Corbin, Creative Imagination, pp.53–63.
140. Fut., I, p.186.
141. Asin Palacios (Islam cristianizado, p.56) translates this name as 'grain market'; perhaps he read sāq instead of qis, but this still fails to explain his translation of hanīyya. In fact it is the name of a quarter containing a mosque of the same name: cf. Fut., I, p.331.
dicted you; but if they had been involved it would have been forbidden me to stay silent".  

Apart from the fact that this incident led to the meeting with Khadîr, it also testifies to the paradoxical nature of the master-disciple relationship in Ibn 'Arabi's case. Undeniably he neglected even the most elementary rules of propriety with regard to 'Uryabi by contradicting him on a point of only secondary importance, because the shari'a was not at stake. The issue on which Ibn 'Arabi disagreed with his teacher clearly had to do with the identity of the Mahdi, whose coming had in fact been announced by the Prophet and whom 'Uryabi thought he recognised in one of his contemporaries. However, it emerges from the second account that if Ibn 'Arabi was wrong in his attitude, he was right as far as the heart of the matter was concerned. This was why Khadîr did not tell him he was mistaken but simply said he should submit to his master. It was a piece of advice that Ibn 'Arabi put into practice quite literally, because although he repented of his attitude he would not budge from his position ('Even so, things will turn out just as I said they would'). As a disciple, murâd, Ibn 'Arabi was hierarchically inferior to 'Uryabi and owed him his obedience; as a gnostic ('ârif) endowed with an inner certainty (başira), he spoke the truth and in this particular instance surpassed his master.

It is worth clarifying one point here once and for all: this has to do with the ambiguous nature of Ibn 'Arabi's relationship to his teachers. The ambiguity becomes quite apparent even from the most cursory reading of the biographical sketches of his teachers which he provides in the Rüh al-quds and the Durrât al-fâkhira. If we adhere to the explanations that he himself gives, it was due to two causes: firstly, the exceptional talents and charmismate with which he was favoured from a very early age, and which made him an altogether exceptional disciple; secondly, it was a result of the function he was called upon to exercise in the sphere of sainthood or waliyya. In Ibn 'Arabi's case the suhûk—the 'wayfaring', or methodical progression along the Path under the direction of teachers—did not correspond to any personal need to achieve spiritual realisation because, as we have already seen, he had received this from the very start. When he met 'Uryabi he was only a novice in appearance. And yet, however great his spiritual capacity, every 'knower of God' ('ârif bi llâh) must submit to education and initiation (tarbiyya) at the hands of a teacher—whether living or dead[144]—who will instruct him in the techniques that will enable him to become the master of his talents and know himself. In other words, in the case of the Shaikh al-Akbar the fact that as a disciple he owed obedience to his teachers did not prevent him from being superior to them in gnosis. This is even more so because, in conformity with the particular function to which he would later lay claim, he was strictly speaking 'beyond categories', and as such the only created being to whom he was answerable was—and could only be—the prophet Muhamamd. In this sense it is legitimate to maintain that really Ibn 'Arabi had no teacher. At least potentially, during the period that concerns us, and fully and effectively later on, he affirmed that he possessed the highest degree of realisation of sainthood (waliyya).

In this connection it is worth citing the instructions given to him by the 'Imâm of the Left' during their encounter in subtle form. '... This Imâm showers created beings with benefits and blessings without their being aware of the fact. He did so in my case by announcing to me some good news about my state, which I was unaware of even though it was my own state, and by informing me about it. He also forbade me to affiliate myself (al-intimâ) with the teachers whom I was frequenting, and said to me: "Affiliate yourself to none but God, for none of those whom you have met has authority over you (layya li ahad minmman lâqâqthu 'alayka yad). No, it is God Himself who through His Goodness has taken you in His charge (Allâh tawallâkâ). Mention if you wish the virtues of those whom you meet, but affiliate yourself to God, not to them". The state of this Imâm was equivalent to my own (kâna hâl hâdâh l-imâm mithlha hâlî sawâ), because none of those whom he had frequented had authority over him. I was told as much by trustworthy people (al-thiga), and he himself informed me of this at the time of our meeting in the "intermediary realm" (fi mashhad barzakh).[144]

To appreciate fully the implications of this verbal exchange between Ibn 'Arabi and the Imâm of the Left, we need to refer briefly to what Ibn 'Arabi himself has to say about the hierarchy of initiation at the start of the twelfth volume of the Futûhât. At the summit of the pyramid are the four Pillars (awtâd), with first of all the Pole (qudî), followed by the 'Imâm of the Left', then the 'Imâm of the Right' and finally the fourth Pillar. The true holders of these functions are the four prophets, who are considered by Islamic tradition to be always living: Idrîs, Jesus, Elijah and Khadîr. Idrîs is the Pole. Jesus and Elijah are the two Imâms, and Khadîr the fourth Pillar. Each of these prophets permanently has a substitute (nî'dib) in the world below: a man who fulfills the function in question. The Pillars—both the titular ones and the substitutes—belong to the category of afrâd, or 'solitary ones'. Their equivalents among

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[143] I am alluding here to the case of the 'awaṣyâq—those who are trained by a master who died sometimes decades or even centuries earlier. There is the famous example of Shaikh Abû l-Hasân Khaıraqâni (d. 425/1034), who was trained by the spiritual influx (rihântiyâ) of Abû Ya'qûb al-Hasâmî. Cf. Jamî, Nağhib, p.298: also the articles by I.T.P. de Bruijn in ELF and by H. Lambert in the Encyclopedia Iranica, s.v. Khaıraqâni.

the angels are the *muḥājīyān*: the spirits overcome by love in the Divine Majesty, in other words the Cherubim (*karrābiyyān*) . . . Their station (*maqām*) is intermediate between the station of the “confirmation of truth” (*sīdāqīyya*) and the station of legislative prophecy (*nuḥūwāt al-tashrīf*) . . . It is the station of free prophecy (*al-nuḥūwāt al-mutlaqah*).145

No one has authority over the Pillars: they know and acknowledge God alone, who Himself takes charge of teaching them. Moses’ famous adventure with Khadr (Qur’an 18:59–81) is a good example of this independence on the part of the Pillars. So, when Ibn ‘Arabi declares that his state is equivalent to the state of the Imām of the Left (or in fact of the ‘substitute’ who was fulfilling his function at that particular time) he is clearly suggesting that they both belong equally to the category of the ‘solitary ones’.

Indeed it is even probable that the ‘good news’ which the Imām announced to him regarding his state refers to precisely this point: that would explain why he goes on to advise him not to become identified with any teacher, because it is ‘God Himself who has taken you in His charge’.

As to the identity of the person who had assumed the function of Imām of the Left at this time of his encounter between him and Ibn ‘Arabi, there are a number of reasons for supposing it was Abū Madyan (d. 594H). Ibn ‘Arabi in fact states on several occasions that Abū Madyan was the Imām of the Left, and that an hour before his death he succeeded to the previous Pole;146 he explains that this information was conveyed to him in a vision by Abū Yaḥyā al-Bistami.147 It also emerges very clearly from his account that he had never met this Imām of the Left except in the spirit. Now as it happens, in a biographical sketch in the *Rūḥ* which we will examine more closely later, he describes how one day Abū Madyan sent him the following message: ‘Regarding our meeting in the subtle world there is no question: it will happen. Regarding our physical encounter in this world, God will not permit it.’148

It must be said straight away that Ibn ‘Arabi did not only include himself among the ‘solitary ones’; on his own admission he was also one of the four Pillars. To each Pillar (*wātād*) belongs one corner of the corners of the House (the Ka‘ba). The Syrian corner belongs to him who is on the heart of Adam; the Iraqi corner to him who is on the heart of Abraham; the Yemenite corner to him who is on the heart of Jesus; and the corner of the Black Rock to him who is on the heart of Muḥammad—and this is my corner. God be praised!’149 Ibn ‘Arabi goes on to specify that the Sufi Rabi’ b. Mahmūd al-Mardini150 was in his own time one of the Pillars and was replaced at his death by someone else: he also states that, apart from himself, there was a Persian (rājul fārisī) and an Ethiopian (rājul habashī).151 However, this piece of evidence does pose a problem. If we compare it with another passage in the *Futūḥāt* where Ibn ‘Arabi asserts that the Pole corresponds to the corner of the Black Stone,152 it is tempting to deduce that he himself was the Pole. But as we will soon see, according to his own explicit statement153 the supreme function which he exercised was incompatible with this function of *qāb*.

Whatever the case here may be, the fact is that Ibn ‘Arabi was still a young man when he entered the Path. As he himself emphasises, spiritual graces received in the early stages are extremely dangerous for the novice who has not previously practised *rijād*, initialistic discipline. This was precisely his own situation. In such a case the company of shaikhs, their advice and their protection are essential if the novice is to avoid the danger of backward-sliding or, even worse, of going astray. And as there was an abundance of saints in Seville, Ibn ‘Arabi was to go knocking at their doors so as to derive benefit from their teaching and their *baraka*.

For the Shaikh al-Akbār there was nothing to prevent a disciple having several teachers. On the contrary, he states at the end of the *Kitāb nasab al-khīra* that only the ignorant have invented this rule: ‘Be assured that there is no stipulation in the obligatorial conditions of initialistic investiture and spiritual companionship that this garment [khīra] must be received from one person alone. No one has ever imposed such a condition. It is an established fact that one of the men of the Path has said: “Whoever wishes to see three hundred men in one man has only to look at me, for I have followed three hundred teachers and from each of them I have derived a quality.” . . . Investiture [with the khīra] simply consists of keeping the company of a master and practising his spiritual discipline, and that does not involve any restriction in number. In stating these facts I am referring to certain ignorant people.

149. *Fat.*, I, p. 190.
151. Probably the reference is to Badr al-Ḥabashi, Ibn ‘Arabi’s companion. This is the implication of the passage in the *Futūḥāt* (II, p. 10) where—speaking of himself, Ḥabashi and two other individuals—Ibn ‘Arabi states: ‘We were the four Pillars’.
152. *Fat.*, II, p. 5.
153. *Fat.*, IV, p. 77. An explanation of this apparent discrepancy may lie in the fact that, according to Ibn ‘Arabi some afdal or ‘solitary ones’, are actually superior to the Pole in respect of their knowledge of God (*Fat.*, III, p. 137). This is especially the case with the Seal of the Saints—the function Ibn ‘Arabi claimed for himself.

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who imagine that one is only entitled to receive the khirqa from one person alone.\footnote{kitāb nasab al-khirqa, Esad Efendi ms., 1507, ff. 98-98b.}

At this particular period in the Islamic West it was normal and even commonplace to follow the spiritual teaching of several Sufi masters simultaneously. Šuḥba, 'spiritual companionship', was still an informal practice and had not yet acquired the characteristics of a structured and more or less regulated institution that it began to assume at the close of the twelfth century—and even more definitively in the thirteenth century—in the East, where an organised and therefore more rigid system came into being which would soon be given the name of tariqa. This means that at that time there was a certain discrepancy between Oriental Sufism and Andalusian Sufism. Sufism in the East was induced for various different reasons to implement this progressive structuring, and this became especially evident in the growth of a community strength of spiritual life as attested by the proliferation virtually everywhere of khandāqs. In Andalusia, on the other hand, the quest for God remained to a large extent a purely individual undertaking, free and flexible. These differences in emphasis could naturally lead to reciprocal misunderstandings, and these were sometimes aggravated by a certain contemptuous attitude on the part of Orientals towards people in the Maghreb and Andalusia. Ibn 'Arabi was to have bitter personal experience of this on his arrival in the East when—in a Cairo khandāq in 598H—a sheik from Ibril made some highly offensive remarks to him about Andalusian Sufis, who according to this man knew nothing about the Path.\footnote{Rūḥ, p.27. It would appear that this criticism was one of the reasons which encouraged Ibn 'Arabi some time later to write the Rūḥ al-quds, in which he highlights the virtues, the qualities and the spiritual knowledge of the Sufis he had known in the Islamic West. Having a variety of spiritual directors did, however, pose some problems. The disciple could find himself in a situation where he was confronted with instructions that were apparently contradictory. As Ibn 'Arabi writes in the Futuḥāt: 'One day I went to see my teacher Abū l-Abbās al-Uraybī while I was in this state [of confusion]; I was troubled at the sight of men disobeying God. He said to me: "My companion, occupy yourself with God!" I left him and went to Shaikh Abū 'Imrān al-Murtūlī, still in the same state of mind. He said: "Occupy yourself with your soul!" I replied: "Master, I am in a state of perplexity: Shaikh Abū l-Abbās tells me to occupy myself with God but you tell me to occupy myself with my soul. And yet both of you are guides towards God!" Abū 'Imrān started weeping, and said to me: "My friend, Abū l-Abbās has directed you towards God, and the Return is to Him. Each of us has directed you in accordance with his spiritual state (hāl). I hope that God will make me reach the station of Abū l-Abbās. So listen to him: that will be better for you and for me." I returned to Shaikh Abū l-Abbās and told him what Abū 'Imrān had said. He said to me: "Take account of his advice, for he has pointed out to you the path (al-tariqā) whereas I have pointed out to you the Companion (al-raffiq). You should therefore act in accordance with what he has told you and in accordance with what I have told you".\footnote{Fut., II, p.177.}}

Abū 'Imrān Māsā b. 'Imrān al-Murtūlī (d. 604/1207) came, as his name indicates, from the fortress of Mertola where Ibn Qaṣīd had established his headquarters.\footnote{Marrakushi, Muṣābīb, p.50.} He subsequently settled in Seville, and it was there that Ibn 'Arabi became his companion. 'I experienced some marvellous times with him. His spiritual energy was closely linked with God for the purpose of his headquarter from which he had his headquarters.\footnote{Anselm, p.65.}

Ibn 'Arabi very probably met Murtūlī shortly after meeting 'Uraybī—in any case by 580/1184 at the latest. In both the Futuḥāt and the Durra\footnote{Durra, in Sūfis of Andalusia, p.89.} he describes an incident in which he himself and his teacher Murtūlī had a confrontation with 'Abd al-Rahmān b. 'Uayyār, who denied the miraculous powers of saints. At the time, Ibn 'Uayyār was Seville's khaṭīb or city scribe. It was who in 577/1182 inaugurated the great mosque built during the reign of Ya‘qūb b. Ya‘qūb. According to Ibn al-Abbār (d. 658/1259) he died in around 580/1184.\footnote{Tak., ed. Codera, § 1417; cf. also Maqqari, Naff, II, pp.27, 487; III, pp.225, 296.}

Murtūlī's teaching appears to have focussed essentially on the mortification of the soul (hence his advice to the young Muḥyī l-Dīn) and on asceticism (zuhd). On this theme of asceticism he composed a collection of poems,\footnote{Durra, in Sūfis of Andalusia, p.89.} which merited a reference to him by several compilers such as Ibn al-Abbār, who describes him as a companion of Ibn Muḥājib—a famous ascetic who doubled as a poet.\footnote{Tak., ed. Codera, § 1608.} Ibn al-Abbār seems not to have suspected that the author of the Diwan was himself a saint; but the fact did not escape Ibn 'Arabi. At the start of the second volume of the Futuḥāt, where he enumerates the different categories of saints, he reveals that Murtūlī was one of 'the men whom God assists and who in their turn assist created beings' (rijāl il-amīdā il-ḥabī wa l-kawīlī): In every age there are three—neither more nor less. They seek assistance from God and give assistance to created beings with kindness, gentleness and mercy as opposed to violence, harshness or severity. They
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turn to God so as to derive benefit from Him, and then turn to created beings so as to benefit them... I met one of them in Seville. He was one of the greatest spiritual men I have known: his name was Mūsā b. ‘Imrān, the master of his time."163

It was very probably from his own teacher, Ibn Mūjahīd (d. 574/1178), that Mīrūlī inherited his strong taste for asceticism. Described by the author of the Naql al-ibtihāj as the 'ascetic of Andalusia', zāhid al-Andalusī,164 Ibn Mūjahīd was one of the most famous Andalusian Sufis of his time. Ibn al-Abbār himself testifies to his sainthood: 'He was in his time the point of reference in matters of virtue (ṣalāh), scrupulousness (wara') and worship. He is known to everyone, not to mention his competency in jurisprudence (fiqh) as 'Arābī places Ibn Mūjahīd in the highest category of malāmiyya, or 'People of Blame'.166 Some ambiguous statements in the Futūhāt would seem to suggest that he had met Ibn Mūjahīd in person during his youth (that is, before 574/1178); he possibly learned the Qur'ān from him while still an adolescent.167 In any case he had obtained from him an ijtīhaḏ 'amma (an authorisation 'in absentia'), which however does not necessarily imply that he had attended his classes.168

The spiritual method of Ibn Mūjahīd was characterised chiefly by the meticulous practice of muḥāsabat al-nafs—that is, the daily examination of one's conscience. He transmitted the details of this practice to one of his disciples, Aḥū 'Abī Al-lāh b. Qassīm, who taught them in turn to Ibn 'Arabi. 'I have known two men who were like this: Aḥū 'Abī Al-lāh b. Mūjahīd and Aḥū 'Abī Al-lāh b. Qassīm. I knew them both in Seville. They possessed this station and were poles among the 'men of energetic intention' (al-rījāl al-muḥāsabit). When I in turn arrived at this station myself I imitated them and their companions, obeying the instruction of the Messenger of God when he commanded: "Demand accounts of yourself" (hāṣibī anfasakum).169 Our teachers accordingly had the habit of keeping accounts of what they said and did, and recording everything in a notebook. After the evening prayer they

166. Ijtīhaḏ, p. 181.
167. The complete text of this hāṣibī is: hāṣibī anfasakum qabla an tahīsabāb (Tirmidhī, qīṣāma.)

The masters of Seville

would isolate themselves in their own homes so as to demand accounts of themselves. They would take up their notebook, examine their actions and words during the course of the day, and render to each of their actions whatever it deserved. If it merited the request for forgiveness, they requested forgiveness; if it merited repentance, they repented... I did even more than before, because I also recorded my thoughts (khawāṣīḫ); that is, in addition to my acts and words I noted down all the thoughts that crossed my mind."170

Ibn 'Arābī mentions that he was the companion of Ibn Qassīm (d. approx. 606/1209) for almost seventeen years.171 Considering that he left Andalusia for good in approximately 596/597, this implies that he already knew him in around 580/581—that is, at a time when he was also the disciple of Mīrūlī and 'Uyābī. He specifies that, in addition to the daily examination of conscience, Ibn Qassīm transmitted to him all the rules relating to ritual purity and prayer. Jurist (fiqh), ascetic and excellent grammarian: that is how this other disciple of Ibn Mūjahīd is presented to us by the author of the Takmīl.172 But here again it would be a mistake to judge by appearances alone. According to Ibn 'Arābī this jurist—with apparently nothing to distinguish him from the other 'ulamā' in Seville apart from the austerity and self-deprivation which he imposed on himself—was, just like his teacher, one of the malāmiyya, the 'People of Blame'.173

The malāmiyya, too, are 'solitary ones' (afrāḍ); but in their particular case they are viewed not in relation to their function or position but solely with regard to their spiritual state. The malāmi is a pure servant ('abd mahdī). His one and only desire—if any desire still remains in him—is to conform strictly to the divine will. Stripped of his ego, he has renounced all free will (ikhtiyār). As Ibn 'Arābī puts it: 'The malāmiyya are spiritual men (al-rījāl) who have assumed the highest degree of sainthood (walāya). There is nothing higher than the Station of prophecy. [Their station] is the one referred to as the Station of Proximity (maqām al-qurba).174... No miracles (kharaq 'ādāt) are ascribed to them. They are not admired, because in the eyes of men they are not distinguished by behaviour which is ostensibly virtuous... They are the hidden ones, the pure ones, the ones in this world who are sure and sound, concealed among men... They are the solitary ones (al-afrāḍ),175

171. Durra, in Sufis of Andalusia, p. 87. Regarding this master cf. also Rūḥ, § 7, pp. 88–90; Sufis of Andalusia, pp. 83–7; Fut., I, p. 358; III, p. 34; IV, p. 532.
172. Fut., III, p. 34.
173. Fut., III, p. 34.
174. It has been noted elsewhere that Ibn 'Arābī also uses the expression nabwana 'āmma, 'general prophecy', in designating this station. Cf. M. Chodkiewicz, The Seal of the Saints, chapter 7.
Elsewhere, Ibn 'Arabi also specifies that the 'solitary ones' fall into two categories: those who use their spiritual energy (rukāb al-hiimān) as their 'mount' and those who use their acts (rukāb al-'amāl). Those in the first category have chosen not to intervene in the affairs of this world and not to exercise any function. On the other hand, those in the second category find themselves compelled—by divine command, that is—to exercise authority and assume a function of 'government' (tadbīr); the most eminent example is the case of the Pole. These are the mudābbīrin, the 'Directors'. They are superior to those in the first category because, following the example of the prophets, they have returned from God to created beings—without, however, leaving God, for in every single thing at any instant they perceive the wajhu llāh, the Face of God. But it must be clearly understood that the first category as well as those in the second have fully and totally realized 'ubūdīyya, the service of God.

Ibn 'Arabi tells us that four of the spiritual masters whose company he kept as a young man in Seville were among these 'Directors'. This is the picture he draws of them in chapter 32 of the Futūhāt—a chapter devoted specifically to this category of saints: 'At Seville in Andalusia I encountered several individuals who belonged to this category. One of them was Abū Yaḥyā al-Sanhājī the blind. He lived in the Zubaydi mosque. I was his companion until he died. He was buried on a high mountain which is very windy, towards the east. Everyone found it difficult to climb the mountain because of its height and because of the wind that blew without ceasing. But God stillled the wind, which stopped blowing the moment we laid him on the earth. We then began digging his grave and erecting his stele. When we had finished doing this we laid him in his tomb and left. As soon as we had moved away, the wind started blowing again as usual, and everyone was amazed.176

'Sāliḥ al-Barbārī, Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Sharafī, and Abū ʿAlī al-Hajjāj al-Shubarbulī' also belonged to this category. Sāliḥ wandered (sāha) for forty years and then remained at Seville in the al-Rutandali mosque for another forty years, in the same state of self-deprivation which he had known during his years of wandering. As for Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Sharafī, he was one of those men for whom distances were annulled (sāḥib khatwā). For nearly fifty years he never lit a lamp in his home, and I have seen him do some extraordinary things. As for Abū ʿAlī al-Hajjāj al-Shubarbulī (he came from a village called Shubarbulī, to the east of Seville), he was one of those men who have the power to walk on water and who are frequented by spirits. There is not one of these men whose company I have not kept, to whom I have not been linked in friendship, and who did not love me.... So it is that these four men belonged to this station (maqām); they were among the greatest of the malāmīyya saints'.180

The evidence is not to be denied. From the very start—one could say forever—Ibn 'Arabi's spiritual vocation appears to have been carefully guarded and protected by the Solitary Ones (afrād). Like guardian angels they are present all along his route, everywhere and at all times, at every bend and every stopping place. From Jesus, the Imām of the Right who accepted his every change, through the fourth Pillar—Khadir—who called him to order and the Imām of the Left who warned him, to the malāmīyya of Seville who instructed him and trained him. Everything comes to pass just as if the 'solitary ones' had assembled or re-assembled to form an impenetrable barrier around the young Andalusian.

spoke to me with the exception of Hūd, who explained to me the reason for their gathering'.

What did Hūd tell him? A passage from the Rūḥ al-ḥašā'ī seems to provide an initial answer. During the course of his biographical sketch of Abū Muhammad Makhlūf al-Qabā‘ī—the saint of Cordoba to whom he once took his father— Ibn ʿArabī relates that one evening after leaving the shaikh he had a vision in which he saw all the Messengers and prophets gathered together. 'Next I noticed a man who was tall, with a broad face, white hair and a large beard, and who had his hand on his cheek. I chose to address myself to him and ask him the reason for this gathering. He said to me: “They are all the prophets from Adam down to Muhammad; not a single one of them is missing”. I asked him: “And you? Which of them are you?” He replied: “I am Hūd, of the people of ʿAd”. I said: “Why have you all come?” He answered: “We have come to visit Abū Muhammad”. On waking, I inquired about Abū Muḥammad Makhlūf [al-Qabā‘ī] and learned that on that very night he had fallen ill. He died a few days later."

From these various passages we are already in a position to draw some conclusions. Ibn ʿArabī had not one but two visions at Cordoba. During the first one, in 586/1190, he witnessed the assembling of all the Messengers and prophets; during the second, which also occurred in Cordoba but at a different time, he saw 'all the believers', which therefore included all the prophets and all the saints. It was during this second vision that he discovered that every saint (wāli) is 'on the foot of' (ʿalā qadam) a prophet; so it was that he saw Shaikh ʿUryabī 'on the foot of Jesus'.

When the Elect of God assembled in Cordoba, what was their purpose in doing so? According to the incident described in the Rūḥ, it will have been to be present at the last moments of Shaikh al-Qabā‘ī. However there was also another reason, which Ibn ʿArabī would seem not to have revealed anywhere in his written works but which he did confide to certain disciples of his who, from generation to generation, handed down to each other the secret of the Great Vision at Cordoba. Fortunately for us, some of them have left written testimonies. Thanks to the research conducted by specialists into Ibn ʿArabī’s school we are now in a position where we can trace this information back to a disciple of the second generation; but hopefully there is a very good chance

CORDOBA: THE GREAT VISION

586, 594, 598: Ibn ʿArabī’s spiritual destiny hinges around these three dates. To each one of them corresponds a major episode in one and the same basic event. Already with the first of these episodes the story or history of the Shaikh al-Akbar ceased to be a simply individual adventure; for himself saithood itself. To be more precise it became the axis of that history, as the tantant, something prodigious, was in preparation; a new chapter in sacred history was beginning. The whole universe, celestial and terrestrial, became the theatre in which this divine play was to be acted out.

Ibn ʿArabī describes the first act: 'I saw all the prophets from Adam down to Muḥammad, God also showed me everyone who believes in them—all those who have been and all those who will be until the Day of Resurrection, from the greatest to the smallest'. Another passage in the Futūḥāt provides some additional details: 'I saw with my eyes (raʾyi t mashāḥadatu ʿayn) all the Messengers and prophets. Among them I spoke to Hūd, the brother of ʿAd. I also saw with my eyes all the believers—those who have been and those who will be until the Day of Resurrection. God showed them to me in one and the same place, on two different occasions (fiṣāʾī l wāḥid fi zamānaʾin mukhtalīf). Finally, in the Fushā al-Ḥikam Ibn ʿArabī gives two valuable pieces of information about the place and date of this vision: 'Know that when God showed to me and made me contemplate all the Messengers and prophets of the human species from Adam down to Muḥammad. In a scene (mashāḥad) in which it was granted to me to participate at Cordoba in 586, none of them

1. Fat. III, p. 323.
2. Hūd is one of the 27 prophets mentioned in the Qurʾān to whom the 27 chapters in the Fushā correspond.
3. Fat., IV, p. 77.
that, in the years to come, the editing and systematic study of the works written by Ibn ‘Arabi’s direct disciples 8 will make it possible to trace the line of transmission back even further.

For the time being it is Mu’ayyd al-Din Jandi (d. approx. 700H) who is the first to divulge this mystery, in a work that in fact happens to be a commentary on the Fussūṣ.9 Jandi, as mentioned in the last chapter, was a disciple of Qunawi, who in turn—as we will see later—was brought up from a very young age by the Shaikh al-Akbar himself, Abu al-Razzaq Qashâni (d. 730/1330). Jandi’s disciple, and then Dāwūd Qaysari (d. 751/1350), a disciple of Qashâni, repeat the same details in turn in their own commentaries on the Fussūṣ:10 The prophets and Messengers of God assembled in honour of Ibn ‘Arabi to congratulate him on being nominated the ‘Seal of Sainthood’, the supreme heir to the Seal of the prophets.

What precisely is implied by the notion of a ‘Seal of Sainthood’ (khatm or khatam al-walā'īya)? What is the function of the Seal within the sphere of sainthood? We can now give very precise answers to these questions thanks to a recent work by an author who has not only analysed the references to the Seal in Sufi literature in general but has also succeeded specifically in extracting Ibn ‘Arabi’s own teaching on this matter from the enormous corpus of his writings and from the various expositions of the idea—sometimes contradictory and often ambiguous—that they contain.11 This means we have no need to go over the groundwork again. However, the spiritual biography of Ibn ‘Arabi is so intimately related to the issue of the Seal of Sainthood that there can be no tackling the one subject without also coming to grips with the other, and some presentation of the broad outlines of his teaching on the matter will be indispensable.

‘I was prophet when Adam was still between water and mud.’ For some saints this hadith12 is the prophet Muhammad’s affirmation of the pre-

8. This applies especially to the written works of one of his disciples elect, Sadr al-Din Qunawi, which have still not been adequately studied. Professor William Chittick is at present preparing a major work on Qunawi.
12. It is not included in this form in the canonical collections, and its authenticity was disputed by (among others) Ibn Taymiyya.
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after the time of the Muhammadan Seal, although there will no longer be any saints who are “on the heart of Muhammad”.

With the death of the Muhammadan Seal none of the saints will any longer have direct access to the strictly Muhammadan heritage, but the grade of ‘general prophecy’ will still remain open: in other words there will still be afrād. It will only be with the advent of the ‘Seal of Universal Sainthood’ that the gate of non-legislative prophecy will in turn be closed. Even after his coming there will still be saints, but from then on none of them will attain to the station of afrād.

Finally, with the third Seal sainthood will be definitively closed. Ibn ‘Arabī reveals that this third Seal will not just be the last of the saints: he will also be the last man to be born into this world. ‘The last-born of the human species will be in the line of Seth and will possess his secrets. After him no more children will be born into the human race. He will be the Seal of Infants (khatim al-awalād). He will have a sister who will be born at the same time as him but will emerge from the womb before him, him after her. The head of this Seal will be placed near the feet of his sister. His place of birth will be China and his language will be the language of the people of that land. Sterility will spread among men and women and there will be a proliferation of marriages not followed by any births. He will call men to God and they will not reply to his call. After God takes away his soul and the souls of the believers of his time, those who survive him will be like beasts. They will pay no regard either to the lawfulness of what is licit or to the unlawfulness of what is illicit. Animal nature will be the only authority they obey: they will do nothing but follow their passions, free of all reason and every sacred Law. And it will be on them that the Hour will dawn.’

Nowhere in ibn ‘Arabī’s writings does this third Seal seem to be identified any more precisely, so all that remains is to determine the identity of the individuals invested with the functions of Muhammadan Seal and of Seal of Universal Sainthood.

Regarding this second function, ibn ‘Arabī is quite categorical: for him the Seal of Universal Sainthood is Jesus. ‘There are in fact two Seals; through one of them God seals sainthood in general, through the other He seals Muhammadan sainthood. As to the person who is the Seal of sainthood in an absolute sense, it is Jesus. He is the saint who in the time of this Community [i.e. the Islamic community] is the holder par excellence of this non-legislative prophetic function, because henceforth he is dissociated from the function of legislative prophet and Messenger (rasūl). When he descends at the end of time he will do so in the capacity of heir and Seal, and after him there will be no further saint endowed with general prophecy . . . . As to the Seal of Universal Sainthood, after whom there will no longer be any saints [who attain to this level], this is therefore Jesus: we have met numerous saints who were “on the heart of Jesus” or of another of the Messengers.’

Once again, it will be worth noting the major role that ibn ‘Arabī ascribed to Jesus—not only in his personal destiny, as we have already seen, but also in his conception of sacred history. Certainly it is generally acknowledged and admitted in Islam that Jesus will descend to earth again at the end of time in order to intervene in the reign of justice and peace by applying the Muhammadan shari‘ā and yet never before would he seem to have been given a specific function within the economy of sainthood, or walāya.

We are now in a better position to understand the exact nature of that special relationship between ibn ‘Arabī and Jesus which has been referred to several times already: for if Jesus is the Seal of Universal Sainthood, ibn ‘Arabī himself laid claim to the role of Muhammadan Seal. Only a partial and extremely biased examination of his writings could possibly have incited certain authors to maintain that no formal declaration to this effect is to be found in his writings. We have, for example, his statement that ‘I am—without any doubt—the Seal of Sainthood, in my capacity as heir to the Hashimite and the Messiah’. Again, in a poem from the Diwān he declares:

‘I am the Seal of Saints, just as it is attested
That the Seal of the Prophets is Muhammad:
The Seal in a specific sense, not the Seal of Sainthood in general.
For that Jesus is the Assisted’.

The Muhammadan Seal is the comprehensive and integral manifestation of the walāya muḥammadiyya, or Muhammadan sainthood, which is the

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<td>13. Fat., II, p.44; Seal of the Saints, pp.117-18.</td>
<td>35. Fat., II, p.44; Seal of the Saints, pp.117-18. This frequently repeated assertion that Jesus is the Seal of Universal Sainthood provides grounds for doubting the ascription to ibn ‘Arabī of an unpublished treatise called the Buhāt al-ghawwās (R.G. § 91). Its themes and vocabulary bear the unmistakable imprint of the Shaikh al-Akbar, and yet its author—in line with the Shi‘ite commentators on ibn ‘Arabī—assigns this particular function to the Mahdi. Cf. MS. Bibliothèque Nationale 2405, f° 325b.</td>
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<td>14. Faṣūq, l, p.67; Seal of the Saints, pp.125-26.</td>
<td>15. According to Islamic tradition Jesus will descend at the end of time, kill the Dajjal (the Antichrist), smash the cross, kill all pigs and introduce the reign of justice and peace: he will be buried in Medina between Abū Bakr and ‘Umar. Cf. Bukhārī, Matteūs, 51, buqṣī, 106, nubājī.</td>
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<td>17. I am referring in particular to S. Ruspoli, who in an article in the Cahiers de l’Herne which is devoted to Henry Corbin (Paris 1981, p.323) states that ibn ‘Arabī never made the claim that he was the Seal of the Saints.</td>
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supreme source of every other form of sainthood. In this respect and from this point of view he is superior to all the prophets and Messengers, because it is from him that all the prophets derive their sainthood; even Jesus himself, as a wali, is under the authority of the Muhammadan Seal. On the other hand, as a prophet and divine messenger Jesus is superior to the Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood, who possesses neither of these functions. As Ibn 'Arabi explains: 'Muhammadan sainthood—that is, the sainthood which pertains specifically to the Law revealed by Muhammad—has its own Seal, whose rank is inferior to the rank of Jesus because Jesus is a Messenger.'

Elsewhere he writes as follows: 'When Jesus descends to earth at the end of time God will grant him the privilege to seal the Great Sainthood (al-walāya al-kubrā), which is the sainthood that begins with Adam and ends with the last of the prophets. This will be an honour for Muhammad because universal sainthood—the sainthood of all communities—will only be sealed by a Messenger who follows his Law. Jesus will therefore seal the cycle of the Kingdom and universal sainthood simultaneously. This makes him one of the seals of this world. As for the Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood, who is the Seal of the sainthood which pertains specifically to the community that is Muhammad's in the mode of appearance, Jesus himself will be placed under the authority of his position—just as will Elijah, Khadîr and every other saint of God belonging to that community. In other words, although Jesus is a Seal he will himself be sealed by the Muhammadan Seal'.

Although Ibn 'Arabi was the first to expound this remarkable doctrine (al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi had already used the expression khatm al-walāya, but had been somewhat enigmatic about what it meant), he was not alone in claiming the title of Muhammadan Seal. There were others after him who ascribed this function to themselves. Obviously it is not the historian's job to pass judgement one way or the other in such cases of rival claims. Here we are in the realm of the undeniable, and the very notion of a 'Seal' can only concern us to the extent that it represents a fact in the history of ideas and as such plays an important role in the subsequent evolution of Sufism. However, within the perspective of this book it is essential to point out that for Ibn 'Arabi there is no possible room for doubt: he himself is the Supreme Seal, the source of all sainthood, and his spiritual journey as well as his teaching can only be properly understood in the light of this inner certainty which determined his life and his work. On plenty of occasions in this book we will be confronted with the various aspects of this issue. Here it is sufficient to bear in mind that for Ibn 'Arabi the Cordoba vision marked the solemn acknowledgement by the Elect of God of his nomination as Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood.

SEVILLE: RETREATS AND REVELATIONS

The population of Seville was in turmoil. The new sultan, Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb al-Mansūr, had succeeded to his father who had been mortally wounded during the Almoravid disaster at Santarem in 580/1184, and was now coming to the Andalusian capital firmly resolved to restore order to the tumultuous city.

With the third ruler of the Mu'nimid dynasty, the Almoravid state had reached its apogee. Mansūr was a great lover of art and culture like his father, but in military leadership he demonstrated his superiority and succeeded where his father had failed. In 581/1185 he took back Bougie from the Banū Ghanīya, who had launched a huge Almoravid offensive in North Africa. In 583/1187 he crushed their army at the battle of Hamma and subdued the Arab tribes of Iṣāqīya who had rallied to the cause of the Almoravids. But his greatest victory of all was to be the bitter defeat he inflicted on the people of Castile at Alarcos in 591/1195.

Mansūr disembarked at Seville in Jumādā II. 586/1190. He carried out a general inspection of the administration, held an inquiry into the iniquities perpetrated by government officials and personally kept a watchful eye open to ensure that justice was respected. He also attempted the difficult task of applying to Seville the decrees he had enacted at Marrakech on ascending to the throne: absolute prohibition of the sale of alcohol, on pain of death, and the banning of singers and musicians from practising their professions. The musical instruments on the Guadalquivir fell silent—at least for a while.

But there was also more. The new ruler was a fervent admirer of Ibn Hazm

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20. Fut., I, p. 185: Seal of the Saints, p. 120.
22. Hakim al-Tirmidhi, who died in approximately 285/898, was the author of the Kitāb khatm al-walāya or 'Book of the Seal of Saints', which has been edited by O. Yahia (Beirut 1965). Ibn 'Arabi cites Tirmidhi on several occasions, and in a small unpublished treatise called the Jawāb mustaqām an ma sa'ala 'anhu al-Tirmidhi, as well as more fully in chapter 73 of the Futūhāt, he provides answers to the famous questionnaire in chapter 4 of Tirmidhi's work. Cf. Seal of the Saints, pp. 27–52.
23. Cf. Seal of the Saints, pp. 134–37, where the cases of Muhammad Wafā', Ahmad Sirhindī, Qudshuši, Ibrāhīm al-Nabulī, and Ahmad Tījānī are examined. All of these men either considered themselves or were considered by others to be the Seal of Saints—or even (in the case of Sirhindī) as possessing a function superior to that of the Seal.
and did not believe in the Imamate of Ibn Tumart; he adopted Zahirite ritual and declared war on the Mālikites. According to the author of the Murūjīb he forbade the teaching of manuals of applied jurisprudence and ordered the auto-da-fé of a large number of Mālikite works such as the Mudawwana by Sahānīn (d. 240/854). From this time onwards jurists were obliged to adhere strictly and solely to the Qur'an and hadith. Simultaneously he gave instructions to the muhaddithin, or transmitters of the prophetic traditions, to begin compiling the 'ten works' (al-musannafāt al-ashara) — in other words the ten collections of hadith which were accepted as canonical. These collections were soon to become disseminated throughout the Maghreb.

Mansūr's religious rigorism became increasingly pronounced from year to year; at the end of his life he issued a law compelling Jews to wear distinctive clothing. That was to be one of the last measures he took. The sultan was tired, eaten up with remorse at having had his brother and uncle killed in 583/1187 for attempting to overthrow him; from 594/1197 onwards he relinquished fulfilling his public function more and more, and gave himself to asceticism and works of piety instead.

It was during this period, in 594/1197, that he had Abū Madyan summoned to the palace at Marrakech. What exactly did he want from him? We will never know, because the saint died en route and was buried at 'Ubbādā, not far from Tlemcen. This request on the part of the sultan has been variously interpreted. According to G. Marçais and Assim Palacios, Mansūr summoned Abū Madyan because he was disturbed by his increasing popularity. There would therefore be something of an analogy between the case of Abū Madyan, identified as a potential rebel, and the case of other unruly Sufis such as Ibn Barrajān or Ibn Qasī: he would have been taken to Marrakech as a prisoner to be tried. But this is not a very plausible hypothesis. By this time Mansūr had already withdrawn from the exercise of power, entrusting it to his family instead; and besides, nothing entitles us to suppose that Abū Madyan could have represented — or even appeared to represent — a threat to the power of the Almohads.

There is also another version of the events which seems more satisfactory because it corresponds more closely to what we know about the sultan's state of mind towards the end of his reign. According to the author of the Risāla — Ibn Abī Manṣūr (d. 682/1283) — Manṣūr made the decision at the end of his life to enter the palace and revealed his wish to a saintly woman in Marrakech: she in turn advised him to speak to Abū Madyan. When the saint came to hear of the sultan's wish he apparently exclaimed: 'I obeying him I am obeying God, Glory to Him! And yet I will not reach him but will die at Tlemcen.' Ibn Abī Manṣūr goes on to explain how when Abū Madyan arrived in the town of Tlemcen he said to the sultan's envoys who were escorting him: "Salute your master and tell him he will find healing at the hands of Abū l-'Abbās al-Marīnī". So it was that our master Abū Madyan died, in Tlemcen. This Abū l-'Abbās al-Marīnī was none other than Abū l-'Abbās Ahmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Marīyī al-Qanījā 'irī: an Andalusian Sufi from (as his name suggests) the region of Almería who according to Ibn 'Abd al-Malik was the shaikh of the entire Sufi community in the Maghreb. He went to the East on four occasions, and crossed paths with Ibn 'Arabi in Hebron in Shawwāl 602/1205. All his biographers emphasise the respect and veneration shown to him by the Almohad rulers; in this connection Ibn 'Abd al-Malik's detailed sketch of him contains a story about the alms that the Almohad sultan entrusted to him for distributing to the poor in Medina. Also, according to Ibn Sāhīb al-Salātī it was Marīyī who in 592/1195 persuaded Mansūr to renovate the great mosque of Ibn 'Addabās.

From a passage in the Rūh it would appear that Mansūr was also on very good terms with Yūsuf al-Shubbarbūlī, a disciple of Ibn Mūjāhid. Further, we will see in due course that the time came when he offered assistance to Ibn 'Arabi himself. But this was a period during which the Shaikh al-Akbar was resolutely avoiding all association with men of power — and indeed had for some time been avoiding associating with men in general.

27. Ibn Abī Mansūr Saflī al-Dim. Risāla, p. 511. It is interesting to note that in his Muhādārat al-abār (II, p. 92) Ibn 'Arabi describes an incident in which the sultan of the time (he is not any more specific) yielded to the wishes of Abū Madyan.
30. Cf. e.g. sketches 6, 16, 26 and 56 in the Rūh.
ELECTION

"The Messenger of God has said: "Demand accounts of yourself before they are demanded of you". With regard to this matter God revealed to me a sublime spectacle (masḥūd 'ażim), at Seville in 586."

Ibn 'Arabi says no more; but clearly he is referring to a vision relating to the Last Judgement. Now it so happens that several autobiographical accounts survive in which he mentions the various supernatural perceptions he was granted by way of anticipation of the Resurrection and Last Judgement. The analogies between these accounts are no justification for mixing them up; each of the visions describes one particular aspect either of the universal Resurrection or of Ibn 'Arabi's own resurrection. In any case two of these texts cannot possibly bear any relation to the 'sublime spectacle' of 586, because they refer to visions which he experienced in the one case in Fez in 593 and in the other case in 599 at Mecca. However, we also possess two other accounts by Ibn 'Arabi which mention neither dates nor place-names but which quite possibly correspond to the vision of 586.

The first of these accounts is to be found in chapter 71 of the Futuḥāt—a chapter devoted to the 'secrets of lastin'. After explaining that on the Day of Judgement the saints will first of all intercede on behalf of those who have done them harm (he notes that in the case of those who show kindness to the saints, their benevolence will itself be their safe-conduct), Ibn 'Arabi describes the vision he was granted of his own intercession. 'God has promised me that on the Day of Resurrection I will be able to intercede on behalf of everyone who falls within my gaze—those whom I know and those whom I do not know. He showed me this in a scene (masḥād) in such a way that I saw it and experienced it with certainty.'

In the Kitāb al-mubashshirih or 'Book of Visions' Ibn 'Arabi gives a complete and detailed report of the event. 'I saw in a vision that the Resurrection had taken place. People were rushing forward: some were clothed, others naked: some were walking on their legs, others on their faces.'

"Then God came, "in the darkness of thick clouds, accompanied by angels" (Qur'ān 2:210), seated on His Throne which was being carried by angels. They placed the throne to my right. While all this was happening I experienced no fear or anxiety or fright."

"Then God placed His palm upon me to make me know what my situation had been [in this low world]; thanks to the authentic hadīth (al-hadīth al-sahih) I understood his intention and I said to Him: "Lord, kings demand accounts of their subjects because they are poor and need what they take from them for their treasury. But You are rich. Tell me then what You will add to Your purse by demanding accounts of created beings". He smiled and replied: "What do you want?" I answered: "Authorise me to go to Paradise [i.e. directly and without rendering accounts]." He gave me His authorisation.

Then I saw my sister Umm Sa'di. I said to Him: "And my sister Umm Sa'di!"

He replied: "Take her with you". Then I saw my sister Umm 'Alā. I said to Him: "And her as well?" He replied: "Her as well!" I said to Him: "And my wife Umm 'Abd al-Rahmān!" He replied: "And your wife Umm 'Abd al-Rahmān!" I said to Him: "And Khātūn Umm Jānīn!" He replied: "And Khātūn Umm Jānīn!" I said to Him: "This is taking too much time; let me take all my companions and relatives whom I know, as well as everyone else whom You wish". He answered: "Even if you were to ask me if you could take all the people of the Station (ahl al-mawqif)." I would let you.".

"I then remembered the intercession of the angels and prophets and, out of respect for them, I [only] took with me everyone who fell within my gaze (God alone can count them): those whom I knew and those whom I did not know. I made them go in front of me, keeping behind them so as to prevent them becoming lost on the way."

The two accounts coincide: in both cases it is a question of Ibn 'Arabi interceding on behalf of everyone who fell within his gaze, those whom he knew and those whom he did not know. But are we to identify the fact that he specifically interceded on their behalf? But her name and aristocratic title, khātūn, which was a title applied chiefly to the wives of Seljuq and Ayyūbīd rulers, suggest she was Turkish or Kurdish in origin, and this makes it unlikely that Ibn 'Arabi could have known her in Andalusia.

But there is one particular feature of this account that merits closer consideration. This is the fact that the first four individuals whom the Shaikh al-Akbar asked to be able to take with him to Paradise are all women. The Kitāb al-kutab contains a long letter written by Ibn 'Arabi to Umm Sa'd to..."
console her over the death of Umm 'Alā'. and from this document it emerges that he was very attached to his two sisters (it will be remembered that he had no brothers) whom he took with him to Fez after his father's death with the aim of marrying them off. The two other women referred to in the passage remain an enigma. Of Umm Jūnān we know absolutely nothing—not even the nature of her relationship to Ibn 'Arabī. As we have seen, Umm 'Abd al-Rahmān was the name of one of his wives—but which one? Various references in the Futūḥāt indicate that he had at least two wives. It would appear that his first wife was Maryam bint Muhammad b. 'Abdūn al-Bijā'ī; he possibly married her in Seville, and her spiritual aspirations were very much in harmony with his own—as the following passage shows. 'My saintly wife Maryam bint M. b. 'Abdūn al-Bijā'ī said to me: 'In my sleep I saw someone who often comes to visit me in my visions, but whom I have never met in the world of sense-perception. He asked me: 'Do you aspire to the Way?' I replied: 'Most certainly yes, but I don't know how to reach it!' He said: 'Through five things, namely trust (al-tawakkul), certainty (al-yaṣīn), patience (al-sabr), resolution (al-ażīma) and sincerity (al-siddq) ...'.

The second of Ibn 'Arabī's wives whom we know about was Fātimah bint Yūnus b. Yūsuf Amir al-Haramayn. She gave him a son, Muhammad 'Imād al-Dīn (d. 667/1271), to whom he bequeathed as an endowment (waqf) the first draft of the Futūḥāt. But here things become complicated. Ibn 'Arabī also had a second son, Muhammad Sa'd al-Dīn (d. 656/1258), who was born in Malaya in 618H and apparently from another wife. Could it be that the mother of this Muhammad was the same as Qūnāwī's mother—that is, the woman who according to some sources became Ibn 'Arabī's wife in Anatolia? Also, according to some late sources, after he had settled in Syria Ibn 'Arabī married the daughter of the Mālikīte qādi of Damascus. No doubt the reference here is to Zayn al-Dīn 'Abd al-Salām al-Zawāwī (d. 681/1282), the first Mālikīte qādi of Damascus, who came from a great Berber family of jurists which had settled close to Bougie; a member of this family had been one of Ibn 'Arabī's teachers during his stay in that town. And finally, according to Muhammad Banū Zākī's Tuhfat al-zā'ir, Ibn 'Arabī married a daughter of the Banū Zākī, who for a long time occupied the position of qādi in Syria; some corroboration of this can perhaps be derived from a reference in the Dīwān, where Ibn 'Arabī states that he had invested the daughter of Zākī al-Dīn with the khirāq. Which of these women is Umm 'Abd al-Rahmān? In the present state of our knowledge it is impossible to give an answer. However, it is worth noting that only two sons are ever referred to either by Ibn 'Arabī himself in the samā's of his writings or by later chroniclers: Muhammad 'Imād al-Dīn and Muhammad Sa'd al-Dīn. This naturally leads one to suppose that if Ibn 'Arabī ever had a son called 'Abd al-Rahmān, he must have died at a very young age.

Whatever the nature of the bonds of kinship and affection which linked Ibn 'Arabī with these four people, one fact is particularly striking—namely that the first beneficiaries of his intercession with God were all women. Indeed here too he distinguishes himself from the majority of his co-religionists, because for him there was not one single level of spiritual realisation which women are incapable of attaining. 'Men and women have their share in every level, including the function of Pole (qubūt) ...'. Furthermore, several of Ibn 'Arabī's spiritual teachers were women; they include two whose company he used to frequent in Seville when still a youth—Fātimah bint Ibn al-Muthannā and Shams Umm al-Fuqara'. Fātimah bint Ibn al-Muthannā often used to tell her young disciple: 'I am your spiritual mother and the light of your carnal mother'. Although this lady of Seville was over ninety years old, her face was so pink and fresh that Ibn 'Arabī would blush whenever he saw her. She lived in extreme poverty, feeding herself from the waste that the people of Seville left outside their doors. She appears not to have had any home of her own until the day when Ibn 'Arabī and two other disciples of hers built her a hut out of reeds. In his Rūḥ al-quds he has no hesitation in stating that 'she was a mercy for the world', and he states that she had at her command an unusually unusual

42. Kitāb al-kutub, pp. 35–40, in Rosā' il, Hyderabad 1948.
43. Dārara, 3. in Sūfis of Andalusiya, p. 75.
44. See above, chapter 2, where it was pointed out that Asīn Palacios' categorically assertion to this effect needs strong qualification.
45. Fat., I, p. 278; cf. also Fat., III, p. 135. Thanks to a samā' dated to 630H in Aleppo, we happen to know that she was still alive and by her husband's side in that year. The samā' in question is to be found at the end of the Kitāb naẓm al-fatāw al-makki, in ss. Aḥmadīyya, Aleppo.
46. Fat., IV, p. 554: '... the first draft, which I bequeathed as an endowment to my son Yūnus b. Yusuf Amir al-Haramayn ...'. In specifying the name of Muhammad's mother Ibn 'Arabī seems to have wanted to avoid any possible confusion between him and Muhammad the younger, who was his son by another wife.
50. Rūḥ, 41, p. 124; Sūfis of Andalusiya, p. 137; Fat., II, pp. 21, 61. In chapter 10 we will come back to the question as to the likelihood of this marriage.
52. Dīwān, p. 56.
53. Fat., III, p. 83.
but totally devoted servant: the sūra al-Fāṭiha, who—just like Aladdin’s genie of the lamp—fulfilled even the smallest of her wishes.55

It was apparently in 886/1479, at Marchena of the Olivares which was a citadel not far from Seville, that Ibn ‘Arabī met Shams Umm al-Fuqara’. As he himself writes in the Rūḥ al-quds, ‘She had a stout heart, noble spiritual energy and great discrimination. She concealed her spiritual state, but sometimes she would reveal an aspect of it to me in secret because she had been granted a revelation about me, and this would give me great joy’.56

During the same year, 886, Ibn ‘Arabī became acquainted with some saints who fell within a rather peculiar spiritual category: the ‘demented’ (bahālīl). In a chapter of the Futūḥat which is devoted specifically to them,58 he explains that the ‘demented’ have lost their reason as the result of a theophany and a sudden seizure which comes from God. Their reason remains with Him (‘uqālhum maḥbūsa ʿindahū), rejoicing in the contemplation of Him, plunged into His Presence, overcome by His Majesty. They are reasonable men but without any reason! (hum ʿaqlī bi-lāʿuqālī). A little further on he explains that there are three types of ‘demented’. There are those in whom the inspiration which visits them (wūrida) is more powerful than their own inner strength, and they are accordingly dominated by their spiritual state. There are those whose inspiration is equal in strength to their own inner strength: in their case their outward behaviour is apparently quite normal, but they are suddenly distracted when the inspiration seizes them. Finally there are those whose interior strength is greater than the strength of the inspiration: they do not show anything when seized by the inspiration. There are in addition two separate kinds of ‘demented’: the ‘sad demented’ (maḥzūn) and the ‘joyful demented’ (masārī). ‘Ali al-Salawī59 and Abu ʿl-Hajjāj al-Ghīyārī,60 whom Ibn ‘Arabī met in Seville in 896/1488, both belonged to the second category. On the other hand Yusuf al-Mughāwīr (d. 619/1222), whose company he also frequented in Seville during the same year, was one of those who weep without ceasing.61

Ibn ‘Arabī was all the better equipped to describe the station of the bahālīl or

56. O. Yahia, Histoire et classification. p.94.
57. Rūḥ, § 54. p.126; Sufs of Andalusia, pp.142-43.
61. Ibn ‘Arabī specifies that he met Yusuf al-Mughāwīr in Seville in 886, and that he was his companion at the same time as Salawī’s. Cf. Fut., II. pp.33. 187; Safi al-Din, Risāla, pp.135-40 and the bio-bibliographical sketch on p.216.

Seville: retreats and revelations

‘demented’ because he himself had experienced it at a certain period in his life. ‘I myself have experienced this station (maqām).’ For a time, according to what people have told me, I performed the five prayers and directed them as imām. I carried out the bowings and prostrations and all the prayer rituals—the gestures as well as the recitations—without seeing anything myself. I had no awareness of those who were with me, or of the place, or of what was happening or of anything else in the sense-perceived world. This was due to a state of contemplation which dominated me and in which I was annihilated both to myself and to everything else. They told me that when the time for prayer arrived I recited the call to prayer and directed the prayer itself. I was like someone asleep who gesticulates [in his sleep] without being aware of it.62

It was during this same period that he established a bond of friendship with the khātāb of Marchena, ʿAbd al-Majīd b. Salama, who told him of his fabulous encounter with Muḥād b. al-Ashrāf, one of the ‘substitutes’ (abdāl) of his time.63 As for Ibn ‘Arabī himself, there was nothing more natural than that he should see one of these mysterious individuals suddenly appear right in the middle of his house. That is precisely what happened to him in the same year, 896, in Seville. One evening, after performing the prayer at sunset he suddenly experienced a burning desire to meet the man who from this time onwards he was to consider his master: Abu ʿl-Madyan. There was a knock at the door, and it was Abu ʿl-Maṣūṣ al-Sadrānī, a companion of Abu ʿl-Madyan and himself one of the seven ‘substitutes’—who after the four Pillars—represent one of the highest levels of the initiatic hierarchy. Ibn ʿArabī asked him: ‘“Where have you come from?”’ Mūṣā replied: ‘“From Shaikh Abu ʿl-Madyan in Bougie”.’ ‘And when were you with him?’ ‘“I performed the sunset prayer with him, just now. After finishing the prayer he turned to me and said: “Muḥammad b. ʿArabī is now thinking such-and-such a thought, in Seville. Go to see him straight away and give him such-and-such a message from me.”’ He then described the desire I had had to meet Abu ʿl-Madyan and told me that the shaikh had said: ‘Inform him that as far as our meeting in the spirit is concerned, that will certainly take place. But as to our corporeal meeting in this world, God will not permit it . . .”‘64

Their encounter ‘in the spirit’ did indeed take place: there would appear to be good justification for equating it with the dialogue quoted earlier between Ibn ʿArabī and the Imām of the Left, which took place in the ‘Intermediary World’ or harāzkh and during the course of which the Imām of the Left announced to Ibn ‘Arabī ‘good tidings regarding his state’. This dialogue is

64. Rūḥ, § 19. p.114; Sufs of Andalusia, p.121.
most probably to be dated to the same year (586), shortly before the Cordoba vision.

It is important to note that so far the majority of the spiritual teachers whose company Ibn ‘Arabi kept—for example Mirtül, Ibn Qassim, Shubargib—were affiliated with the Andalusian schools of Ibn al-'Arif and Ibn al-Mujahid, and that the teaching of these masters clearly bears the mark of this affiliation. But it is perhaps no coincidence that in this same year, 586, Muhiyi l-Din appears to have come under the spiritual supervision of Abū Madyan through the intermediary of several of his disciples. So, for example, he performed a month-long retreat in Seville with Abū Ahmad al-Sulawi, who was a long-standing companion of Abū Madyan. He came to Seville when I was under the charge of my shaykh Ya’qub al-Kūmi. The spiritual state of this man Abū Ahmad was powerful. He had been the companion of Abū Madyan for eighteen years; his ascetic and devotional practice was intense, and he would weep abundantly. I spent a whole month with him at the mosque of Ibn Jarrād.”

Shaykh Abū Ya’qub Yūsuf al-Kūmi, whom Ibn ‘Arabī also refers to in this passage and whom he also knew in 586/1196, was another disciple of Abū Madyan. He was doubtless the first of Ibn ‘Arabī’s masters to transmit to him the teaching of the great saint of the Maghreb, whose miracles and virtues he loved to speak of in Seville for hours on end.

Muhiyī l-Din’s relationship with al-Kūmi was rather strange. The various different anecdotes in the Rūḥ that contain references to him reveal the profundity of Ibn ‘Arabī’s veneration for the man. The love he felt for him was so sincere that, as he tells us, he was able to make him appear at any time of the day or night that he wanted to talk with him. But more than enough did he experience a reverential fear in his presence which paralysed him completely. He confesses in the Rūḥ: When I stood in front of him—or any other of my teachers—I would start trembling like a leaf in the wind; my voice would change and my limbs would start knocking together. When he noticed this he would show kindness towards me and make a special effort to help me relax, but that only served to increase the fear and veneration he inspired in me.”

And yet Ibn ‘Arabī specifically states elsewhere that in certain respects he was Kūmi’s teacher. In the Futūhāt he explains that, when a disciple dies before completing his sulāk or ‘faring of the way’, it is the shaykh’s responsibility to ensure he completes it posthumously. That was the opinion of my master Abū Ya’qub Yūsuf al-Kūmi. He is the only one of my teachers who trained me in initiatic discipline (rijāda); he helped me in initiatic discipline while I helped him in the states of ecstasy (mawājīd) He was for me simultaneously master and disciple, and I was the same to him. People were astonished and nobody understood the reason. This happened in 586; in my case illumination (fath) had preceded discipline (rijāda).”

In reality it would seem that from a certain point of view all of Ibn ‘Arabī’s spiritual teachers were his disciples. The reason for this has already been touched on: it has to do with the fact that his relationship to them was on two different levels—the level of disciple (murid) and the level of gnostic (’arif).

The following incident provides a good illustration of the kind of spiritual benefit which he could bring them. To cite his own words: There was a time when I became accustomed to withdraw into cemeteries to isolate myself. I heard that my master Yusuf b. Yakhla al-Kūmi had announced: “So-and-so [and he referred to me by name] has given up the company of the living because he prefers the company of the dead!” I sent someone to tell him: “If you join me you will soon see whose company I keep!” He performed the dawn prayer and came out alone to meet me: he searched for me and found me sitting between the tombs with my head lowered, talking with the spirits who kept me company. He came and sat beside me, full of respect. I turned towards him to look at him and saw that he had changed colour and seemed ill at ease. He was unable to raise his head because of the weight that was pressing down on him; I looked straight at him but he was unable to look at me because he was so disturbed. When I had finished my conversations and the ‘spiritual instant’ (wārid) had come to an end, the shaikh relaxed and, relieved, turned to me and kissed me between the eyes. I said to him: “Well, master, who is it who keeps company with the dead—you—or I?” He replied: “Certainly not, by God; it is I who keep company with the dead!”

Not only the dead spoke with Ibn ‘Arabī during his solitary retreats. So too did God. As he explains: “The descent of the Qur’an into the heart of the servant is the descent of God into him; God then speaks to him “from him and in him” (min sirrihi fi sirrihi).” This is precisely what happened to him on several occasions. In a Seville cemetery to which he was accustomed to withdraw (this was also in 586) he ‘received’ a number of Qur’ānic verses. Clearly this is a reference to the descent of the Qur’ān ‘in a shower of stars’ (nujumān), which it is possible for saints to experience in the same way that the prophet Muhammad had before them. According to Ibn ‘Arabī, Muhammad received revelation in three different modes. Firstly he received
4. Ibn 'Arabi & the Savants of Andalusia

It is not only difficult but impossible to map out Ibn 'Arabi’s destiny with any real precision, and even more impossible to verify the legitimacy of his claims in matters of waliyya, or sainthood. But it is a somewhat easier task—and indeed a very necessary one—to situate this destiny in the context of the society in which he lived and to determine the nature of his position amongst his contemporaries. This means in particular determining his relationship with regard to the various intellectual and religious circles of the Islamic West, which is where his vocation asserted itself and also where he spent almost half of his life.

Everyone who either has been or at present is involved in research into Islamic Spain in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries—regardless of the particular field of research involved (history, literature or religion)—inevitably comes to one and the same conclusion: in spite of the plethora of events that happened during the period, and in spite of the fact that it played such a decisive role in the history of Islam in the West, the Almoravid era badly lacks a comprehensive study. Between, on the one hand, the work done by E. Lévi-Provençal on Islamic Spain from the time of the conquest down to the fall of the Cordoba caliphate (422/1031) and, on the other, R. Arié’s studies of Spain under the Nasrids we are faced with a gaping void. As Dominique Urvoy has pointed out with regard to the social system of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, ‘we possess no comprehensive study of al-Andalus for this period. We possess no—or at any rate very few—archival documents to help us reconstruct it. The chronicles provide the only material available to us, but they just deal with factual history’. In practice this means that if we want to reconstruct even a small part of the intellectual and religious context

Visions, retreats, revelations: for Ibn ‘Arabi 586 was plainly a year full of blessings. One other piece of information perhaps needs to be added to the evidence adduced so far. This can be found in a passage in Jandi’s Sharh fujūs al-hikam, there, basing himself on the testimony of his teacher Qunawi, Jandi asserts that it was at the end of a nine-month retreat in Seville that Ibn ‘Arabi was told he was the Muhammadan Seal, the supreme Heir. There is no reason to doubt that the retreat in question took place in 586H—a year when Muhayi l-Din increased the number of his retreats and frequented the cemeteries of Seville assiduously. As to how we are to reconcile this testimony with the interpretation given by the same author of the Cordoba vision, that is a problem we will have to come back to. The matter is complicated even further by a number of other, subsequent visions which also have a bearing on Ibn ‘Arabi’s claim to the title of Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood, because each of these would seem to offer grounds for assigning a different date to his investiture.


1. D. Urvoy, Le Monde des Ulémas andalous, p. 3.
of the Almohad period we are obliged to turn to the tabaqāt, or biographical collections. These are a literary genre in which the Arabs are past masters; they are compilations—sometimes in alphabetical order, sometimes according to date of death—of biographical sketches of 'ulama' or 'savants', in the broadest sense of this term. Regardless of who their author happens to be, these sketches are presented in a virtually uniform fashion and could hardly be more insipid or boring: names (father's name, grandfather's, surname, kunya), town of birth, teachers, disciples, travels, type of training and discipline, date of death. However, in Le Monde des Ulema' andalusais Urvoix has shown that a meticulous examination and systematic analysis of the sketches contained in these tabaqāt does yield data which can help to clarify the matters for anyone concerned with the social, religious and intellectual life of the period. By carrying out an analysis of this type in the case of the Sīla by Ibn Bashkuwāl (d. 578/1183) and the Takmilah of Ibn al-Abbār (d. 658/1259) Urvoix himself has come up with statistics which reveal some of the characteristic features of cultural and religious activity during the period when Ibn 'Arabi was living in the Islamic West, and from these data certain significant conclusions can be drawn.

To begin with, one notes that between 585 and 610 the census shows a considerable increase in the number of 'ulama' in Seville: 100, or 68 up on the preceding period (565–85) and far larger than the number registered in Cordoba. There is a similar increase in the region of the Maghreb. Secondly, it appears that during this same period the traditional religious disciplines (hadith, fiqh, Qur'ān) made a major leap forward throughout the Almohad realm. For hadith the number swells from 57 names to 78; for fiqh, from 76 to 88, and for the Qur'ān from 97 to 126; there is also a substantial increase in adab, language and kalām. It is also to be noted that this rapid advance in the traditional and literary disciplines is more accentuated in Seville than elsewhere in Andalusia. And finally, when one examines the interrelationship between the various religious and literary disciplines one finds that hadith was practised by almost a quarter of the jurists (fuqaha'), and became more and more closely linked with asceticism (zuhd) and Sufism; jurisprudence (fiqh) was intimately associated with literary disciplines, and the Qur'ān with study of Arabic (which is quite normal). This all goes to show, firstly that Seville's efforts to supplant her rival Cordoba had finally succeeded, and secondly that Almoravid and Almohad Islam had broken with Andalusian tradition and re-allied itself with the tradition of the East.

One other fact which emerges is that although Mālikism held the majority position, it was not the only madhhab or 'school' in existence in Andalusia. Under the Almohads there was a slight increase in Shafi'iism, and Zāhirism also continued to thrive.

Ibn 'Arabi's dogmatic and intellectual training began, as we have seen, in Seville in 578, and this means it coincided with the renewal of the religious and literary disciplines—especially Qur'ānic learning. To what extent did he benefit from this revival? What if anything did he gain from the teaching of the great savants or 'ulama' of his time? What was his relationship with the religious dignitaries—the qādis and khatīibs? One possible way of arriving at answers to these questions is to examine the Ijāza he wrote to King Muẓaffar plus the chains of transmission given at the start of the Muḥādarat al-ʿabrār, and then to complete these sources of information with the various pieces of data scattered throughout the body of his work. But first of all there are a few points regarding these sources which require a little clarification.

Several passages in the Kitāb muḥādarat al-ʿabrār contain allusions to events and people dating from a period considerably later than Ibn 'Arabi's own time. This has led R. Hartmann, and subsequently Brockelmann, to deny Ibn 'Arabi's authorship of the work and attribute it to someone writing later than Dhahabi (d. 748/1342). In fact, however, it is simply a question of a few interpolations—only to be found in some editions—that have been inserted into a text the overall authenticity of which is beyond any doubt. Even a superficial reading of the Kitāb muḥādarat al-ʿabrār allows one to be quite categorical: Ibn 'Arabi is indeed its author. This is attested irrefutably by the many references to his spiritual teachers (Shams Umm al-Fugāra', Yūnus al-Ḥāshimi, Mawrūri, etc.), companions and disciples (Habashi, Qunawi's father, Abū l-Abbās al-Harrār), and by the information he provides about his birth, family, travels, encounters in Cairo and Jerusalem, about his correspondence with King Kaykā'ūs and about his poems (which are mostly to be found either in the Dīwān or in the Tarjumān al-aswāq). Certain details even enable one to establish that Ibn 'Arabi composed the work over a very long period of time. So, for example, at the start of the first volume of the Muḥādarat al-ʿabrār Ibn 'Arabi refers briefly to the reign of Caliph al-Nāṣir li Dīn-Allāh (d. 622/1225) and adds the following remark: 'He was granted allegiance on the 25th of Dhū l-qa'da 575, and now we are in Shawwāl, 8.

8. Ibid., p.187; cf. also J. Aguade, 'Some remarks about sectarian movements in al-Andalus', Studia Islamica 64, pp.53-79.
10. Cf. e.g. the Beirut edition of 1986, I. p.460, which contains a reference to Suyūtī (d. 911/1505) that is not to be found in the Cairo edition of 1906.
611—may God prolong his days—. But he clearly completed this statement quite a few years later, because he adds the information that in 623 Caliph al-Zahir was succeeded by al-Mustansir (d. 640/1242); ‘it is he who is the present ruler at the time that I am writing’ (huwa al-khalifah al-‘am hinsa taqaddadhh haddha). Al-Mustansir was caliph from 623 to 640 but, as the Kitab muhaddarat al-abrar is included in the Fihrist drawn up by Ibn ‘Arabi in 627h, we are able to conclude that he must have written it between 611 and 627h.

If there is no problem as far as the authorship of the Ijaza li l-Malik al-Muzaffar is concerned, we do have a problem with the identity of the person for whom it was intended. At the start of the text Ibn ‘Arabi specifies that he is addressing the certificate to a person called ‘al-Malik al-Muzaffar Bahah al-Din Ghazi b. Malik al-‘Adil’. A glance through any list of Ayyubid sultans reveals that there are only two candidates—both living during the same period—could have referred to by this name: either al-Malik al-Ashraf I Muzaffar al-Din Músá b. Malik al-‘Adil, who ruled first of all at Mayyafarīqin from 607 to 618 and then at Damascus from 627 until his death in 635/1238, or al-Malik al-Muzaffar Shihāb al-Din Ghazi b. al-Malik al-‘Adil, who reigned at Mayyafarīqin from 627 to 645/1247. O. Yahia equated the addressee of the Ijaza with the ruler of Damascus, and he is probably correct. Ibn ‘Arabi in fact specifies at the beginning of the text that he wrote this Ijaza in Damascus in 632h, which is when al-Ashraf has been the ruler of the city. There is also the fact that, whereas a reference in the Futuhat establishes Ibn ‘Arabi visited Mayyafarīqin at least once during his years of travels through the East, we know he no longer left Syria after 620; and yet in 632 al-Malik Muzaffar Shihāb al-Din was in Mayyafarīqin.

Before examining the Ijaza itself it is worth recalling that Ibn ‘Arabi was over seventy years old when he wrote this certificate, in which he mentions the masters whose company he used to keep—in the case of some of them for forty years previously. The passing of time, the author’s old age and a memory which—on his own admission—sometimes faltered, all help to explain a few slips and inaccuracies which crept in when he was recording the names of his teachers.
Ibn ‘Arabi and the Savants of Andalusia

hadith. This is hardly likely to surprise anyone who has read the Futūḥat. The space taken up in this work with quotations from the Qur’an and hadith (with a marked preference for Muslim’s Sahih in the case of hadith), Ibn ‘Arabi’s constant concern to base his teaching on scriptural foundations and his strict attachment to the Sunna (displayed especially by the wasīyā or ‘testimonies’ in the final chapter) all go to show the extreme importance in his eyes of a thorough study of the Qur’an and hadith: it was for this reason that he continued perfecting his knowledge in these areas throughout the rest of his life. So, in the East we see him following the teaching of Ibn Sukayna (d. 607/1210) whom he met in Baghdad, and of the qādī al-qādī or ‘judge of judges’ of Damascus, ‘Abd al-Samad al-Ḩarastānī (d. 614/1217), who transmitted to him Bukhārī’s Sahih, and also of Nāṣr b. Abī l-Faraj al-Ḩāshimi (d. 619/1222) who in Mecca taught him Abū Dāwūd’s Sunan.

And yet for Ibn ‘Arabi knowledge of the Qur’an and hadith was not something that could be reduced to a mere accumulation of often sterile erudition as in the case of the jurists or fuqahā’. Certainly there can be no accusing him of neglecting the isnāds or chains of transmission, and he was scrupulous in his respect for the utterance of the text (matn); but for him true knowledge of the hadith derived from the divine teaching (khayāt al-lāli) granted as a favour to the ‘saint-prophets’, al-awwalīya al-antiya—a term which he applied to the ‘most perfect of the saints’. Prophecy’, he writes, ‘is simply divine speech.’ This speech can manifest itself in various ways. Referring to the verse ‘It does not happen to any man that God speaks to him other than through revelation or from behind a veil or by sending him a messenger’ (Qur’an 42:51), Ibn ‘Arabi explains: ‘Revelation is either what He projects into the hearts of His servants without intermediary, making them hear it inside themselves, or what He tells the servant from behind the veil of some form or other through which He speaks to him . . . or what He says to him through the intermediary of a messenger . . . .’ Elsewhere18 he specifies that the difference between a prophet and a saint is that to a prophet the revelation brings legislation (al-wahy bi l-tashri’) whereas in the case of a saint it is simply a confirmation of the authenticity of what has been brought by the prophet. In this way the sahih conforms to the Law not just by imitation (taqlid) but as a result of an inner certainty (‘alā basīratin). According to Ibn ‘Arabi this is the meaning of the verse in which God makes Muhammad say, ‘I call to God in accordance with an inner certainty (‘alā basīratin)—both I and those who follow me’ (Qur’an 12:108). ‘Those who follow’ him truly are the heirs of the prophets (warāithat al-antiya), to whom God has shown the form of the Prophet (mażhar Muḥammad) receiving from the form of Gabriel (mażbar jibril) the divine discourse together with the legal statutes it contains—in just the same way that the companions saw Gabriel at the time of his dialogue with the Prophet on the subject of submission, faith and charity (islām, imān and ḥṣān). This, states Ibn ‘Arabi, is why a saint (wali) may validate a hadith which is adjudged apocryphal according to the usual criteria, and why he may on the other hand reject a hadith which according to these same criteria is considered authentic.19 ‘I myself have been the recipient in this way of many legal prescriptions (ghām) which were given by Muhammad and are acknowledged as forming part of his law by the doctors of the Law (ulama’ al-rusūm), even though up until that time I had had no knowledge of them whatsoever.’20

There are a good number of examples in Ibn ‘Arabi’s writings of this supernatural transmission of legal rules. Here are a couple: ‘As for myself, I saw the Messenger of God in a vision of good omen (ru’ya mubashshira), and in the vision he commanded me to raise my hands during prayer at the moment of the takbir of sanctification, when bowing and when straightening up from the bow’.21 Ibn ‘Arabi was later to discover that this ritual practice was recommended by hadiths which he did not know existed. On another occasion the Prophet told him that prayer can be performed in front of the Ka’ba at any time, although everywhere else there are times when it is prohibited. ‘I saw the Messenger of God when I was in Mecca. He showed me the Ka’ba and said: “You who dwell in this house, do not prevent anyone who has performed the circumambulations around it, regardless of the time of day or night, from praying in front of it regardless of the time of day or night, because from that person’s prayer God creates an angel which will ask pardon of him right up to the Day of Resurrection”.’22

As regards knowledge of the Qur’an, we have already seen that at a very early stage Ibn ‘Arabi had experienced the revelation ‘in a rain of stars’ (tanzil mu’jamān). But he also experienced the descent of the Qur’an in another and even more surprising form, as the following passage shows. ‘In a dream I saw a being who was one of the angels; he gave me a piece of agglutinated earth, free of any dust and bottomless in depth. When I was holding it in my hands I discovered that this piece of earth was none other than His word. “Wherever you find yourself, turn towards Him . . . thank Me and do not be ungrateful!”


21. Fut., I, p. 437. For the debates among the jurists about this particular practice see M.I. Fierro’s article, ‘La polémique à propos de raf al-jad’afr il l-sak bi dans al-Andalus’, in Studia Islamica 65, pp. 69–90.

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(Qur’ān 2:150–2). I was stupefied: I was unable to deny either that this was the very essence of these verses, or that it was also a piece of earth. I was then told: "This was the way in which the Qur’ān was revealed (or the way in which these verses were revealed) to Muhammad". At the same time I saw the Messenger of God, who was telling me: "This is how they were revealed to me (ḥakadha ʿunṣilat ʿalayya): experience it for yourself. Can you deny what you are witnessing?".23

TRAINING IN LITERATURE ACCORDING TO THE
KITĀB MUḤĀDARAT AL-ʿABRĀR

Or all of Ibn 'Arabi's writings, the Kitāb muḥādarat al-ʿabrar certainly has to be grouped among those that have elicited the least interest from specialists concerned with the study of his school. At first sight there is nothing to justify defining this particular work as 'esoteric'. The principal themes which it unsystematically deals with are isra'ilīyyāt (traditions relating to Jews and Christians), sermons, fables, proverbs and the history of the Ancients. This is how Ibn 'Arabi himself describes the work: 'I have included in this book—\which I have entitled ‘The Conference of the Pious and the Conversation of the Perfect’—rall kinds of literary stories (adab), sermons, proverbs, unusual anecdotes, chronicles of times gone by, the lives of the Ancients and of the Prophets, the history of kings both Arab and non-Arab, noble virtues, marvellous stories, traditions I have been told about the beginning of things and the creation of this world... as well as some talk which is entertaining and amusing while not serving to undermine religion...'.24 Here we are faced with a classic example of a book of adab—a literary work aimed at being instructive, funny and erudite all at the same time, and destined for a fairly broad readership of adabī, or literati.

It is worth pointing out in passing that spiritual teaching is not altogether absent from the work. Most often it remains just beneath the surface, but sometimes it emerges quite explicitly—as for example in the dialogue form. So it is that we come across Ḥādī Thālūṭ and ʿAbd Allāḥ Mawrūrī (later there will be more to say about this individual, who was a disciple of Abū Madyan and an intimate friend of Ibn 'Arabi) describing to the author a series of visions (waqqāʾ) which reveal the great masters of Sufism such as Dhu'l-Nūn al-Miṣrī, Junayd, Bistāmī and Ghazālī asking subtle questions of Abū Madyan such as 'What is true unity (tawḥīd),'# or 'What is the secret of the secret?'25 It would seem that, through the medium of a seemingly casual and informal book, Ibn 'Arabi was attempting to communicate some fundamental notions about Sufism to 'non-initiates'—and, as a result, reach a wider audience.

However, the chief interest of the Muḥādarat al-ʿabrar from our immediate point of view lies in the fact that it informs us with a fair degree of accuracy about Ibn 'Arabi's contacts with the literati of his time as well as about the extent of his own literary erudition.

All the people mentioned in this work—linguists, grammarians and poets—were the intellectual elite of the Almohad era, although there is a noticeable absence of any reference by Ibn 'Arabi to literati such as Ibn Hawūt Allāh (d. 613/1216) or Ibn Madā (d. 593/1196), to mention the names of just two men who were also among the most eminent representatives of literary life in the Islamic West during the twelfth century. The discussions and conversations which Ibn 'Arabi held with these people more or less constitute the oral sources that lie behind the Kitāb al-muḥādarat. But he was equally dependent on written sources, and he drew up a list of these in his preface. The titles of the works—approximately forty in number—give a good idea of the simultaneously religious and edificatory aim which Ibn 'Arabi had in mind when writing the Kitāb al-muḥādarat. For example, he mentions Ibn Jawwā's Kitāb ṣafwat al-ṣawāa, Qushayrī's Risāla, Sulami's Muqāmat al-awliyā', the Kitāb al-kāmil li-l-adab by Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Mubarrad, Ibn 'Abd Rabbihī's Kitāb al-ʿiqd, Jāḥīz's Kitāb al-maḥāsin wa l-addād, Abū Tammām's Kitāb al-hamāsā and Husrī's Kitāb zuhrat al-adab. Needless to say, in addition to these works he also mentions all the classics on the Sira and hadith. But it is clear nonetheless that the Shaikh al-Akbar had a special appreciation for 'profane' literature and also had certain affinities with literary circles. There is nothing at all surprising in this because, as we have already seen, during his time the majority of Andalusian Sufis also devoted themselves to adab; in this respect Ibn 'Arabi was very much a part of the period in which he lived. But if one reads carefully the stories and poems contained in the Kitāb al-muḥādarat, one perceives that he only took an interest in adab or made use of it either to the extent that this literature invariably contains a moral and is therefore the expression of a kind of universal wisdom, or because it represents an excellent educational tool. This emerges very clearly from the preface to the book, where—apparently to justify the 'futile' nature of the work— Ibn 'Arabi points to certain Andalusian Sufis, such as Ibn Muḥājir and his disciple Ibn Qasīm, who had made use of adab as well. Finally, the interest he shows in poetry is also to be explained as due to the fact that he himself was a poet. From the Diwān, through the poems written as introductions to each chapter

25. Cf. e.g. I, pp.173, 199; II, pp.14, 31, 148, 171, etc.
26. See Appendix 4.
of the Futūhāt, to the Tarjamān al-asbābūn, he wrote thousands of verses. For him poetry was an appropriate instrument for the transmission of certain essential truths. So it is that he addresses a warning to readers of the Futūhāt who might be tempted to ignore the verses that open each of the chapters: ‘Consider carefully the verses placed at the start of each chapter of this book, because they contain knowledge (kalām) which I have deliberately put in them. Indeed you will find in these verses things which are not mentioned in the exposition of the corresponding chapter’. Later we will see how Ibn ‘Arabi had a vision in which he saw an angel bring him the sura al-Shu‘arā’ (‘The Poets’) in the form of a parcel of light: it was as a consequence of this angelic descent that he composed one of his collections of poems, the Diwān al-ma‘ārif.

THEOLOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL TRAINING

As we have seen, in both the traditional religious and literary disciplines Ibn ‘Arabi’s erudition and training were generally speaking very broad and, as such, were fully in keeping with the culture and education of a twelfth-century Andalusian intellectual. Can the same be said of his acquaintance with speculative theology (kalām) and philosophy (falsafa)? What value did he attribute to these two branches of learning?

Firstly it is important to emphasise the fact that Ibn ‘Arabi’s initiation into works of a doctrinal nature—not only philosophical works but even works relating to tasawwuf or Sufism—happened relatively late. It was only in 586/1190, that is around twelve years after the commencement of his vocation, that he first became acquainted with Qushayri’s Risāla through the intermediary of his teacher Yūsuf al-Kūmi, even though this is among the most classic manuals of Sufism. ‘I had never heard anything whatsoever about Qushayri’s Risāla, or about any other work of a similar kind: I did not even know the meaning of the term “tasawwuf”’. He was soon to make up for this, at least in the sphere of tasawwuf. The historian Ibn ‘Abd al-Malik al-Marrakushi (d. 703/1303) informs us that he was even given the surname ‘al-Qushayri’, so devoted he was to reading the Risāla. And if we draw up a quick list of the authors on Sufism whom he refers to in his writings, we see that not a single one of the most famous of them is missing: Ghazālī, Tirmidhi, Niffārī, ‘Abd Allāh al-Anṣārī, Sulami, Qushayri, Muḥāṣibī, Abū Ṭalib al-

27. Fut., IV, p.21; cf. also II, p.665.
28. Cf. below, Conclusion.
32. Fut., I, p.36.
34. Fut., I, p.162; II, p.289; IV, p.52.
36. Ibn ‘Arabi cites Ghazālī very often. Cf. e.g. Fut., II, pp.103, 262, 289, 345; IV, pp.89, 106, 260, etc.
38. Risāla ilā l-Imām, p.4.
This meant that the opinions expressed by Ibn ‘Arabi sometimes agreed with the view held by the Ash’arites, sometimes with the view held by the Mu’tazilites; most often they were in agreement with both parties at once. And yet he explains that he arrived at his own conclusions by a completely different route. One particular example is the case of the hotly debated issue as to the Vision of God in the future life—an issue on which, as we happen to know, Mu’tazilites and Ash’arites were divided. According to Ibn ‘Arabi the Mu’tazilites are quite right (sadaqat al-mu’tazila) in denying the possibility of the Vision because all one’s gaze will be able to take in will be the Cloak of Divine Magnificence (rida’ al-kibriga’) and this ‘Cloak’ is the creation itself. Therefore we are that Magnificence in which the Divine Essence cloaks itself (nahmu ‘ayna al-kibriga’ ala dhatihi). One consequence of this is that in a sense all we will ever be able to see is ourselves. However, a few lines further on Ibn ‘Arabi states that the Ash’arites also have right on their side (fa sadaqa al-’ash’ari) in asserting the possibility of the Vision because the veil cannot help contemplating Him whom it veils (al-hijab yashhad al-mahjub).  

Ibn ‘Arabi adopts the same position with regard to philosophy (falsafa) as with regard to speculative theology. ‘The science of the philosopher is not totally in vain’, as he writes (al-faylasuf laya kulla ’ilmih bi batin). He clarifies and explains his point of view in chapter 226 of the Futuhat, which is concerned with the question of will (irada): ‘I reject reflection because it engenders confusion (talbis) and absence of verity (adam al-ṣidq) in the person who makes use of it. Furthermore, there is not one single thing that cannot be known through revelation (kashf) or spiritual experience (wujuj). Besides, to devote oneself to [speculative] reflection is a veil (hijab). There are those who question this, but no man of the Way denies it; only the people of speculative reflection and reasoning by induction (ahl al-nazar wa l-istikhal) claim to contradict it. And if there are a few among them [i.e. the philosophers] who experience spiritual states, such as Plato the Sage, that is something extremely rare; those individuals are comparable to men of revelation and contemplation.’

This means that in Ibn ‘Arabi’s eyes the only true philosopher, the only philosopher who deserves the name of ‘sage’ (hakim), here becomes a synonym for ‘ārif, gnostic), is he who endeavours to perfect his knowledge by means of contemplation and spiritual experience. The model for this type of philosopher is the man named by Ibn ‘Arabi in the passage just cited: the ‘divine Plato’ (Aflathin al-ilahi). The rest—those who rely only on their intellect...
Theological and philosophical training

with his hands. When the infidel saw that they did not burn him, he was surprised and placed them back in the brazier. Then [the man] said to him: "Now put your hand near the fire". He did so and burned himself ... The disbeliever was converted, and from that time onwards acknowledged [miracles].\(^{47}\)

The most famous of all the Andalusian philosophers whom Ibn ʿArabi met was Averroes; the reader will remember the account of their first encounter at Cordoba, when Ibn ʿArabi was a mere fifteen years old. In the same passage of the Futūḥāt\(^{48}\) he describes his second meeting (if one can use such a word in referring to an encounter that took place outside the physical world) at a later date with the man who wrote the great Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics. Subsequently I had the wish to meet him a second time. He was shown to me—God have mercy on him!—in a vision (wāqʿa), in a certain form. A light veil had been placed between him and me so that I could see him although he could not see me and was unaware of my presence. He was so absorbed that he paid no attention to me, and I said to myself: "This is not someone who is destined to follow the same path as me".

It emerges that Ibn ʿArabi distinguished clearly between two different types of philosopher. On the one hand there is the philosopher-infidel whose punishment in hell will, he declares,\(^{49}\) be to be afflicted by the same ignorance which had been the lot of the ignorant believer in this world (whereas, contrariwise, the believer will be rewarded in paradise with the knowledge which had belonged to the philosopher-infidel on earth). On the other hand there is the philosopher-believer, such as Averroes. Certainly he is superior to the first type, but his possibilities remain limited; he will never attain to the level of knowledge possessed by the wali or saint. The 'divine Plato' therefore remains an altogether exceptional case, and clearly Ibn ʿArabi knew of no one who was Plato's equal among his own contemporaries.

When reading Ibn ʿArabi's works one cannot help perceiving that his knowledge of philosophy was very superficial and, what is more, that he had no desire whatever to increase it. His reaction to a passage in The Ideal City by Fārābī (d. 339/950) gives a good idea of the sense of repulsion which philosophical language produced in him. I have seen an infidel (bāʾīd ʿāhl-
To this lack of knowledge of Arab philosophy we must add a blatant ignorance of Greek philosophy. Apart from a reference to the Sirr al-asrār by pseudo-Aristotle,54 which was a work that enjoyed an exceptionally large circulation in the Arab world, and another reference to Hippocrates' Book of the Elements,55 his allusions to Plato, Socrates or Aristotle are always very vague and it is quite clear that he had not read them.56 As for what he knew of Neoplatonism, we have already seen that he was basically indebted for it to the works of Ibn Masarra and to the Epistles of the Brethren of Purity.

Finally, it is worth emphasising that there is no reference or quotation to suggest that Ibn 'Arabi knew any other languages apart from Arabic and very probably Berber—which was commonly spoken in medieval Andalusia and was the mother tongue of several of his teachers. Consequently if (as R. Austin has proposed, although without being able to cite any specific source in support of his contention)57 he had some knowledge of Jewish philosophy and esotericism—and in particular of the Kabbala, which was blossoming in the Andalusia of his time—he probably acquired what he knew as a result of encounters with Jewish literati who spoke Arabic. So, for example, he relates a discussion he had one day with a Rabbi about the esoteric significance of the letter bā';58 from this particular episode it emerges that he knew that the Torah as well as the Qur'ān begins with this letter. However, although in his writings we certainly find a few rare and very general allusions to the Torah,59 they would seem for example not to contain any reference whatever to Maimonides' Guide of the Perplexed—a work written in 1190 and cited by Ibn Sab' in. The same comments apply to his knowledge of Persian literature. Through his Iranian friends and disciples—especially Qūnawi and Awhād al-Dīn Kirmānī (d. 635/1238)—he could not

Possibly we are to deduce from this that the work in question—which probably enjoyed a wider circulation than Asin Palacios suggests—was known by both of these titles.

54. Tadhrib il-aḥkām, ed. Nyberg, p.120.
55. Fut., I, p.56. Hippocrates' theory about the elements was known to the Arabs through the intermediary of Huṣayn b. Ishāq's work, Fī l-aqṣāmat 'aḥa'ar y dhāhāt (cf. GAL. I, p.369). Doubtless Ibn 'Arabi's reference is to this particular work.
56. Cf. e.g. Majāhilān, II, p.243, where he quotes a maxim attributed to each of these philosophers.
58. Fut., I, p.83.
59. Cf. e.g. Fut., II, p.261, where he states that the verse 'Do not say, I will do such-and-such a thing tomorrow without adding 'If God wills' (Qur'ān 18:2) is to be found in the Torah in the Hebrew language'. To my knowledge the only passage in the Old Testament which bears even a slight resemblance to this saying occurs in Ecclesiastes (Sir. 39:6), but the text in question is in Greek, not in the Hebrew language.
possibly have remained unfamilar with the works of the Shaikh al-Ishraq, who was executed at Aleppo in 587/1191. But a search through the corpus of Ibn ʿArabi’s writings for even the slightest reference to the *Hikmat al-Ishraq* or any other of Suhrawardī’s writings reveals nothing at all.

There are some who have attributed to Ibn ʿArabi an acquaintance with Indian literature, and have even gone so far as to ascribe to him the translation of a treatise on yoga called the *Amratkund* (*Kitāb hawā al-hayāt*) on the grounds that the text of this work is to be found in *majmuʿāt* or ‘compilations’ of some of his authentic writings. Recently I have seen a manuscript of this kind, dating from the nineteenth century and belonging to a private Moroccan collection. The ascription, as was shown by Massignon and later by O. Yahia, is quite clearly absurd. However, an article which has only recently been published testifies to the continuance of this legend down to the present day.\(^6\)

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5. God’s Vast Earth

*I AM THE QURʾĀN AND THE SEVEN SUBSTITUTES*

**When**, in Andalusia, I arrived at the Mediterranean sea—so Ibn ʿArabi tells his disciple Qunawi—‘I resolved not to make the crossing until I had been allowed to see all the internal and external states that God had destined for me until the time of my death. So I turned towards God with total concentration and in a state of contemplation and vigilance that were perfect; God then showed me all my future states, both internal and external, right through to the end of my days. I even saw that your father, Išāq b. Muḥammad, would be my companion, and you as well. I was made aware of your states, the knowledge you would acquire, your experiences and stations, and of the revelations, theophanies and everything else with which God was to grace you. I then went to sea, with insight and certainty as my possession. Everything was and everything is just as it was bound to be.’\(^1\)

In all probability it was in Algeciras (*jazirat al-khadrā*)\(^2\) that, in the year 589/1193, Ibn ʿArabi had this vision of his own future and the future of his disciples. The Andalusian port of Algeciras was linked with Ceuta by an endless stream of sea-trafic, facing it across the Strait of Gibraltar; the ‘green island’ of the Arab geographers, it is where Khadr is said to have gone with Moses to rebuild the wall of the two orphans,\(^3\) and it was certainly from here that the young shaikh set sail for the Maghreb for the first time in the year 589.

On his arrival in Algeciras he visited Shaikh Ibrāhīm b. Ṭarīf al-ʿAbsī,\(^4\) who

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4. Cf. *Fatwa*, I, p.67, where Ibn ʿArabi states that he met the shaikh at Algeciras in 589; also his biographical sketch of him in the Rūḥ, where he mentions that he met him twice in Algeciras.
GOD'S VAST EARTH

according to the author of Takmilat al-Fiqh, was a disciple of Abu l-Rabi' al-Malāqi (a member of the Almeydan school) and of Ibn Mūjahid before he himself became the teacher of Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Qurashi' (d. 591/1202).

Soon afterwards he landed in Ceuta and began his first tour of the Maghreb. He apparently stayed for a while in Ceuta itself—at least long enough to follow the teaching of three great muhaddiths who were living there at the time: 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥujari (d. 591/1194), who in Ramadan 589 transmitted to him Bukhāri’s Sahih; Ibn al-Sā'īdī (d. 600/1203), transmitter of Ibn Bashkuwāl and Ibn Quzman; and also a Sufi who according to Ibn 'Arabi had attained to the 'level of the Red Sulphur': 10 and finally Ayyūb al-Fihri (d. 609/1212), a disciple of Ibn Ḥubaysh and Ibn Bashkuwāl in the traditional religious sciences but also a companion of Abū Ya‘āqūb and Abū Madyan, who died a martyr in the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa. 11 Another person who attended these gatherings was the qādi or judge of Ceuta, Abū 'Ibārim b. Yaghmūr (d. approx. 609/1212). A bond of friendship was forged between him and Ibn 'Arabi, who praises him in the Futūhāt for his

and once in Ceuta together with his disciple Habashi (these last two meetings took place, as we will see later, in or around 594-5). See Rūh § 25, p. 114; Saffs of Andalusia, pp. 128-29; and Kitāb al-Asrāb, p. 3, in Rūh II, Hyderabad 1948.


10. Rūh, p. 123. Red Sulphur is an alchemical symbol and refers to the material capable of transforming silver into gold; this is the sense in which Ibn 'Arabi uses the term in the Taṣawwuf (al-ṭīfī) ed. Nyberg, p. 219. The expression is often used in Sufi vocabulary as a metaphor indicating the excellence of the spiritual level attained by a saint, or waqf; Ibn 'Arabi himself is often referred to by his disciples as khwāt al-ahmar. Sha‘rūī (d. 973/1565) used the expression as the title for one of the works he devoted to the teaching of the Shāfi‘ī al-Iḫbar (al-Ḵhwāt al-ahmar fi bāyān illām al-Shāfi‘ī al-Iḫbar), Cairo, 1369/1949, in the margin of the Yawqāt wa l-Yawqātī. The ‘red sulphur’ which—according to the quotation from the Kitāb al-ṭīfī used as the epigraph to this book—the pilgrim sets out in search of in ‘the city of the Messenger’ is none other than the ‘inheritance’ reserved for whoever attains to the Station of Muhammad.


I AM THE QUR’ĀN AND THE SEVEN SUBSTITUTE

exceptional integrity. 12 To him he represented the perfect example of a just governor: anger had no hold over him, and when he punished and applied the legal penalties prescribed by the shari‘a he acted solely out of obedience towards God and out of mercy towards the guilty party, who in this way was purified of his wrongdoing. This, Ibn ‘Arabi tells us, was how Abū ‘Ibrāhim behaved—a man ‘who wept abundantly, meditated intensely, practised dhikr unceasingly and reconciled enemies’. 13

Ibn ‘Arabi did not linger too long in Ceuta, and was soon continuing on his pilgrimage. His destination was Tunis—and specifically Shāfi‘ī Abū al-‘Azīz al-Mahdawi. The idea of making this visit had come to him quite suddenly. One day in 589, he explains in the Rūh, he set off from Seville and wandered along the western coast until he arrived at Rota, 14 where he performed the Friday prayer. It was there that he met for the first time Muhammad b. Ashraf al-Rundi, one of the seven substitutes (abādī). ‘He told me many things and promised me that I would meet him again in Seville. I stayed with him for three days, then left. He predicted to me in detail everything that was to happen to me after we separated, and everything came to pass as he had said. On my return to Seville, God put the idea into my head of going back to see him so as to gain benefit from his company. It was a Tuesday; I asked my mother’s permission and she gave it. The next morning there was a knock on the door. When I went to open it I found a man from the desert who asked me, “Are you Muhammad b. al-Arabi?” “Yes”, I replied. He went on to tell me: “While I was walking between Marchena and Puchena I met a man who inspired a reverential fear in me. He asked me if I was going to Seville and I said yes. Then he said to me: ‘Find the house of Muhammad b. al-Arabi; meet the man in person and tell him that his companion al-Rundi sends him his greetings. Tell him also that I counted on coming to see him, but that he will suddenly conceive the desire to go to Tunis. May he travel in peace and—God willing—he will see me when he returns to Seville’”. What he said did indeed come to pass, because the next day I left to visit you [i.e. Shaikh Mahdawi].’ 16

At the beginning of the Futūhāt 17 Ibn ‘Arabi states that he stayed twice at

12. Fut., III, p. 334. Ibn Yaghmūr was qādi of Fez, Ceuta, Valencia, Jādīn as well as other places. He disappeared in the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa (Nūr, pp. 99-100).


15. This small coastal town, not far from Cadiz, still exists today; in Ibn ‘Arabi’s time it had a mosque which was famous throughout Andalusia and had become a place of pilgrimage. Mārākūšī (Ma‘ṣīh, p. 228) writes that people came from every corner of Andalusia to pray in the mosque.

16. The Rūh al-quds—written in Mecca in 600—is addressed to Abū al-‘Azīz Mahdawi.

Tunis with Shaikh Mahdawi: first of all in 590/1194, followed by his return to Andalusia, and secondly in 598/1201, just before he left for Cairo never to return to the West. The accident at Rota must have taken place in 589, shortly before his crossing at Algeciras and his arrival at Tunis in 590H, because at the end of the passage quoted above Ibn 'Arabi writes that he subsequently returned to Seville where he met up with al-Rundi once again.

The account in the Rūḥ raises a question. If one fine morning Ibn 'Arabi left Seville to go and see al-Mahdawi, he must already have known of him by name and reputation. Who was it that told him about him? We are not in a position to give an exact answer to the question, but most probably he was told by one of the teachers associated with Abu Madyan—who was himself one of Mahdawi's teachers.

Between Ceuta and Tunis Ibn 'Arabi no doubt stopped off in Tlemcen—unless he only broke his journey there on his return. At any rate he stayed there in 590/1194,18 and it was there that he met the mystical poet Abū Yazīd al-Farazānī (d. 627/1230).19 During this same trip to Tlemcen he also made the acquaintance of a saintly man called Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Tartūsī,20 who during a discussion with Ibn 'Arabi evinced a critical attitude towards Abū Madyan. At once Ibn 'Arabi—whose veneration for Abū Madyan knew no bounds—formed an adversarial towards al-Tartūsī, but that same night he had a dream in which he saw the Prophet rebuke him. 'The Messenger of God asked me: "Why do you hate so-and-so?"' I replied: "Because he hates Abu Madyan!" He said to me: "Does he not love God and me?" I answered: "Certainly he does; he loves God and he loves you." He replied: "Why then do you hate him for hating Abū Madyan rather than love him for loving God and His Messenger?" I answered: "Messenger of God, I have committed an error and have been negligent. I now repent, and he is one of the people whom I love the most! You have warned me and counselled me." When I woke up I took some valuable clothes, climbed into my saddle, went to the man's house and told him what had happened. He wept and accepted the gift, and understood that the vision was a warning from God. His reservations about Abū Madyan vanished immediately, and he started to love him.21

The name of Tunis is almost inseparable from the name of the famous mosque Zaytūna, which was built in 114/732.22 However, in his Nuzhat al-mushfiq Idrisi (d. approx. 560/1165) does not even so much as refer to it: "The last-mentioned town [i.e. Tunis] is beautiful, surrounded in every direction by cultivated plains yielding wheat and barley as their principal produce . . . inhabited and visited by neighbouring populations and by foreigners from distant lands; it is encircled by solid earthen enceintures and has three gates. All the fruit and vegetable gardens are situated inside the city; outside it there is nothing worth mentioning . . . ."23

Did Ibn 'Arabi like the town? Clearly he did. because after his arrival in 590/1194 he stayed on for almost a year in the company of Shaikh 'Abd al-'Azīz Mahdawi and of Mahdawi's teacher. Shaikh Ibn Khamis al-Kīnānī al-Jarrāhī, who was another disciple of Abū Madyan and lived in the port. He [Shaikh Kīnānī] was a surgeon in Tunis. To go to see him I made the journey barefooted in spite of the intense heat, following the example of my two teachers Abū Ya'qūb and Abū Muhammad al-Mawrūrī who told me that this is how they had gone to visit him.24 A passage in the Durra al-fikhrīya reveals that a deep affinity and indeed complicity had rapidly become established between Muḥyī l-Dīn and Kīnānī. This eminent man was one of the shaikhs of Abū al-'Azīz al-Mahdawi, and yet Mahdawi did not know him in his full reality because the shaikh did not totally unveil himself to him . . . I remained in his company for a little less than a year. Before my departure he insisted that I say nothing either to 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Mahdawi or to anyone else about his true state. He also asked me not to give any more thought to it.25 Evidently Ibn 'Arabi—contrary to Mahdawi—was able to perceive Shaikh Kīnānī's true spiritual calibre. This is all the more significant because there is a passage in the Futūḥat which suggests the insight was reciprocal. In the preface to this work Ibn 'Arabi relates—in a tone which would seem to betray some bitterness—that at the time of his first stay in Tunis in 590H Shaikh Mahdawi manifested a certain coldness towards him: 'but', he adds, 'I forgave him because it was my outer state and the evidence of appearances which led him to do so. I had in fact hidden both from him and from his disciples what I really was by adopting an external manner of behaviour which was atrocious . . . .'26 He explains that one of the causes of this initial rejection to which Mahdawi and his entourage subjected him was the famous verses he recited to them one day when everyone was present, in

22. For details about the mosque cf. EP, s.v. Masjid.
which he declared ‘I am the Qur’ān and the Seven Substitutes’. Any assertion of this kind, in which the speaker identifies himself with the Divine Word, is obviously blasphematory by nature, and the statement by Ibn ‘Arabi just cited clearly indicates that it was not a question here of an ‘ecstatic pronouncement’ or shahid—uttered while in the grip of a condition of spiritual agitation—but of a kind of deliberate provocation aimed at concealing at least temporarily his state of ‘pure servanthood’ or ḍabāḍīyya. However, he further qualifies himself by adding a remark which shows that although his reciting of this scandalous verse was premeditated, the verse itself was nonetheless inspired and is in no way an expression of egoistic self-importance: ‘By God, of those verses that I recited there was not one single one which I did not hear as if I was dead . . . . In all that noble gathering there was nobody who perceived me [as I was in reality] with the exception of Abū ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Murābītī; but his perception was only very vague because he was still overwhelmed with confusion about me. As for the old shāhid Jarāḥ (God have mercy on him), we had revealed ourselves to each other, mutually and voluntarily, during a sublime meeting (qad takāshaṭtu ma’ahu ala niyyat fi ḍabāḍīyyu al-ʿaliyyat).’

Ibn ‘Arabi and Kinānī also had a friend in common: Khadrī. ‘I was in the port of Tunis, on a small boat at sea, when I was gripped by a pain in the stomach. While the other passengers slept I went to the side of the boat to look out at the sea. Suddenly, in the light of the moon which on that particular night was full, I caught sight of someone in the distance who was coming towards me walking on the water. As he drew level with me he stopped and lifted one foot while balancing on the other; I saw that the sole of his foot was dry. He then did the same with his other foot, and I saw the same thing. After that he spoke to me in a language which is unique to him; he then took his leave and went off in the direction of the lighthouse which stood at the top of a hill a good two miles away. It took him three paces to travel the distance . . . . Possibly he went to visit Shaikh Ibn Khamis al-Kinānī, one of the great masters of the Way who lived at Marsā ʿIdūn and from whose place I was returning on that particular evening.’

The reference to Shaikh Kinānī allows us to date this second encounter with Khadrī with complete certainty to 590H as opposed to 589H, which was the year of Ibn ‘Arabi’s second visit to Tunis. This is because in a small work written by Ibn ‘Arabi in 590H on his return from Tunis, he mentions Shaikh Kinānī, applies to him the formula of ṣarāḥbam (the formula for someone who has died) and specifies that he was buried at Marsā ʿIdūn. In other words Shaikh Kinānī died in 590/1194.

Mahdawi’s attitude to Ibn ‘Arabi in 590H is rather surprising, because although he distanced himself from this doubtless rather unusual disciple the opposite was not the case: Ibn ‘Arabi experienced a very real and profound veneration for the man. It was for him that he was later to write the Riqū al-qaṣṣad and undertake the composition of the Futūḥā haddiyya, in which he always refers to him as al-wali, ‘the friend’. But that is not all. Hardy had he returned from Tunis than he set to writing a small treatise addressed to the companions of Mahdawi and in particular to his own cousin Abū l-Ḥusayn b. al-ʿArabī, who was also a disciple of Mahdawi. This text, which has been recently published, contains a section devoted to enumerating the merits (manāqib) of Shaikh Mahdawi. In addition, Ibn ‘Arabi announces to his reader that he intends to write an independent work devoted entirely to the virtues (fasl il) of the Tunisian master. And finally, in the passage from the prologue to the Futūḥāt which was mentioned earlier Ibn ‘Arabi declares with regard to Mahdawi, his servant Ibn al-Murābītī, himself and Ḥabashī, ‘We were the four corner supports (arkān)—an obvious allusion to the four Pillars (awtād). But admittedly it was a question here of Ibn ‘Arabi’s second stay in Tunis, eight years later.

590/1194 was the year that began a long period of wandering for Ibn ‘Arabi in three-dimensional space. But it was also, and above all, the year of his simultaneous entry into what he calls ‘God’s Vast Earth’ (ard Allāh al-wāṣf/a. Qur’ān 4:97) and the ‘Realm of Symbols’ (manzil al-rumāz). He states that he entered this ‘Vast Earth’—a land which no geographer will ever be able to map—in his thirtieth year, and that from then onwards he never left and never would leave it. Sometimes he also refers to it as the ‘Earth of Reality’ (ard al-haqqat) and he devoted the whole of chapter eight of the Futūḥāt to it. It must be said that the idea of a world where ‘spirits are
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corporeally experience bodies spiritualised' is not unique to Ibn 'Arabi. We find it referred to by various names in earlier writers, and even in pre-Islamic traditions. Henry Corbin, in an important work which he devoted specifically to this subject, has brought together a number of sources of information and both translated and analysed texts written by several authors—including chapter 8 of the Futuhat. It will therefore be sufficient here just to sum up the essential details mentioned in this lengthy passage, while at the same time rounding them off with some further details taken from chapter 351 of the Futuhat—a source Corbin failed to make use of.

The Earth of Reality. Ibn 'Arabi explains at the start of chapter 8, came into being 'out of the surplus of clay from which Adam was created'; it is imperishable and immutable (bāqiyā la tafānā wa la tattabbadala). Everything that dwells in it possesses life and speech (ḥiyyī nātiq). Gnostics enter it in their spirit, not their body; in other words they leave their carnal envelope in this lower world. The earth in question is located in the barzakh—the intermediary world where spirits receive a subtle body. As Ibn 'Arabi writes: 'Every body in which spirits, angels and jinns clothe themselves and every form in which a man perceives himself while asleep is a subtle body belonging to that earth'.

In chapter 351 Ibn 'Arabi reveals a completely different aspect of this spiritual Earth: it is the Earth of those who have realised total servitude ("ubūdiyya) with regard to God. Servitude is complete and pure submission, in conformity with the very essence of the servant's nature (dāhiyya li l-sbhd) . . . It is only realised by those who inhabit God's Vast Earth, which contains both the contingent (hadith) and the eternal (iqām). This is the Earth of God; whoever dwells there has realised true servitude with regard to God, and God joins that person to Himself, because He has said, 'You My servants who believe, My Earth is vast, therefore worship Me' (Qur'ān 29:57), alluding in these words to the Earth of which I am speaking. I myself have been worshipping God in this place ever since the year 590, and we are now in the year 635. This Earth is imperishable and immutable; that is why God has made it the abode of His servants and the place of His worship . . . It is a spiritual Earth, intelligible and not of the senses (hiya arḍ ma' nawiyyya, ma' qāla ghayr mahsūsa) . . .

37. See previous note.

'I am the Qur'ān and the Seven Substitutes'

Another passage from the Futuhat allows us to conclude that the event in question here occurred in Tunis, at the same time as Ibn 'Arabi gained access to the Dwelling-Place of Symbols. 'This Dwelling-Place itself consists of a number of different Dwelling-Places, such as the Abode of Unity (manzil al-wahđāniyya), the Abode of the First Intellect, the Abode of the Sublime Throne . . . and the Abode of the Vast Earth. When I entered this Dwelling-Place, while staying in Tunis, I unconsciously let out a cry; not a single person heard it without losing consciousness. The women who were on the adjoining terraces fainted; some of them fell from the terraces into the courtyard, but in spite of the height they suffered no harm. I was the first to regain consciousness; we were in the course of performing the prayer behind the imām. I saw that everyone had collapsed, thunderstruck. After a while they recovered their own spirits and I asked them: 'What happened to you?' They answered: 'It's for you to tell us what happened to you! You let out such a cry that you have been the cause of what you see'. I said to them: 'By God, I had no idea I uttered a cry!'

As we can see, Tunis was an important stage in Ibn 'Arabi's journey. On the one hand it was during this prolonged stay in the city that he gained access to the Earth of Reality and in doing so 'realised' the state of total servitude. On the other hand, through his companionship with Kināni and Mahdawi for a period of almost a year his spiritual and doctrinal education was completed. But that is not all. In his huge Diwan Ibn 'Arabi states that it was in Tunis, in the year 590, that he came to know he was the Heir of Muhammad knowledge:

'Without any doubt at all I am the Heir of the knowledge of Muḥammad And of his state, both secretly and manifestly.
I came to know this in the town of Tunis
Through a divine command I received during the invocation (dhikr).
This happened to me in 590 . . .'

It was possibly during the course of this spiritual event that those verses came to his lips which were to scandalise Mahdawi and his disciples: 'I am the Qur'ān and the Seven Substitutes'. At any rate it seems clear that the 'revelation' in Tunis concerning his status as wārish, or Muḥammadan Heir, was linked with his entry into the Vast Earth of God.

41. Diwan, p.332; the rest of the verse is incomprehensible. We will come back later to the significance of this event.
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‘In every epoch there is one unique being thanks to whom that age attains its apotheosis. I am that being, through to the end of time.’

‘There is in fact no-one who, to my knowledge, has realised the station of servitude (maqâm al-‘ubâdiyya) better than I have, and if such a being exists he can scarcely be more than my equal because I have attained to the plenitude of servitude. I am the Pure and Authentic Servant; I have not the slightest aspiration to sovereignty (rubâbiyya).’

On his return to Andalusia in the same year, 590/1194, Ibn ‘Arabi was no longer the same person. Thirty years old, he had attained to his spiritual maturity and from this time onwards was capable in turn of training and teaching others. And yet his teaching was not simply destined for a few disciples gathered around him. The ‘Muḥammadan Heir’ was to address himself ‘to all nations’ thanks to a monumental corpus of writings, and to this period are to be dated the first texts in a long series of works which he was to continue writing until he died.

HEIR TO ABRAHAM

On his return to Andalusia Ibn ‘Arabi set sail from Qaṣr Maşmûda,43 the Moroccan port more commonly known as Ksar;44 situated on the southern shore of the Strait of Gibraltar about twenty kilometres to the west of Ceuta. It was linked with the port of Tarifa in Spain. In the middle of the night, as Ibn ‘Arabi tells us in the Durra, he boarded a boat at Ksar to go and visit Shaikh ‘Abd Allâh b. Ibrâhim al-Mâlâqi45 who lived in Tarifa. This Sufi—just like Shaikh Ibn Tarîf, with whom he was on close terms—was a disciple of Abû l-Rabi’ al-Mâlâqi, and he was famous for his futuwwa, or ‘heroic generosity’. According to Ibn ‘Arabi’s description of him in the Rûh, ‘He was always to be seen busying himself on someone else’s behalf—never for himself. He went to see governors and judges for the sake of other people’s affairs, and his house was always open to the poor’.46

From Tarifa, Ibn ‘Arabi continued on his journey until he came to Seville. There he visited for the first time—before leaving for the Maghreb, while he was still in Tunis—he had one day mentally composed a poem inspired by the sight of the Great Mosque (no doubt the Zaytûnâ mosque) and more specifically by the maqṣâra of Ibn Muthannâ. Ibn ‘Arabi had recited the verses to himself and for himself alone; they could not possibly have been known to anyone else—or at least so he thought. On his return to Seville he encountered a young man he had never seen before who recited to him word for word the poem he had composed in Tunis. Ibn ‘Arabi did not conceal his amazement. ‘I had not recited it to anybody! I asked him who had composed these verses, and he replied that their author was Muhammad b. al-‘Arabi. Then I asked him: “When did you learn them?”’ In spite of the long distance between Tunis and Seville he gave me the exact date on which I had composed them. “And who taught them to you?” He answered: “One evening I was in the eastern quarter of Seville, by the roadside together with a group of companions, when a stranger we didn’t know who looked like a pilgrim (sa’i) do passed close by us and came over to join our group. He talked with us for a bit and then recited these verses. As we found them pleasing we noted them down. We then asked him who had written them and he replied: ‘So-and-so’ (he told me his name). After that we pointed out to this man that we had no knowledge of any maqṣâra of Ibn Muthannâ in our own town. He replied: ‘It stands beside the Great Mosque in Tunis; that is where he has composed them—at this very instant!’ He then disappeared, and we were unable to understand who exactly he was or how he had managed to vanish right in front of our eyes . . .’ This happened in 590, and we are now in the year 635.47

Ibn ‘Arabi explains that this invisible person who had so indiscreetly listened in on his monologue was one of the men of ‘the Hidden World’ (rijûl al-ghâyib) who have the ability to listen to men without their being aware of the fact—regardless of whether they are talking at the top of their voice or silently within themselves—and then divulge whatever they happen to hear. It should, however, be pointed out that although Ibn ‘Arabi sometimes used the expression rijûl al-ghâyib very loosely—as is very common in Islam—he also gave it a more technical sense, applying it to one specific category of saints to whom he devotes a lengthy passage in the vast inventory he compiled at the start of the second volume of the Futûhât. ‘There are never more than ten of them; they are men of fear (khushû’î) and never speak except in a murmur (hamsan), because they are overpowered by the epiphany of the Merciful . . . They are the Hidden Ones (al-mastûrîn) and the unknown: God has hidden them in His earth and in His heaven. They speak only to Him, and contemplate nothing besides Him: “they walk on the tips of their toes

42. Fut., III, p.41.
43. Durra, § 26: Sufis of Andalusia, p.131.
44. It was also called al-Qaṣr al-sâghir to distinguish it from al-Qaṣr al-kabîr; cf. EI 3 s.v. Qaṣr al-sâghir.
45. Durra, § 26, in Sufis of Andalusia, p.131.
46. Rûh, § 26, p.120: Sufis of Andalusia, p.129.
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(hawāni) and when they are troubled by the ignorant their answer is 'Peace' (Qur'ān 2:5:3).

However, he adds further on that Sufis also apply the same expression rijāl al-ghayb in its broader sense to men who avoid being seen (such as in the case of Ibn 'Arabī's mysterious companion in the story told earlier on), also to pious and believing jinēs, and finally to beings who derive their knowledge and their sustenance from the invisible world, al-ghayb.

Shortly after Ibn 'Arabī returned to Andalusia his father died, leaving two daughters still unwed. The Rīsāla mentioned earlier, addressed by Ibn 'Arabī to his cousin, enables us to date his father's death with a fair degree of accuracy. In it he writes: 'Among the merits [of Shaikh Mahdawi] I will also mention the following. He sent for me one evening to ask me to accompany him to the baths (hammām), which was something I enjoyed very much. Among us that night was Shaikh Abū Muḥammad Jarrāh (God have mercy upon him)—a devout hermit who was the warden of the port, which is where he was eventually buried. When we arrived at the hammām [Shaikh Mahdawi] placed some towels in front of him and called the disciples up one by one. He covered each of them with two towels—one around their torso, the other around their waist—so that he could then undress them. When he had finished he did the same for me and for himself. He had used very long towels so as to hide our nakedness the better. We spent an excellent night in the shaikh's company and in the best possible state 'in a garden whose fruits will soon be ready' (Qur'ān 69:2:3), until the first third of the night had come to an end. We then went to his house and everyone performed their prayers (awrād) until the break of dawn. [In the morning] my father—may God have mercy upon him—asked me: "What happened with the shaikh in the hammām?" I told him what had happened; he was surprised and condemned behaviour of such a kind in these times and in this country.

The tarābhām formula, 'may God have mercy upon him', is traditionally spoken when referring to the dead; Ibn 'Arabī's use of it here on mentioning his father indicates that at the time of writing this Rīsāla—namely on his return from Tunis in 590/1194—his father had already died. On the other hand, this same text also reveals that his father was with him in Tunis in 590 at the time of the hammām incident. Furthermore, it is very probable that his father died in Seville, because we know from elsewhere that he spent his final moments in the company of his wife and two daughters. From these various pieces of evidence we can conclude that Ibn 'Arabī's father died in 590/1194, some time after they had been together in Tunis but before Ibn 'Arabī sat down to write the letter to his cousin on his return to Seville.

One point about which there is no doubt is that his father's death—which was apparently followed shortly afterwards by the death of his mother—was to turn Muḥyi l-Dīn's so far calm and peaceful existence upside down. An only son, he found himself head of the family, and from now on the duty of providing for his two sisters fell upon him. However, as we have seen, the young shaikh had made a vow of poverty. It was already a number of years since he had stripped himself of all his possessions, leaving it to God to care for meeting his needs. Asceticism of this kind was hard to reconcile with his new responsibilities. His family circle realised this immediately, and put pressure on him to return to the world and renounce the Path. Everyone individually contributed their own advice, and everyone together begged him to put an end to his eccentricities and start shoultering his responsibilities in the proper way.

These tests did not catch Ibn 'Arabī unprepared: years earlier he had been warned about them by his master, Shaikh Sāliḥ al-Barbari. In his own words: 'At this period I had only just started to follow the Way, and I had received the certain instructions of a spiritual nature which I had confided to nobody. The shaikh [al-Barbari] said to me: "My son, when you have tasted honey leave the vinegar! God has opened the Way to you, you must hold to it with resolution. How many sisters do you have?" I told him I had two. "Are they married?" I replied that they were not yet married but that the elder of the two had been promised to the emir Abū l-Alā' b. Ghāzin. "My child, know that this marriage will not take place. Your father and the man whom you speak of will die and you will be left alone to look after your mother and sisters. Your family will try to persuade you to return to the world so as to take care of them. Don't do what they ask you, and pay no attention to their words... If you listen to them, you will be abandoned in both this world and the other, and left to yourself".'

It was only some time later that the full significance of Shaikh Barbari's warning dawned on Ibn 'Arabī, during a retreat in Seville in the course of which he became the recipient of the Abrahamic heritage. . . . On the same night of this retreat I received the illumination (fatḥ) corresponding to the dhikr I was practising. Its light revealed to me what had so far been hidden from me. Next this revealing light was eclipsed and I said to myself: "This is the contemplative vision of Abraham" (hādhā mashhadun khali-

GOD'S VAST EARTH

Iyyum). I then knew that from this time onwards I was the Heir (wirth) of the community (umma) which God had commanded both us and His Messenger to follow in His utterance: “The community of your father Abraham: it is he who has called you muslimin” (Qur’an 2:278). I realised his quality of father (ubuwwatahu) and my quality of son (bunwuwaati). My master Sāliḥ al-Barbari had said to me at Seville: “My child, beware of tasting vinegar after tasting honey!” I now understood what he meant. 55

In line with Ibn ‘Arabi’s notion of wirtha or inheritance, as it was explained earlier, to ‘inherit’ from the prophet Abraham means to realise the mode of contemplation of the Divine Presence that is unique to him. But it also means becoming endowed with the character traits that define his particular spiritual type as described in the revelation of the Qur’an, which emphasises his clemency and compassion. Muhīyī l-Dīn was to receive confirmation of this many years later during his stay in the haram or sacred precinct at Mecca, when he was in the process of composing a chapter of the Futūhāt in front of the maqām Ibrāhīm, or ‘station of Abraham’. Traditionally this term maqām (‘station’) refers to the stone Abraham climbed onto to help his son construct the Ka’ba; but here, as we will see, it is given a deeper meaning. ‘Know that while I was in the process of writing these lines, near to the maqām Ibrāhīm . . . I was overcome by sleep and I heard one of the spirits of the Supreme Pleroma announce to me on God’s behalf: “Enter into the maqām Ibrāhīm”—a maqām which for him consisted of being compassionate (awwah) and clement (halim). Then he recited to me the verse, “Certainly, Abraham is compassionate and clement” (Qur’an 9:114). I then understood that God would necessarily give me the strength which accompanies clemency, because one can only manifest clemency in relation to the person one dominates. I also knew that God was sure to test me by means of slanderous accusations that would be spoken against me by people towards whom I would be obliged to show clemency even though I had power over them, and that I would be heavily afflicted, because God used the word halim, which is the form of the intensive. Furthermore, Abraham has been described as awwāh, which is a word that strictly applies to someone who sighs a great deal because of his perception of the Divine Majesty and because of his powerlessness to render glory to that Majesty. For a contingent being is incapable of exalting and glorifying the Divine Majesty as It deserves. 56

Shaikh Barbari had seen correctly. Some time after he had given his warning, the emir who had been promised to Ibn ‘Arabi’s sister died. His death was followed a few years later by the death of Ibn ‘Arabi’s father in 590/1194. In Ibn ‘Arabi’s own words: ‘The time arrived when my family came looking for me to reproach me for failing to look after my sister’s needs. Next my cousin came to see me, and with much thoughtfulness and consideration begged me to return to the world for the good of my family’. 57

Ibn ‘Arabi had not forgotten Shaikh Barbari’s words, and refused to yield. For him there was no question of changing his mode of existence or renouncing siyāha: those long periods of wandering across Andalusia, far from the great cities and the crowds. As he was to write later in the Futūhāt: ‘siyāha consists of travelling across the earth to meditate on the spectacle of the vestiges of centuries gone by and nations that have passed away’. 58 To a certain extent it is true to say that for the greatest part of his life—that is, up until the time when he settled permanently in Damascus—Ibn ‘Arabi never stopped practising siyāha, firstly in the West and then in the East. In his case at least, these wanderings were also made for the purpose of meeting the saints of his time as so to profit from their baraka and their knowledge, and for the purpose of gaining first-hand acquaintance with the various categories of spiritual men whom he was subsequently to describe in his writings so vividly.

As we saw earlier, one of these periods of wandering brought him into the company of one of the seven abdāl: Ashraf al-Rundi. This time, in 590/1194, they led him to his third encounter with Khadir and to a meeting with a man whose rank was even higher. Some time later [i.e. after the second encounter with Khadir in Tunis] I set off on a journey along the coast in the company of a man who denied the miraculous power of the saints. I stopped off in a ruined mosque to perform the midday prayer together with my companion. At the same moment a group of those who wander remote from the world entered the mosque with the same intention of performing the prayer. Among them was the man who had spoken to me at sea and whom I had been told was Khadir; there was also another man of a high rank who was hierarchically superior to Khadir (akbar minhu manzilatun). I had already met him previously, and we had become bound by ties of friendship. I got up and went to greet him: he greeted me in turn and expressed his joy at seeing me, then he moved forward to direct the prayer. After we had finished the prayer the imām started to leave: I followed him as he moved towards the door of the mosque, which faced to the west and looked out over the ocean in the direction of a place called Bakka. 59 I had just started talking with him at the

57. Durra, in Sufis of Andalusia, p.75.
59. No doubt the reference is to Wādi Lago (nowadays Rio Barbate), a place mentioned by
door to the mosque when the man whom I said was Khadjir took a small prayer rug which was stored in the mihrab, stretched it out in the air seven cubits above the ground and got onto it to perform the supererogatory prayers. I said to my travelling companion: "Do you see that man and what he is doing?" He asked me to go over and question him. So I left my companion and went over to see Khadjir. When he had finished his prayers I greeted him and recited some verses to him... He said to me: "Only did this for the sake of that unbeliever!", and he pointed to my companion who denied the miracles of the saints and, sitting in a corner of the mosque, was watching us... We then left for Rota."

So who was this person who was superior to Khadjir, whom Ibn 'Arabi had already met and with whom he had forged bonds of friendship? He must surely have been either the Pole (quth) or one of the two Imams who are question of superiority only arises with regard to the function performed; as far as the actual spiritual level of the afrad or 'solitary ones'—and that includes the 'pillars'—is concerned, they are equal to the Pole.) Perhaps then we should read this account in the light of another passage in the Futuhati where Ibn 'Arabi declares that during the course of his wanderings (fi bar di sijahati) he had met and seen with his own eyes the Imam of the Right, who among his other duties is responsible for training the afrad."

In spite of his prolonged absences and in spite of the family tensions that affected him Muhji l-Din found the time to compose two treatises during the months following his return from Tunis. These writings from the period of his youth are the Kitab mashhad al-asrar al-qudsuya ('The book of the contemplations of the most holy secrets') and the risala addressed to the companions of Mahdawi which has already been referred to a number of times in the past few pages. This risala, edited and published without any title

Arab geographers as being close to Wadi Bakka or Wadi Lakka: the famous battle which decided the fate of Spain in 92/711 was fought just offshore from it. The precise orthography and location of the place have given rise to a whole controversy: cf. Lévi-Provençal, Histoire de l'Espagne musulmane, I, pp. 20-21 and, for Wadi Bakka, Doxy, Recherches, 1, pp. 305-7. If this is the place in question Ibn 'Arabi was very roughly half-way between Tarifa and Rota, which was indeed the town he was heading for.

60. Fut., I, p. 186.
62. Ibn 'Arabi uses the verb sijahna to describe his meeting in physical mode with the Imam of the Right, and to distinguish it from his meeting in subtle mode (fi mashhad barzakh) with the Imam of the Left.

by Dr. Taher in 1985 from one rather late manuscript, would seem at first glance to correspond to numbers 625 and 626 in Osman Yahia's General Repertory. In other words it is a case of the same work known under different titles, composed—as Ibn 'Arabi states at the start of the text—in 590/1194 on his return from Tunis for the benefit of Mahdawi's companions, and more specifically for his cousin Abú l-Husayn b. 'Arabi. From the point of view of the themes discussed in it and the ideas it develops, this risala seems also to be identical to number 632 in the General Repertory, which is entitled al-Risala fi l-nabuwwa wa l-walaya. To simplify matters I will give the text published by Dr. Taher the title Risala fi l-walaya, because walaya or sainthood is its chief subject as well.

But here things become complicated. In his descriptive comments on the Kitab mashhad al-asrar (number 432 in his Repertory), O.Yahia notes on the basis of Ibn 'Arabi's own statement in the preface to the treatise that it too was written in 590, for Mahdawi's companions and in particular for his cousin. In other words, every point of detail here is identical to what we find stated at the start of the Risala fi l-walaya. Is this just a coincidence? Before accepting such a convenient solution to the problem we need to examine the facts a little more closely. To begin with, one notes that in the Mashhad Ibn 'Arabi refers to his Tahbirat iltiyya, to the Kitab lawami al-anwar and to the Kitab al-hikma by Ibn Barrajjan—three works which are also referred to in the Risala. And that is not all. In the preface to the Mashhad Ibn 'Arabi reveals his intention of devoting a work to Shaikh Mahdawi's merits (manaqib); as was mentioned earlier, we find the same plan laid out in the Risala fi l-walaya. Finally, although the editor of the text seems not to have been aware of the fact, the last pages of the Risala are directly and very obviously related to the Mashhad. In the pages in question Ibn 'Arabi justifies his use of expressions which are liable to scandalise the reader, such as 'aqla li l-haqq' ('God said to me'), 'qultu lahu' ('I replied to Him') and 'ashhadami al-haqq' ('God made me contemplate'). These expressions never occur in the Risala fi l-walaya, and yet they are virtual leitmotifs featuring on every page of the Mashhad. Furthermore, Ibn 'Arabi specifies that by expressing himself in this way he is simply imitating some of his predecessors such as the author of the Mawaid (zähid al-mawaid). Niffari (d. 354/963). But while the structure of the Kitab mashhad is certainly reminiscent of the structure of Niffari's Mawaid, the same cannot hardly be said of the Risala. In other words far more is involved here than mere coincidences.

What are we to deduce from all these details? Two hypotheses present
knowledge with which they are favoured and which both induce and authorise them to express themselves in a manner usually reserved for the prophets because, as in the case of the prophets, they have become privileged in being able to speak with God. In the text of the Kitāb mashāhid al-āsrār itself Ibn Ḥarūn turns so to speak from words to action: in an allegorical style reminiscent of Nāṣirī’s Mawāqif he describes a series of ‘abodes of contemplation’, each of which represents a face-to-face encounter with God.

At any rate, the Kitāb mashāhid al-āsrār would seem not to have been the first of Ibn Ḥarūn’s writings because it contains a reference to another work—the Kitāb al-qalībāt al-ilāhiyya—which will necessarily have been written earlier, either before 590/1194 or in the same year. But here again things become complicated, and any attempt to arrive at a precise dating as the basis for a chronological classification of his works turns out to be a perilous enterprise. Ibn Ḥarūn specifies at the start of the Tadhkirat that he wrote this voluminous work in a period of four days, at Moron (Mawrūr)—a town not far from Seville—in Andalusia, and especially for Abū Muhammad al-Mawrūr.68 He also refers in it to several other of his works—which will therefore already have been written at the time69—including the Kitāb insin’ al-jadāwīl. However, if we turn to Osman Yahia’s Répertoire Général we find that this same work (also known by the title insin’ al-dawā’ir) was written in 598/1193. Yahia bases his dating of the composition of the insin’ al-dawā’ir on a passage in the first volume of the Futuḥāt; but what exactly does Ibn Ḥarūn say in the passage in question? Addressing himself to Shaikh Mahdawi he writes as follows: ‘You already know [the chapter] on the cause of the beginning of creation (sabab b’d al-‘ālam) which is contained in my book called al-‘Anqū al-ma’dhīrīb . . . and in my book called insin’ al-dawā’ir, part of which I wrote (alladhi allā‘an b’dallahu) at your home during my visit in 598 . . . I took it with me to Mecca to finish it off but this book [i.e. the Futuḥāt] prevented me.’70 Furthermore, at the start of the insin’ al-dawā’ir the author specifies that he has written the work for ‘Abd Allāh Bāḍ ar-Ḥabashi; and yet we only see this companion of Ibn Ḥarūn’s first appearing in his life in the year 594/1198, at Fez.

All this gives us grounds to suppose that, if it is true that in some instances

65. I am referring here to the only manuscript I have been able to consult: Bibliothèque Nationale 6104, fols. 1–28b.
66. Kitāb al-najāt min huṣab al-ṣittibāb fi sharh mushkil faw‘i’d min kitābāy al-‘asrār wa l-mashāhid (ms. Faṭḥī 5122, fols. 165b–214b), fols. 172a. In the preface Ibn Sawdakin describes the circumstances which led to him writing this double commentary under Ibn ‘Arabi’s dictation (mīdān an’ al-shahākh al-‘alām).
67. In Fut., l. p.221, Ibn Ḥarūn cites this same statement as a hadith of the Prophet. No hadith of precisely the same form is to be found in the canonical collections, but it does occur in the variant form ‘The learned are the heirs of the prophets’. Cf. Bukhārī, *ibn.,* 10; Ibn Mājā, muqaddima, 17.
68. Tadhkirat ilāhiyya, ed. Nyberg, p.120.
69. The treatises in question are the Kitāb jāh al-quāid. Manāhīj al-irshād. al-Muḥaddathāt (three texts which have apparently disappeared: cf. O. Yahia, Répertoire Général § 5), the kābīl al-ma‘nā . . . (unpublished, but manuscripts of it survive: Répertoire Général § 181), and the Kitāb matshā al-anwār al-ilāhiyya—a title that is strangely reminiscent of the full title of the Mashāhid, which is Kitāb mashāhid al-āsrār al-qubūlayya wa masūlī al-anwār al-ilāhiyya.
70. O. Yahia, Répertoire Général § 289.
71. Fut., l. p.98.
Ibn ‘Arabî composed his works ‘all of a piece’ and over a short period of time.23 There were also other instances where—on the contrary—the composition stretched out over a period of several years, thereby explaining the sometimes contradictory chronological allusions which we often encounter. What is more, even in the first case (the case of works completed in a single sitting) we see Ibn ‘Arabî returning to and amending texts years afterwards; this was the case for example with the Mawâqîf al-nujûm, as we will see later. In these circumstances it is quite impossible to assign a precise date to the actual commencement of his activity as an author, or to determine which of the works that can safely be ascribed to the period of his youth was the first to be completed in its entirety. Until further notice, as it were, the best we can do is to take stock of the various pieces of information that all seem to point to the same conclusion, which is that the period of his thirtieth year was a decisive time; a time when his spiritual magistracy began to manifest itself externally and also the time when the enormous literary production which he has bequeathed to us began—apparently in a very rapid rhythm. We find in these early works all the major themes which much later on were to be organised and synthesised in the Futûhât, already conveyed with an authority deriving from a vast learning but above all from a wealth of inner experience.

The little that we know about the person to whom the Tadhibrât were addressed illustrates once again the ambivalence of Ibn ‘Arabî’s relationship to the Sûfîs he knew. A disciple of Ibn Saydâbûn, of Shams Umm al-Fuqarâ’ and above all of Abû Madyan (who greatly admired him), Mawrûrî was perhaps himself one of Ibn ‘Arabî’s teachers. However, it is difficult to be certain about the matter because the references to him are in this respect contradictory. According to the story in the Futûhât,23 Mawrûrî became the disciple of Ibn ‘Arabî because one day he had had a vision of his dead brother who said to him, ‘Only he who knows his Lord can see Him’. ‘So’, Ibn ‘Arabî writes, ‘he came to visit me in Seville and told me his vision. He then explained to me that he had come to see me because he wanted me to give him the knowledge of God. He stayed in my company until he knew God as far as it is possible for a contingent being to know Him’. In this passage Ibn ‘Arabî refers to Mawrûrî as ‘sâhibhûnû’, ‘our companion’. However, in the same volume of the Futûhât, in a chapter concerned with the Poles and their stations,24 the Shaikh al-Akbar relates how he saw in a dream that the Pole of

tawakkul, or abandonment to God, was ‘Abd Allâh al-Mawrûrî, and that he met him and was his companion (‘ayantuhu wa sahîtuhu). Similarly, in the Durrat al-fâkhira he states again that for a period of time Mawrûrî kept his company,25 but in the Rûh he states the opposite: ‘I visited him and profited from his company’ (‘âshartuhu mu’âsharatan wa intâfu’tu bihi).26 Perhaps these apparently irreconcilable statements are to be understood as indicating that the relationship between Ibn ‘Arabî and Mawrûrî was similar for example to his relationship with Shaikh Abû Ya’qûb al-Kûmi, who was simultaneously his disciple and his master.

75. Durrât, § 14, in Sûfîs of Andalusia, p. 108.
6. Fez

While Ibn 'Arabi—apparently indifferent to the rumblings of war—was devoting his time now to *siyāha* or wanderings, now to the composition of his works,1 the population of Seville lived in the fear and distress caused by the repeated assaults from Castile. Once the truce signed in 586/1190 had expired. King Alfonso VIII decided to resume fighting against the Almohads. In 590/1194 he bathed the whole region of Seville in fire and blood.2 Increasingly worried, the people of Seville sent emissaries to Marrakech to request help from the sultan. Abu Yusuf Ya'qūb immediately assembled his troops and marched towards Seville, arriving eventually on the 20th of Jumādā II 591/1195.3

When the Almohad reinforcements arrived in Seville Ibn 'Arabi himself happened to be in Morocco—in Fez, to be precise. 'I was in Fez in 591 when the Almohad armies disembarked in Andalusia to confront the enemy that was seriously threatening Islam. It was there that I encountered a man of God, one of my best friends, who asked me: 'What do you think of this army? Will it win a victory this year?' I turned the question back on him: 'What do you think yourself?' His answer was: 'God has spoken about this battle, and He promised the Prophet victory in this very year. He mentioned it to him in the Book He revealed to him when He said: 'In truth We have given you a resounding victory' (Qur'an 48:1). The good news is contained in those two

words, 'resounding victory' (*fathān mubīnān*). Examine carefully the sum total of the numerical value of the letters'. I counted them up and found that the victory would indeed occur in 591. I had barely returned to Andalusia before God gave victory to the Muslims'.4

The Almohads certainly won the day. Approximately two months after their arrival in Seville, they annihilated the troops of Alfonso VIII at Alarcos5 on 8 Sha'ban 591/1195; a date the Castilians were not easily to forget. There is no doubt that the Arab chroniclers exaggerated the importance of the victory, which did not exactly change the course of history. However, from this time onwards Castile no longer dared measure itself against Ya'qūb, and the Andalusians knew peace—at least for a few years.

The town of Fez—wrote Idrīsī (*d. 560/1165*)—'has many houses, many palaces and many trades. Her inhabitants are industrious, and their architecture—like their industry—has an air of nobility. There is a great abundance of all kinds of staples and provisions. Wheat in particular is cheaper there than in any neighbouring region. Fruit production is substantial. Everywhere one looks one sees fountains topped by cupolas, water reservoirs with arches and decorated with sculptures, and other beautiful things. The surrounding neighbourhoods are well supplied with water, which gushes in abundance from a number of springs and makes everything look green and fresh. Gardens and orchards are well cultivated, and the inhabitants are proud and independent.'6 Apart from being an important commercial crossroads (thanks largely to its privileged geographical location), Fez was also an intellectual and religious centre which enjoyed considerable prestige—especially during the time of the Almohads. Poets and literati came from all parts of the Almohad Empire to practise their crafts: many *ulamā* from Andalusia as well as the Maghreb met there to carry on their disputes. More discreetly and not quite so loudly, Sufis arrived in search of a master or so as to be able to do their practices in favourable surroundings. No doubt Ibn 'Arabi was one of them—unless we follow Dominique Urvoy in preferring to suppose that it was the 'instinct to flee' which drove the young shaikh to leave Andalusia for Fez at exactly the same time that Castile was threatening the impending destruction of Seville and the surrounding region. Urvoy speaks of Ibn 'Arabi in the following terms: 'While the instinct to flee seems to have been all that counted for him—returning to Andalusia when he thought victory over the Christians had been won but then leaving again

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1. After the *Kitāb musahhid al-asrār* and the *Risāla fi l-musābaqa* (if, that is, one insists on considering them separate works—which is hardly justified). Written in 590, Ibn 'Arabi produced the *Kitāb tahdhib al-ahliya* in 591/1195 (cf. *Fat. IV*, p. 449; O Yahia, R.G., S. 745). The work published under this title at Cairo in 1228 is not by Ibn 'Arabi but by Yahyā b. 'Adī (cf. the article by K. Samir in *Arabica* XXI, 2, June 1974, pp. 111–19 and XXXI, 2, June 1979, 158–78).
FEZ

when he realised he had been mistaken...17 However, this interpretation of events would seem to be somewhat fragile. Firstly, the extract from the Futūḥāt quoted at the start of this chapter shows quite plainly that Ibn ʿArabi returned to Andalusia before the battle of Alarcos and its successful outcome for the Muslims—although according to what he himself says he admittedly knew about the Almohad triumph in advance. And secondly, he left Andalusia again in 593/1196, when the Christian threat had—at least provisionally—been removed, and returned in 595/1198. In fact it proves very difficult to establish any correlation between Ibn ʿArabi’s journeys to the Maghreb and the course of historical events: between 589 and 597 he was continually crossing backwards and forwards across the Strait of Gibraltar. Instead, it would seem to have been the case that the reasons behind this particular departure for Fez were more of a domestic and spiritual nature. On the one hand, the journey gave Ibn ʿArabi the opportunity to escape for a while from the pressure his relatives were exerting on him to convince him to ‘return to the world’. On the other hand, Fez was the citadel of Moroccan Sufism: it was there that Abu Madyan had chosen to pursue his training, and it was there that he had met his two masters, Abu ʿAbd Allāh al-Daqqāq and Ibn Ḥirzīh (d. 559/1165). Certainly Ibn ʿArabi knew neither of these men himself, but it is very probable that he kept the company of their disciples and through them received their teaching orally. At the very least we do know that during his first stay in Fez he met the muḥaddith Muḥammad b. Qāsim b. ʿAbd al-Rahmān al-Tamīmī al-Fāṣi (d. 603/1206). According to Ibn Abībār—which expresses some reservations about his abilities as a transmitter (rāwī)9—Muḥammad b. Qāsim spent fifteen years in the East, where he met the famous Abu Tahir al-Sīwāfī (d. 578/1182). But this man was no ordinary muḥaddith. He was also a Sufi—one of those Sufis who were to transmit the khīra to Ibn ʿArabi. Furthermore, he is noted not so much for transmitting hadīth to Ibn ʿArabi as for handing down to him traditions (akhbār) about the saints of Fez—especially about Abu ʿAbd Allāh al-Daqqāq. He left a record of these akhābār in one of his works, the Kitāb al-mustafād fi dhikr al-sāliḥīn... fi madinat, which Ibn ʿArabi studied under his guidance.10

Ibn ʿArabi also formed friendships with two other notable Sufis, Abu ʿAbd Allāh al-Mahdawī (not to be confused with Abu al-ʿAzīz Mahdawi) and Ibn Tākhīmīsh. Regarding Abu ʿAbd Allāh al-Mahdawi, who died at Fez in 595/1198, Tādiṭī tells us that he saved the population of the town from famine by distributing wheat to everyone, and that he spent forty years in the Great Mosque seated facing towards the qibla.11 Ibn ʿArabi for his part confirms that Abu ʿAbd Allāh al-Mahdawī was one of the malāmīyya12 and that he belonged to the spiritual category of ‘men of ardent desire’ (ahl al-istīḥyāq). These men—who are never more than five in number—are the men of the five obligatory prayers. ‘Each of them fully realises one of the five obligatory prayers... It is through them that God maintains the existence of the world. Their verse in the Book is: “Observe the prayers, and the middle prayer” (Qur’ān 2:238). They never cease praying, either during the night or during the day. Sāliḥ al-Burbarī, whom I knew and whose companion I was until the time of his death, was one of them, as was Abu ʿAbd Allāh al-Mahdawī of Fez, whose companion I was as well’.13 In addition, he notes in the Rūḥ al-qāʿīd14 that for sixty years Mahdawi never turned his back to the qibla—a detail corroborated by the account in the Tashawwuf.

As for Abu ʿAbd Allāh Ibn Takhīmīsh (d. 608/1211)—who according to Tādiṭī saved the passengers of a boat from shipwreck simply by his presence15—Ibn ʿArabi describes him too as being a malāmī, who was believed by his contemporaries to be one of the ābdāl or ‘substitutes’.16

During one of his stays in Fez—perhaps the one in 591—Ibn ʿArabi also met an eminent representative of kalām, or speculative theology, Ibn al-Kattānī (d. 597/1200).17 And became involved in a debate with him over the divine attributes. This was a thorny issue, and one that led to a great deal of ink being spilt by Muslim theologians. Some denied the existence of divine attributes as distinct from the Divine Essence; others taught tashbih, anthropomorphism; while yet others—the Asḥārites—admitted the existence of divine attributes as distinct from the Divine Essence but held that these attributes possessed no reality apart from Essence. Ibn ʿArabi states his own position clearly at the beginning of the Futūḥāt: ‘To say that God is Knowing, Living, Powerful and so forth: all this is a matter of relationships (nisāb) and assignations (kāfāt) with regard to Him and not of distinct essences (wujūd), because that would amount to qualifying the Divine Essence with imperfection. Indeed whatever is perfect through the addition of something is imperfect in its essence with regard to the perfection deriving

16. Rūḥ, §27, p. 121; Sufis of Andalusia, p. 322; Fut., III, pp. 15. 34.
17. For this famous theologian cf. Tākh., ed. Codera, §1062; Tashawwuf, §165, p. 335 and the introduction, p. 16.

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from this addition. But He is perfect in His very Essence. Consequently it is impossible to add something separate to His Essence, but it is not impossible to attribute to Him relationships and assignations. As for the person who declares that these attributes are not His and yet at the same time are not other than Him—that is a totally mistaken assertion..." 18 This last thesis was the one upheld by Muhammad Ibn al-Kattānī. At Fez I saw Abū 'Abd Allāh Ibn al-Kattānī, who was the representative in his time of the speculative theologians (mutakallimīn) in Morocco. One day he questioned me about the divine attributes, I gave him my opinion on the matter and then asked him what he thought: "Do you agree with the declared view of the mutakallimīn"? He replied: "I will tell you my opinion. As far as I and my colleagues are concerned it is impossible not to assert the existence of an adjunct (zdā'īd) to the Essence, which is called an attribute (ṣifā'ī). However, we declare that this adjunct is not His and yet is something other than Him..."." I replied to him: "Abū 'Abd Allāh! I will say to you what the Messenger of God said to Abū Bakr about his interpretation of the dream: you are partly right, partly wrong!" 19 He was like someone whom God sends to his ruin in spite of his learning. That is not to call his faith into question—only his intelligence. 20

In 591/1195 Fez—like Tunis and like every other city where he stayed for any length of time—became for Ibn 'Arabi a stage on which a number of visionary events were acted out; although they were not quite as decisive as the ones he was to experience there two years later, they are just as indicative of his spiritual progress. First of all, a passage in the Futūḥāt reveals that it was at Fez, in the year 591/1195, that he attained to the 'Abode of the pact between plants and the Pole', 21 also he explains that it was through reaching this Abode that he knew in advance (and therefore not just on the basis of the arithmological considerations mentioned earlier) of the victory of the Almohads at Los Alarces. This is because in the case of this 'Abode', as in the case of all the others, gaining access to it also entails gaining acquisition of a number of special sciences which are peculiar to it. Three of these sciences demand our particular attention: the 'science of the illumination of revelation' (futūh al-mukāshafāt), the 'science of the illumination of sweetness' (futūh al-halāwāt), and the 'science of the illumination of expression' (futūh al-'ibārāt). At first sight these three notions appear extremely abstruse, and fully to understand what they mean we have to turn to chapter 216 of the Futūḥāt where Ibn 'Arabi describes and analyses the three types of illumination in question.

Ibn 'Arabi starts off by explaining the 'illumination of expression'. This is only given to the perfect Muhammadan, even if in other respects he is the heir to another prophet. The most powerful station (maqām) obtained by the person who has received this illumination is the station of veracity (sīdqa) in all he says, in all his movements and in his state of repose... Such a person is incapable of conceiving in witting what he will say, then putting it into order by means of reflection and finally uttering it. For him, the moment in which he speaks is the same as the moment in which he conceives the discourse by means of which he expresses his thought... Of all the men I have met throughout my life, I have not met one who showed any trace of this form of illumination. Nonetheless, it may be that such men exist and that I simply have not met them; but the one thing about which I am sure and certain is that I am one of them... 22

From this passage we see that only the 'perfect Muhammadan' obtains this illumination. Ibn 'Arabi also explains at the very start of the chapter that from this station of 'veracity' derives the fījāz al-qurān, the inimitability of the Qurān. I raised a question about this issue during the course of a vision. The reply that was given to me was: '[The fījāz] consists of your speaking only the truth (sīdqa) and nothing except what exists in reality (amr wa'āqf muhaqqaq) without adding so much as a particle, and without lying within yourself. If your discourse is of such a nature, then it is inimitable (mūjījāt).' In the first volume of the Futūḥāt Ibn 'Arabi refers again to this vision but in terms that are more specific, 'I was asked during the course of a vision: "Do you know what the inimitability of the Qurān is?" "No", I replied. I was told: "It is the

18. Fut., I, p.42. On the same topic see also the Kitāb al-masā'il, in Rasā'il, Hyderabad 1948, p.22.


20. Fut., IV, p.22. There is an allusion here to Qurān 45:23. Man adāllahu likh 'ala 'ilm is usually translated 'He whom God knowingly leads astray', but the commentators are divided over the meaning of 'ala 'ilm and the translation I have offered above gives the sense which seems most compatible with the context. See also Fut., I, p.315, II, p.8 and IV, p.80, where Ibn 'Arabi describes another debate he held with Ibn al-Kattānī regarding the knowledge 'dispensed' by God ('ilm manwarah). It is also worth noting that according to Tadālī (Tashawwuf, § 169, p.335) Ibn al-Kattānī was an ascetic (zhā'īd) as well.

21. Fut., III, p.140. As we have seen, the Pole occupies the highest position in the spiritual hierarchy of initiation: he is the khālifat Allāh, caliph of God, in the strict sense of the term. Ibn 'Arabi explains that some Poles possess both the temporal and the spiritual power associated with the title; according to him this was especially the case with the first four caliphs (Fut., II,


p.6). This means that the Pole's authority extends throughout the entire creation including the vegetable, mineral and animal kingdoms, which offer him their allegiance in the same way as those men who recognise him. Cf. Kitāb munzil al-qubl, in Rasā'il, Hyderabad 1948.
fact that it communicates the Truth (al-haqq). Observe the truth and your discourse will be inimitable'.

This is a particularly interesting detail when one bears in mind the immense importance Ibn 'Arabi attached to the exact and literal transcription of divine and prophetic utterances.

Ibn 'Arabi continues: The second category of illumination is the illumination of inner sweetness (fath al-hulawa fi l-batin) ... Even though it is spiritual (mar'awiyya), this sweetness is nonetheless perceptible in just the same way that one perceives the coldness of cold water ... Whoever experiences it feels a loosening of his limbs and joints and a kind of numbness ... This sweetness is of no fixed duration, and in my case its duration was variable. Sometimes it descended upon me while I was doing something or other and it lasted only an instant, but at other times it descended on me and persisted for days and nights before disappearing ...'.

'The third type of illumination is the illumination of revelation procured by knowledge of God in things. Know first of all that God is too great, too sublime to be known in Himself. But on the other hand He can be known in things ... In fact things are veils in relation to God: when they disappear, what is behind them is revealed. He who has revelation sees God in things just as the Prophet saw what was going behind his back ... I myself experienced this station (maqam), praise be to God! Furthermore, it is impossible to know God in things save through the manifestation of things and through the disappearance of their status. The eyes of the ordinary man stop at the status of things, whereas those who have the illumination of revelation see nothing in things but God. Among them there are those who see God in things, and there are others who see things and God in them ... The greatest illumination in this domain is when the vision of God is the very vision of the world (yakina 'a'yn ru'ya' yathli llyada ... I have discovered no-one among the men of God who have dealt with the subject of this illumination before me who have noted this particular point.'

This last paragraph calls for some explanatory comments, because it either explicitly or implicitly formulates several ideas which are fundamental to Ibn 'Arabi's doctrine. The first notion which one notes immediately is that God can only be known in things, because according to Ibn 'Arabi He can only be known in His capacity of rabb or lord of something; the Divine Essence is by its very nature absolutely unknowable. The notion of rabb, as implied in the above passage, is one of the recurrent themes in the Shaikh Al-Akbar's teaching. Every being—or more generally speaking, every thing, because in his eyes everything is alive—is subsumed under the authority of a Divine Name which is its rabb, its own 'lord', and for which it provides the locus of its epiphany. Consequently, according to Ibn 'Arabi, all that each of us is ever capable of knowing of God is our own rabb, and this is one of the meanings he ascribes to the hadith he so often comments on: 'He who knows himself knows his Lord' (man 'arafa nasabuhu 'arafa rabbahu)—that is, the Divine Name which governs him. But also—and this is a point of major importance—the knowledge of things necessarily precedes the knowledge of God. As Ibn 'Arabi says in the same passage of the Futuhat: 'The goal is to know God in His capacity as Lord of the world, and this knowledge only becomes accessible once prior knowledge of the world has already been obtained. This is something that is understood by the most perfect among the men of God, and it is why the Messenger of God said, 'He who knows himself knows his Lord'. Also worth noting is the fact that the idea of 'God knowable in things' is implied in another idea which was particularly dear to Ibn 'Arabi and is a correlate of the notion of rabb: the idea of tajalliyya or 'self-disclosures'. It is because every single thing is the receptacle of theophanies that by seeing it one can see God.

Finally, it will be noticed that Ibn 'Arabi establishes a distinction between the person who only sees God in things and the person who sees things and God in them. These two standpoints correspond respectively to the perspective of the wāqif, the person who comes to a halt in the Divine Presence and from that time onwards knows and sees nothing but God, and of the rāf, the person who has returned from God to created beings while remaining simultaneously present with God because he sees the Face of God in everything. According to Ibn 'Arabi this second case is superior to the first. As he writes in another passage in the Futuhat: 'To be attentive to God and [simultaneously] to the created object forms part of the perfect acquisition [obtained by a man] of the Divine Names', However, there is another even

24. In this connection see Fut., I, pp. 248, 403; IV, p. 67.
26. This is a reference to the hadith, 'I see you behind my back'. Cf. Bukhari, imam, 3: Muslim, salat, 110-11. Later we will look in more detail at this phenomenon, which Ibn 'Arabi experienced at Fes in 593.
28. For the notion of rabb cf. e.g. Fasığ, I, pp. 81, 119; Su'ad al-Hakim, Muṣjam, p. 283, pp. 306-14; Henry Corbin, Creative Imagination, pp. 94, 140, 142, 149-52, etc.
30. For the notion of tajalliyya which we will come back to later cf. Fasığ, I, pp. 79, 81; Su'ad al-Hakim, Muṣjam, p. 117, pp. 257ff; Henry Corbin, Creative Imagination, pp. 184-215.
31. This standpoint is exemplified by the lāyiyya, those who deny the reality of the world: cf. Balyuni, Épiphe, introduction.
32. Fut., IV, Bah al-arjār; Balyuni, Épiphe, p. 32.
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higher stage: the stage where the ‘vision of God is the very vision of the world’. The being who attains to this stage never ceases contemplating the multiple in the One and the One in the multiple.

It was also in 591. and very probably in Fez as well, that Ibn ‘Arabi gained access for the first time to the ‘Abode of Light’, where he was instructed in the difference between sensible bodies (ajsam) and subtle bodies (ajsad). At the beginning of chapter 34.8 of the Futuhat he writes as follows: ‘Know that this Abode is one of the Abodes of Unity and Light (min mana’il al-tawhid wa l-anwár). God granted me access to it on two occasions: it was in this Abode that I came to understand the difference between sensible and subtle bodies. Sensible bodies (ajsam) are what are known to ordinary men—regardless of whether they are fine and transparent or dense, visible or invisible. Subtle bodies (ajsad) are the bodies in which spirits manifest in the waking state [when one perceives them], in the form of sensible bodies (ajsam); and they are also the forms perceived by the sleeper in his sleep. They are similar to sensible bodies but are different from them’.

In 593/1196 Ibn ‘Arabi gained access to the Abode of Light for the second time—and, as we will see, in a most spectacular way. Without anticipating this second event, it is worth noting that the account given above would seem to need to be set alongside another passage from the Futuhat concerning the ‘Abode of the Extinction of Sins’ (al-fanat ‘an al-mukhallafat). Ibn ‘Arabi explains that the people who experience this fanat, or extinction, are of two kinds. ‘On the one hand there are those whose sins (mad’asii) have not been pre-eternally decreed (lam yaqdar ‘ala-yhim). They only perform acts which are permitted (mubah), even if they appear to commit acts of disobedience (mukhallafat) which legally are designated in the community as sins (mad’asii) ... For they have been told in a way they were able to hear and understand: “Do what you wish, I have already forgiven you”, just as it was said to the fighters at Badr. For them, the status of acts of disobedience has been annihilated (fanajat ‘anhum aham al-mukhlaifat) ...’

‘On the other hand there are those who have obtained knowledge of the secret of the pre-eternal decree (sirr al-qadar) ... They have seen what in the way of actions they have been destined to perform—inasmuch as these actions are actions, not inasmuch as they are of this or that status [i.e. are permitted or forbidden]. They have seen this in the Presence of the Pure Light (hadrat al-nur al-khaliil) ... Below this Presence there are two other Presences: firstly the Presence of Half-Obscurity (asifat) and secondly the Presence of Pure Obscurity (al-zulma al-mahdaha). In the Presence of Half-Obscurity legal obligation (taklit) has appeared, the Word has become divided into words and Good has become differentiated from Evil; but the Presence of Obscurity is the Presence of evil which contains no good ...

‘So, when men belonging to this second category see what they see in the Presence of the Light, they hasten to commit all the actions which they know must issue from them: but in doing so they are “extinguished” to the status of closeness or distance which is [normally] implicit in these actions. From then onwards they obey and disobey without any intention either to come closer [to God] or to transgress the prohibitions ...

‘It was this strange kind of extinction which God acquainted me with in Fez. I have seen nobody who has experienced it and yet I know that there are men who have experienced it; it is simply that I have not met them. However, in my case I saw the Presence of Light and the corresponding status but this contemplation did not exert its status upon me. In fact God raised me into the Presence of Half-Obscurity while at the same time He preserved me and rendered me impeccable (halaqati wa ‘asamati). Consequently, I have the status corresponding to the Presence of Light while remaining in the Presence of Half-Obscurity, and for the people of the Way this is more perfect.’

In other words, according to Ibn ‘Arabi’s own statement he belonged to the second category of men who are preserved from committing sin and have gained knowledge in the Presence of Light of the sirr al-qadar or secret of the pre-eternal decree—that is, of their destiny. To grasp the full implications of this exceptional grace—which of him he considered himself a privileged recipient—and the consequences liable to follow from it we need to turn to a passage in the Fasus al-hikam which elucidates the peculiar modalities of this knowledge of the sirr al-qadar. The passage in question occurs in the second chapter, where Ibn ‘Arabi deals with the various sorts of divine gifts and the different attitudes adopted by men with regard to the favours dispensed by the Most High. He explains that there are those who formulate a request (either in a specific form or not) and there are those who abstain from doing so, and among these is the person who realises that the knowledge which God has of him in all his states is none other than the knowledge of what he was in the state of immutable essence (fi hal thubat ‘aynaha) prior to his existentiation ... This is the highest category of spiritual men and the one that is most perfect in revelation (aksaf). They are those who have gained knowledge of

33. Fut., III, p.186. Ibn ‘Arabi specifies a little further on (p.187) that he gained access to this Abode in 591.

34. The reference is to a famous hadith qudsi about those who fought at Badr. Cf. Bukhari, maghribi, 9, 46; Ibn Hibat, I, p.80; II, p.296. One of the versions of this hadith is recorded by Ibn ‘Arabi in his Miskkat al-anwar (§ 90).

the secret of the pre-eternal decree. They fall into two separate categories: he who has a synthetic knowledge and he who has a distinctive knowledge. The second of these two categories is superior to the first. In fact he knows what the Divine Knowledge knows about him—either because God grants him knowledge of what He obtains from his very essence or because He reveals to him both his immutable essence and the sequence of all his future states. This last case is the most elevated of all. 16

It would seem that Ibn ‘Arabi claimed he belonged to this last category. Does he not say himself that at the moment when he embarked for the first time on a boat to the Maghreb he had a vision of all his future states—and even the states of disciples of his such as Qarnawi and Qarnawi’s father? 17

A ‘FACE WITHOUT A NAPE’

‘When His Essence became cloaked in my khirqa
Both Arabs and non-Arabs hesitated about it.’ 18

Ibn ‘Arabi seems to have been invested with the khirqa for the first time in 592/1195 in Seville. It will be remembered that this is an initiatory rite 19 which binds the disciple to his teacher, who by transmitting to him his baraka or spiritual influx makes him a new link in the uninterrupted chain (silsilah) that goes back to the Prophet. 20 However, it is important to understand that the term khirqa—frock or cloak—should not be taken literally. The investiture is not necessarily performed in actuality by the transmission of a cloak or garment, but can also be accomplished (as was to be the case with Ibn ‘Arabi in the East) by using a turban or just a simple piece of material. And it must also be emphasised that the wearing of the khirqa (libas al-khirqa) was not always understood in the same way in all periods and in all parts of the Muslim world. 21 In Ibn ‘Arabi’s time investiture with the khirqa was a form of initiatory bond frequently used in the East, along with other methods equally well attested in Sufi literature. On the other hand, in the Islamic West the term khirqa appears to have tended to be used as a symbolic way of describing subha—keeping the regular company of a teacher—rather than as referring to an actual form of ritual affiliation. This at any rate was how Ibn ‘Arabi interpreted the term—in conformity with the usage of Sufis he had known in the West—before his arrival in the East.

The first master to endow Ibn ‘Arabi with the khirqa was Taqi al-Din ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn ‘Ali al-Tawzawi al-Qastallani. This man belonged to a family of southern Tunisian origin which had affiliations with Sufism that were to take a rather strange turn. ‘Abd al-Rahman, himself a muhaddith-sufi, 22 had two brothers: Abu l-‘Abbâs Ahmad and Muhammed. Muhammed settled in Marrakech and entered the service of the Almohads as a Talib. 41 As for Abu l-‘Abbâs (d. 636/1238)—whom Ibn ‘Arabi was to meet in Egypt and at whose request he wrote the Kita’b al-khalwa al-mutlaqa 24—he was a disciple of Shaikh Qarshi (d. 599/1202) and, in accordance with his teacher’s wish, married his widow. From this union the famous Qutb al-Din Qastallani was born: a relentless enemy of Ibn Sab’in and of the school of Ibn ‘Arabi, denounced quite justifiably by Massignon as a witch-hunter.

Our information about this first of Ibn ‘Arabi’s investitures derives from two autobiographical sources which disagree with each other about the silsilah, or chain. In a small unpublished treatise called Kita’b nasab al-khirqa, where Ibn ‘Arabi enumerates his silsilah, he states that in 592/1195 in Seville he received the khirqa from Taqi al-Din ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Tawzawi and that in 594/1197 in Fez he received it from Muhammed ibn Qasim ibn Tamimi al-Fasi; he adds that both these men received it themselves from Abu l-Fath al-

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16. Fatâr, l. p. 60. 17. See above, start of chapter 5.
18. Dhwâr, p. 58.
19. It can also assume other forms, such as talqin al-dhikr, ‘ahd or muwâhidâk.
20. The historical nature of some of these chains is due to the fact that transmission of baraka can occur between the ruha’iyyah—the ‘spiritual presence’ of a shaykh who has been dead for ten years—and a murid or disciple who has never met him physically. In this case the link is of the waqfâq type already referred to above in chapter 2.
23. The Talib were an official Almohad body. In a sense they were the guardians of tradition: their mission was to study the shari’ah and tawdid (as formulated by the Mabâdi) and teach the rudiments of the faith to those who were ignorant of them. Cf. Historia politica del imperio almohade, l. p. 213. and Trente-sept Lettres officielles almohades, p. 143. For the three Qastallani brothers see Denis Grâ’s biobibliographical sketch in his edition of Sufi al-Din Ibn Abu Mansur’s Risâlah, pp. 210–11.
Mahmūd.45 However, in the first volume of the Futūḥat46 he records that the khirqa khadiriyya was transmitted to him by Taqi al-Din Tawzari, who had received it from Shaikh Sadr ad-Din Ibn Hamawiyh, who had received it from his grandfather who in turn had obtained it from Khādir. The Banū Hamawiyh were a family of some importance, Iranian in origin, and several of its members held the role (itself more political than spiritual) of shaikh al-shuyukh or shaikh of shaikhs at Damascus.47 Sadr ad-Din himself assumed this role after his father’s death in 577/1181, and retained it until his own death in 616/1219. One point worth noting in passing is that to judge from Ibn Arabi’s references to Sadr ad-Din, which are few and far between, even though the two shaikhs were both living in the East at the same time they apparently never met.48

Apart from these details, Ibn ‘Arabi’s assertion that Sadr al-Din received the khirqa khadiriyya from his grandfather poses something of a problem. If we examine the genealogical tree of the Banū Hamawiyh49 we find that Sadr al-Din’s grandfather was in fact Abū l-Ḥasan ‘Alī, a pupil of Ghazālī who died in 539/1144; and yet Sadr al-Din himself was born in 543/1148. Furthermore, Haydar Amoli (d. approx. 787/1386) specifies in the preludia to his Naṣṣ al-musayyib—a vast commentary on Ibn ‘Arabi’s Fawāṣīl al-hikmat—that it was Muhammad b. Hamawiyh (d. 530/1143). Sadr al-Din’s great-grandfather and a pupil of the Imam al-Haramayn, who had been Khādir’s disciple.50 And finally, Ibn Abī Usaybi’ā (d. 668/1270), author of a famous biographical compilation about doctors, reproduces in the second volume of his Tabāqāt al-atibbā’ the chain of Sadr al-Din in the form in which it had been transmitted to his uncle Rashid al-Din Ibn Abī Usaybi’ā by Sadr al-

45. The specifications of date and place do not occur in the two manuscripts listed above, but they are to be found in another manuscript kindly communicated to me by O. Yahia. In Sūfīs of Andalūsia, p. 151 n. 1. R.V.J. Austin states that Ibn Abī Usaybi’ā had already received the khirqa from Khādir in 580/1184 at Seville. He bases this conclusion on a passage in the Kitāb nisab al-khirqā, ms. Esad Eldeni, 1507, p. 70; however, in the passage in question Ibn Abī Usaybi’ā simply says that he had been Khādir’s companion (tāshīrī) and had received from him the rules of propriety and submission to masters (‘indākhātu līn wa khaddāku inna al-tasām in nisāb al-shuyukh). In other words he is simply referring here to his first encounter with Khādir at Seville. He also alludes to his investitures at Seville, Fes and Mecca elsewhere in a short poem in the Dīwān, p. 58.
48. Apart from the passage in Futūḥat, l. p. 187 I have only been able to find one other reference to Sadr al-Din b. Hamawiyh. In the Sharī‘ al-Khādir al-nā‘ām, “d. 1731.

Din himself.51 Now according to this document, Sadr al-Din received the khirqa not from his grandfather but from his father. ‘Umar (d. 577/1181), who in turn had received it from his own father, Muhammad b. Hamawiyh, who had obtained it from Khādir who himself had obtained it from the Prophet. Here again we come up against a contradiction, because Muhammad b. Hamawiyh was not the father but the grandfather of ‘Umar b. Hamawiyh. There is a link missing—namely Abū l-Ḥasan ‘Alī (d. 539/1144), the father of ‘Umar and the grandfather of Sadr al-Din, unless, that is, ‘Umar b. Hamawiyh did not in fact receive the khirqa directly from his grandfather Muhammad b. Hamawiyh. But whatever the truth of the matter is, from these various texts it emerges that in receiving the kkhira from Taqi al-Din Tawzari Ibn ‘Arabi actually received a double affiliation with the Prophet—one of them passing via Khādir, whom it will be remembered, he had already met on three occasions.

On his arrival in the East Ibn ‘Arabi was again invested with the khirqa: firstly at Mecca in 599, at the hands of Yūnus b. Yahyā al-Ḥashimi52 who himself had received it from ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jālānī (d. 561/1165), and again two years later in Mosul, from a disciple of the famous Qādīb al-Bān.53 This second investiture made the Shaikh al-Akbar revise his opinion about the profundity of significance of the lbs al-khirqa. Although in its most general sense this investiture is simply a symbol of initiatory companionship, according to Ibn ‘Arabi it is also—in a more specific and technical sense—the means by which a master produces an immediate transformation in his disciple. In his own words: ‘One of my teachers, ‘Ali b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Jāmī’, who was a companion of ‘Ali al-Mutawakkil and Qādīb al-Bān, had met Khādir; he used to live in his garden outside Mosul. Khādir had invested him with the khirqa in the presence of Qādīb al-Bān. He in turn transmitted it to me, on the very same spot in his garden where he had received it from Khādir and in the same way that it had been performed in his case...’ From this time onwards I maintained the validity and effectiveness of investiture with the khirqa and I invested people with it because I understood that Khādir ascribed importance to it. Up until then I was no supporter of investiture with the khirqa when understood in this sense: as far as I was concerned it was
simply an expression of companionship... So it is that when the masters of spiritual states perceive some imperfection in one of their companions and wish to perfect that person’s state, they resort to the custom of meeting with the person alone. The master then takes the piece of clothing he is wearing in the spiritual state he is in at that particular moment, removes it and puts it on the man whom he wishes to guide to perfection. He then holds the man closely to him—and the master’s state spreads to his disciple, who thereby attains to the desired perfection. This is the “clothing” as I understand it and as it has been transmitted by our masters”.55

Apart from the certificate of investiture made out to the addressee of the Kitāb nasab al-kihiraq,56 elsewhere Ibn ‘Arabi supplies the names of fifteen people to whom he had transmitted the kihiraq. The source of this information is a series of short poems placed at the beginning of the Diwān.57 Interestingly, fourteen out of these fifteen people are muridat, women;58 the only male disciple mentioned is Badr al-Habashi—although of course this is not to deny that Ibn ‘Arabi transmitted the kihiraq to numerous other murids or male disciples. And one other detail is even more interesting. In the majority of cases it was during his sleep that Ibn ‘Arabi saw himself investing these women with the kihiraq, so, for example, in the case of the daughter of the great Shafi’ite qadi Ibn Zakari (d. 617/1220), a woman whom certain sources referred to earlier state that he married.60

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Ibn ‘Arabi was a little over thirty years old when, at Seville in 592H, he received this investiture with the kihiraq. He was already—and probably had been for several years—an accomplished spiritual teacher in his own right. To judge from the following anecdote which he recorded in the Fuiḥlat, by

56. The name of the person varies from manuscript to manuscript. In ms. Isad Ef., f° 96, his name is given as Sayyid Kamal al-Din b. Ahmad... b. ‘Ali b. ‘Ali Tālib, but in ms. Yahya Ef., f° 3, he is called Ahmad b. ‘Ali al-Ishbili.
57. Diwan, pp.53–60.
58. When referring to two of them Ibn ‘Arabi uses the expression ‘my daughter’. Are we to understand this figuratively or literally? One of them is called Dunya (p.54), the other Sadr (p.57).
59. Diwan, p.54.
60. Diwan, p.56. Before giving the poems that come next, Ibn ‘Arabi states: ‘Here ends what happened in the world of the senses: what I will now describe took place during sleep’. This statement is followed by a series of short poems which mention eight women who received the kihiraq from him.

61. We do not know the exact date when Ibn ‘Arabi had his first disciples, but 586/1190 would be a reasonable guess.

62. This disciple is also mentioned in Fut., I, p.154, in connection with Averroes’ funeral.
63. Fut., IV, p.539.
65. Durra, § 1, in Sufs of Andalusia, pp.75–6.
A 'face without a nape'

The major experiences that Ibn 'Arabi went through in Fez in both 593 and 594, meant that the town came to occupy a privileged place in his travels almost comparable to the position later occupied by Mecca. It should also be noted that, contrary to his previous visit which appears to have been fairly brief, this time Ibn 'Arabi stayed in Fez for a considerable period. He was there in 593, in 594, and possibly even in 595—at any rate we only see him back in Andalusia in that year.

If Ibn 'Arabi had been asked to choose a symbolic name for the town of Fez, he would no doubt have called it Nūr. Light: it was here that he attained once again to the Abode already referred to—the Abode in which he 'became light.' But on this second occasion the interior metamorphosis brought about by this beatific vision was accompanied by a very tangible charism: just like the Prophet, who used to say he could see behind his back, Ibn 'Arabi became a 'face without a nape' (waṣṭ bi lā gūfā), one total eye capable of seeing in every single direction. He describes this phenomenon twice in the Futūḥāt, and in considerable detail. In the lengthy chapter 6971 he writes as follows: 'Know that the Prophet is all face and no nape or neck. That is why he declared, 'I see you behind my back.' 72 ... When I inherited this station from him and it became mine, I happened to be directing the prayer at the al-Azhur Mosque in Fez. At the miṣrāb my entire essence became one single eye: I could see from every side of myself in just the same way that I could see my qibla. Nobody escaped my view: neither the person who was entering nor the person who was leaving, and not even those who were performing the prayer behind me ...' The second account occurs in chapter 206, and contains some additional points of detail. 'I obtained this station [of Light] in 593 at Fez, during the 'ṣāra' prayer while I myself was directing the prayers at the al-Azhur Mosque, which is in [the district of] 'Ayn al-khayl. It appeared to me in the form of a light that was if anything more visible than what was in front of me. Also, when I saw this light the status of the direction 'behind' (hukūn al-khair) ceased for me. I no longer had a back or the nape of a neck, and while the vision lasted I could no longer distinguish between different sides of myself. I was like a sphere: I was no longer aware of myself as having any "side" except as the result of a mental process—not an experienced reality ...' 73

Two particular points emerge from these accounts. Firstly, the illumination was not simply an internal one because it was accompanied by a

66. Doubtless b. Baqi should be read instead of b. Taqī. Abū l-Qāsim b. Baqi was indeed for a long while ṣūfī under Ya'qūb, as well as holding the post for some time under the rule of his son. He appears to have been highly esteemed by Ya'qūb al-Mansūr, who made a point of insisting in his will that he should be confirmed in his position of office. According to Hucí Miranda this favouritism on Ya'qūb's part was due to the fact that Ibn Baqi had abandoned the Malikite madhab in preference for Ibn Hazm's. Cf. Historia política del Imperio almorahide, l. p. 384; Muṣḥ, pp. 199, 217.

67. It will be remembered that Ibn 'Arabi's father, who had spent part of his life in the service of the Almohads, was dead.

68. See above, chapter 6 ad init.

69. Muṣḥ, pp. 245; Seville Islamiast, p. 170. There was no need for Nāṣir to concern himself with Andalusia, which was out of danger thanks to the ten-year treaty signed in 593/1196. On the other hand, he was obliged to take action to quell the revolt of the Banu Ghāniyya in Ifriqiya.

70. Muṣḥ, p. 216; Seville Islamiast, p. 169.

71. Muṣḥ, l. p. 401.

72. Bukhārī, inān. 3.

73. Muṣḥ, ll. p. 486. For the symbolism of the nape of the neck cf. 'Uqīt al-mustawwif: ed. Nyberg, pp. 98-9, where Ibn 'Arabi states that the believer is a 'face without a nape', the non-believer (kāfīr) 'a nape without a face' and the hypocrite (muḥafīq) 'a face plus a nape'.
physical phenomenon during the course of which the spatial conditions of the body were transcended ('I was like a sphere'). It must also be emphasised here that according to Ibn 'Arabi one of the characteristics of the Pole—although not necessarily a characteristic unique to him—is precisely the quality of being a 'face without a nape'. Secondly, according to Ibn 'Arabi the station in question is one that forms part of the Muhammedan heritage. Elsewhere he explains in connection with this issue that only he who has attained to this station in which he is able to perceive the qibla in all directions has the right (as did the Prophet) to perform prayers on horseback. Finally, it is interesting to note that this incident occurred in the al-Azhar Mosque: the imam there was normally Muhammed b. Qasim al-Tamimi, who in the very same place and during the same year transmitted to Ibn 'Arabi his hagiographical work on the saints of Fez, and in the year 594/1197 invested him with the khirga.

The year 593 was for Ibn 'Arabi also the year of his encounter—again at Fez—with the Pole of his time: Ashall al-Qabili. In fact it would be more correct to speak of him identifying the Pole rather than encountering him, because he had already been frequenting his company for some time; as he states in the Darrasa, this man never spoke to him of anything apart from the Qur'an. However, he was unaware of the fact that the man held the function of qadibiyga until the day when God revealed it to him during the course of a vision: 'I met the Pole of the time in 593, at Fez. God had shown him to me during a vision and had revealed to me who he was. Subsequently [on the next day] severall of us gathered together in Ibn Hayyün's garden at Fez; he himself was there, but nobody paid him any attention. He was a foreigner, originally from Bougie, and he had a withered hand. With me at this gathering were several masters from among the men of God, all of them highly regarded in the Path, such as Abû l-'Abbâs al-Hassár and others like

him. All these men showed great respect towards me. The meeting was only for my sake, and nobody else apart from me spoke about the knowledge of the Way; if they happened to speak about it among themselves they subsequently submitted the results of their discussion to me. It so happened that the Pole came to be mentioned—while he himself was present. I said to them: "My brothers, I am going to tell you some amazing things about the Pole of your time." In saying this I turned towards the man who during my sleep had been shown to me by God to be the Pole, and who also often kept my company and loved me greatly. He said to me: "Say what God has revealed to you, but do not reveal his identity!"... After everyone had left, this Pole came up to me and said: "May God reward you. You did well in not referring to him by name. May the salvation and mercy of God be upon you!" This was in fact a farewell greeting, although I did not know it; never did I see him again.'

There is one major inference to be drawn from this account: even though Ibn 'Arabi was still only a young man of thirty-three, he was already recognised at this time by Sufis in the Islamic West as being a Master par excellence.

The renown Ibn 'Arabi enjoyed at this period among Sufis—and perhaps among non-Sufis as well—is confirmed by his narrative of the circumstances surrounding his meeting with another 'Pillar' (watad), Ibn Ja'dun al-Hinawi. I had arrived in Fez, where people had heard me spoken of [without recognising me] and hoped to be able to meet me. To avoid them I escaped from the house I was in and went to the Great Mosque. Unable to find me in the house, they looked for me in the mosque. I saw them coming towards me, and when they asked me where I was I replied: “Continue looking for him until you find him”. While I was sitting there, very smartly dressed, the sheikh [Ibn Ja'dun] came and sat down in front of me. I had never met him before. Through divine inspiration I was made aware of his states, of his station, of the fact that he was one of the four Pillars (awtad) and of the fact that his son would inherit his station. I told him I knew who he was. He shut his book and got up, saying, "Don't unmask me, don't unmask me!".

So both Ibn Ja'dun and Ashall Qabili were Pillars and, a fortiori, malamigga as well. They also shared one other feature in common: just as nobody paid any attention to Qabili, so (as Ibn 'Arabi notes) 'when Ibn Ja'dun was absent nobody noticed, and when he was present nobody asked

[disciple of Hassár who suffered from having fallen' from his station (muj̣amm), and whom Ibn 'Arabi managed to cure through the exercise of gentleness and patience.]

74. It will be noted in this connection that according to Ibn 'Arabi primordial Man was spherical. Cf. Tadbirat ilãhîyya, p.225.
76. Fut., IV, p.503. Cf. also A. Bel, Siddi Bou Medjani et son maître Ed-Daqaqa, in Fut., I, p.56. Alfred Bel appears not to have known that Tamimi died in 633/1236 because he refers to him as if he was writing later.
77. Ibn 'Arabi also describes the encounter in the Darrasa, and it is there that he gives the information that the name of the Pole was Ashall al-Qabili. He adds that one night he was informed in a dream about the nature of this man's role, and that on the next day he encountered him in Ibn Hayyün's garden. Cf. Darrasa, § 62, in Sufis of Andalusia, pp.152–53.
78. To date I have unfortunately not been able to find any biographical account of al-Hassar. Taddi simply states that he was a disciple of Shâkh Abû l-Rabi' Sulaymân Tilimsani (d. 579/1187) at Fez: cf. Tashawwur, p.280. But Ibn 'Arabi refers to him twice in the Futuhat: in Fut., III, p.34 he says that Hassár was one of the malamigga and in Fut., I, p.233 he tells a story about a
his opinion. When he arrived somewhere nobody welcomed him, and during the course of conversation nobody spoke to him. Everyone ignored him.81 Both men alike were anonymous individuals, unobtrusive, almost invisible. It will be remembered that this unobtrusiveness is the characteristic of the malāmiyya: 'They are the Hidden, the Pure,... concealed among men ....'82 But not all of them enjoy this privilege. Some of them are—in spite of themselves—invested with an external governing function (taclbir): so for example the first four caliphs, who combined a spiritual function with a temporal one. Others again were endowed with an apocalyptic mission which obliged them to emerge from anonymity and make themselves known: to reveal themselves in order to reveal God. This was doubtless the case with Ibn ʿArabi, who states time and time again in his writings that he had received an order from God commanding him to guide men and counsel them: 'I have been commanded to teach created beings and counsel them; I have been forced and constrained to do so against my will (qasran wa hatman wajiban)'.

And as he says in the very first lines of the Rūḥ: 'This mission has been entrusted to me and to me in particular, more than to any other man.'83 People of this kind make the supreme sacrifice: they agree to conceal their 'ubādīyya, or servanthood, for the sake of manifesting the divine rubābīyya or lordship. This sacrifice often exposes them to calumny and hatred, and sometimes it becomes intolerable. That is why several times during his life Ibn ʿArabi was tempted to evade his responsibility so that he could consecrate himself entirely to 'ibāda or worship, hidden from other people’s sight.84

'Lord, I have asked You to grant Your servant permission
To remain hidden until the end of time
Like Ibn Jaḍūn, a teacher and a guide
Who was always veiled by God.
Lord, I have asked You for the protection of occultation ...'.85

Ibn ʿArabi’s request was not to be granted; God had another destiny reserved for him. He was already aware of the fact, and was to receive confirmation of it in the same place: Fez.

81. Ibid. It is also worth noting that both men suffered from a physical handicap: the Pole had a 'withered hand' and Ibn Jaḍūn 'suffered from a speech defect and could only speak with considerable difficulty' (cf. Rūḥ, § 17: Sufis of Andalusia, p. 115).
82. Fut., III, p.181.
83. Rūḥ, p.31.
84. Ibid., p.19.
85. Cf. e.g. Rūḥ, p.31: Kitāb al-maḥashshār, ms. Faith 5322, f° 91.
86. Diwan, p.333.

ASCENSION

During the course of his lifetime Ibn ʿArabi journeyed thousands of miles and passed through dozens of cities: from Tunis to Mecca, Jerusalem to Baghdad, Konya to Damascus. But it was in Fez, once again, in the year 594/1198, that he made the longest and most extraordinary journey of all. This was no longer a horizontal journey but a vertical one, not a terrestrial but a celestial one: a spiritual, not physical, journey which carries the pilgrim beyond every geographical frontier into the Divine Presence, 'twice bows'-length away or nearer' (Qur'ān 53:9). For the saints, awlīya', imitation of the Prophet culminates in this 'journey by Night' in which each of them actualises spiritually what for Muhammad was the supreme experience of the Ascension (mīrāj) in the body through the heavens to the Throne of God.87 But just as no two saints will ever experience the identical illumination (fath), similarly one's mīrāj or ascension will always be different from another's. That is why even though every saint or wall follows the path opened up by the Messenger, each individual discovers a different landscape because this perilous quest is basically neither more nor less than the total and perfect realisation of the prophetic statement 'He who knows himself knows his Lord'. Man is a microcosm ('ālam saḥīr) containing in himself at least potentially all the possibilities displayed in the universe: as a true copy (nuskhah) of the macrocosm, everything that exists in it has its counterpart in man. One consequence of this is that everything contemplated by the saint during his Nocturnal Voyage—the blaze of theophanies, the angelic splendours, the temptations and trials, and the prophetic figures he meets—all takes place inside himself. As Ibn ʿArabi was to say of his own 'ascension': 'My voyage took place nowhere else except inside myself'.88 In this sense the Ascension is nothing but the exploration of one's own being. Only at the end of this internal adventure, in which the saint is simultaneously the theatre and the actor, is he close to attaining the goal of his quest. But the mīrāj in the strict sense of 'Ascension' is only a part of the journey. Unless the pilgrim happens to be one of the waqāfīn—those who come to their eternal stopping-place in the contemplation of the One—he must now make the symmetrically opposite journey and descend again to created beings. In his Risālat al-anwār Ibn ʿArabi explains that the rājī ʿān, 'those who return', are of two kinds: 'On the one hand there is the person who is sent back for himself .... Him we call the gnostic (al-ārṣīf): he returns so as to perfect himself by following a different route from the one he had taken. On the other hand there is the

87. For the Prophet's mīrāj cf. EI2 s.v.: Qushayri, Kitāb al-mīrāj, Cairo 1954.
person who is sent back to created beings for the sake of directing and guiding them by his word. He is the knowing-heir (al-‘ālim al-wārith). As we will see, Ibn ‘Arabi plainly belonged to this second category; and in spite of his wish he was not to remain in the shade, like Ibn Ja‘dun.

Two texts by Ibn ‘Arabi describe—in very different ways from each other—his own experience of the mi‘raj. On the one hand there is the Kitāb al-‘irāq,90 the ‘Book of the Journey by Night’, which was written in Fez in the month of Jumādā I 594, probably on his ‘return’ from his celestial pilgrimage: in it he retraces his itinerary in symbolic mode, using a style that alternates between rhymed prose and poetry. And on the other hand there is chapter 327 of the Futūḥāt,91 where the Shaikh al-Akbar describes the same experience but much more explicitly. Chapter 167 of the Futūḥāt92 and the Risālat al-anwār also deal with the same subject, but impersonally. As these four sources have already been studied in detail elsewhere93 there is no need here to do more than summarise the chief stages in Ibn ‘Arabi’s initiatory journey as they are outlined in chapter 367 of the Futūḥāt.94

After being stripped of his corporeal nature—for whereas the Prophet’s Ascension was made bi jismihī, in his body, saints (awliyā‘) only accomplish it in spirit95—the shaikh arrived at the first heaven, where he was greeted by the Father of Humanity. Adam revealed to him that all men are on the Right of God and this means that everyone without exception is destined for bliss. As Ibn ‘Arabi explains: ‘If the divine wrath was eternal, the same would apply to the punishment . . . but the divine wrath will cease at the Great Judgement’. In fact, he continues, the Resurrection will last only for a limited period of time—the fifty thousand years corresponding to the fifty halves of a thousand years each that were mentioned earlier. This is the period of the imposing of penalties (iqāmat al-hudud). Beyond that period the authority, al-hukm, will belong to the Names ‘the All-Merciful’ and ‘the most Merciful’ (al-rahmān al-raḥīm). Ibn ‘Arabi’s notion of punishment is one of the aspects of his teaching which was the greatest cause of scandal for the doctors of the Law: interpreting in a strictly literal manner the verses of the Qur’an96 which declare the eternity of the stay in hell but not the eternity of the punishment,

he considered that the immensity of the Divine Mercy—which according to a Qur’ānic verse ‘embraces all things’ (7:156)—precludes the perpetuity of eternal suffering. Those beings who are destined to remain eternally in hell will indeed stay there; but for them the fire will become bliss. ‘As for the people of hell, they [too] will return to the state of bliss—while still remaining in the fire. Once the period of their punishment is over the fire will of necessity become “freshness and peace” (bardan wa-salāman) for those who dwell there, and that will be their bliss.’97 It should be added that for Ibn ‘Arabi felicity or bliss (nā‘im) is simply what accords with (mulā‘im) the need of each individual’s nature. Because the damned by their constitution crave for fire they will only be happy in the fire—and this ‘to such a degree’, he adds, ‘that if they were to gain entrance to Paradise they would suffer’.98 Elsewhere he states that ‘even if the person who has committed the most grievous of sins never departs from the fire—because it is his own fitting abode and from fire he was created, so much so that if he was to leave it he would suffer—he will there experience bliss’.99

On his arrival in the second heaven Ibn ‘Arabi had a discussion with Jesus (‘Isa) and John (Yahyā). Jesus explained that his ability to bring the dead back to life derived from his spiritual nature which he had received from Gabriel.100 As for John, he confirmed that the privilege of making ‘death die’ on the Day of Resurrection would be his, because of his name ‘Yahyā’ (‘he lives’) which had been given to him by God. ‘But’—reverted Ibn ‘Arabi—‘there are many men in the world called Yahyā’. ‘Yes,’ John replied, ‘but it is I who possess pre-eminence in this name (li murtabat al-‘awliyya‘), and it is therefore through me [i.e. inasmuch as I am the manifestation of the Name al-Muhdi] that all men live who have lived and do live’.

Continuing on his journey Ibn ‘Arabi came to the third heaven, the heaven of Joseph. Here Joseph explained to him the meaning of the Prophet’s statement. ‘If I had gone through the same ordeal as Joseph and I had been called, I would have responded to the call [immediately]’.101 The allusion here is to the incident mentioned in the Qur’an (12:50) when Joseph, a prisoner, replied to the Pharaoh’s messenger that he would only accept his freedom when the women had acknowledged their wrong-doing.

97. Fuqā‘, I, p.169. Ibn ‘Arabi is here comparing—and this again caused a scandal—the nature of this fire of Gehenna with the fire into which Abraham was thrown (Qur’an 21:69).
98. Fut., IV, p.120.
100. It will be remembered that according to Islamic tradition the angel Gabriel appeared before Mary (Qur’an 19:17), endowed with a human form (tasmīthula), to breathe the spirit of Jesus into her.
At the fourth heaven Ibn ‘Arabi was welcomed by Idris, the Solar Pole, who saluted him as the ‘Muhammadan heir’ and—reply to a question from Ibn ‘Arabi about the plurality of worlds—discussed with him the tajdid al-khalq, the renewal of creation at every instant. At the fifth heaven he met Aaron (Hārūn), who described him as the ‘perfect heir’ and told him that the denial of the reality of the world by certain gnostics was due to an imperfect knowledge of theophanies. In the sixth heaven Moses described and explained to him his experience of his vision of God, and in so doing resolved the ambiguity in the Qur’ānic verse (7:143) which is appealed to by those who deny the possibility of such a vision.

Finally the shaikh arrived at the seventh heaven, where he saw Abraham leaning against the baqūt al-ma‘mur, the Celestial Ka‘ba. From there he continued on his journey until he reached the Lote-Tree of the Limit (sidrat al-muntaha); this marks the final stage of the Ascension proper, but not of the Night journey as a whole. I became nothing but light. Then God made His word descend upon me: “Say; we believe in God, and in what has been revealed to us and in what has been revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes [of Israel] and in what has been given to Moses and to Jesus…” [Qur’ān 3:84]. Through this one verse He gave me all the verses. In this way I came to know that I was the totalisation of those whose names had been mentioned to me (majmi‘ man dhakira li); this was for me the announcement that I had attained to the station of Muhammad. During the course of this Nocturnal journey I obtained the meaning of all the Divine Names and I saw that they all referred to one and the same Object Named and to a single Essence: this Named was the object of my contemplation, and this Essence was my very own being. The journey I had made was only inside myself, and it was towards myself that I had been guided: from this I knew that I was a servant in a state of purity, without the slightest trace of sovereignty.

Here the autobiographical account in the Futūḥāt comes to an end. After exploring his inner planets and speaking with his prophets, the pilgrim discovered his complete servitude and the absolute sovereignty of God. But his journey did not stop there. He was one of the rāfi‘ūn—those who descend again to created beings. More specifically, he belonged to the second category of rāfi‘ūn—the category of beings on whom he himself refers to as ‘knowing-heirs’ (‘alim-wārith) and whom God sends back with the mission of guiding men. Moses had warned Ibn ‘Arabi of this in the sixth heaven when he announced to him: ‘Know that you will present yourself in front of your Lord, and He will reveal to you the secret of your heart and the mysteries of His Book. He will give you the key to the lock on His door, and in doing so He will bring your inheritance to completion and validate your mission (li-yusulhu inbi athala) which is your share [in the verse]: “And He has revealed to His servant” (Qur’ān 5:110). Don’t let this privilege encourage you to want to receive either a Law from Him which would abrogate the preceding one, or a revealed Book: that door is closed. After you have reached this station you will return, sent back (tarji‘ u malf ṭ‘ūban); and just as you are an heir, it is necessary that others in turn inherit from you. So be lenient in your command over created beings’. This advice from Moses is in some respects reminiscent of his intervention in the Prophet’s Nocturnal journey for the sake of reducing the number of obligatory prayers. The details of his advice—specifying that Ibn ‘Arabi will be sent back in order to transmit his heritage—plus the title of Muhammadan Heir and Perfect Heir bestowed on him by Aaron and Idris, and also Ibn ‘Arabi’s reference to himself as the ‘totalisation of all the prophets’, are all allusions to his role as Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood. In fact, the ṭi‘rāf of 594 represents the second act in the divine comedy of which the first scene had already been acted out in 586, back in Andalusia.

‘As for the Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood, which is the specific Seal of the sainthood reserved for Muhammad’s apparent community… I came to know the details about it in Fez, in Morocco, in 594. God familiarised me with it and showed me the sign of its function—which I will not name.’ In another passage in the Futūḥāt Ibn ‘Arabi declares that he came to know the identity of the Muhammadan Seal in 595; but, as we will see, this was a slip of the pen. ‘He is living in our age. I came to know as much in 595. I saw the sign of his function, a sign which God has hidden from His servants but which He revealed to me at Fez in such a way that I knew he was the Seal of Sainthood.’ But although in these passages Ibn ‘Arabi obstinately refuses to name the person in question, he did in fact disclose the person’s name in several poems (one of them included in the Futūḥāt) and especially in a very long qaṣida in the Dīwān in which he outlines the various phases of his investiture with the supreme function of sainthood. Here is an extract:

‘Among the servants of God I am a hallowed spirit
In just the same way that the Night of Destiny is the spirit of nights.
I have purified myself of impurity through parity

102. Ibn ‘Arabi told Idris of his encounter in front of the Ka‘ba with a man who belonged to a humanity prior to our own, and who revealed to him that there were several Adams.
106. In other words the ‘historical’ Islamic community.
108. Fut., II, p. 49.
109. Fut., I, p. 244: see above, chapter 3.
Because by virtue of what is in me I am a stranger to parity and imparity alike.  

And when one night God came and announced to me That I was the Seal, at the beginning of the month.  
He said to those who happened at the time to be In the Supreme Pleroma and the world of the Commandment:  
"Look upon him, because My sign of his function of Seal is to be found on his back."  

I have hidden it from the eyes of created beings out of mercy towards them.  
I offered him the kingdom in fact and truth, but his reply to Me was:  
"What is sublime must remain veiled, for You are hidden.  
And blessed is the man who imitates his master in both ease and difficulty."  

I am without a doubt the Inheritor of the knowledge of Muḥammad  
As well as of his state, both secretly and manifestly.  
I am that in the city of Tunis  
As the result of a divine command which intervened during the dhikr.  
This happened to me in 590.  
In an abode pure of all illusion and reflection.  
But I only knew I was the Seal and assistant  
Four years later at Fez at the time of the full moon.  
If I am neither Moses nor Jesus nor their equals  
That means nothing to me because I am the totaliser of all that.  

For I am the Seal of the Saints of Muḥammad.  
The specific Seal in the cities and in the deserts."  

These lines leave no possible room for doubt: Ibn 'Arabi is identifying himself explicitly and categorically with the Muḥammadan Seal. What is more, in a highly condensed form the verses define his function in relation to the prophets. The Muḥammadan Seal is not a prophet. From a certain point of view he is more than that, because in his own person he represents or embodies the totality of the sainthood of all the prophets. He is, admittedly, only the Heir of Muḥammad—and yet he is the heir not just to Muḥammad's knowledge but also to his 'state': in other words to his name of saint (wāli) which had been partially occulted by his name of messenger (rasūl). And finally, this poem also confirms Chodkiewicz's conjecture that the date 595 mentioned in one of the two passages from the Futūḥat cited earlier is in fact a slip of the pen. It was 'four years' after the episode at Tunis in 590—therefore in 594—that Ibn 'Arabi received precise knowledge of his function as Seal.  

However, this qasīda still raises two questions that are impossible to avoid. Firstly, why did Ibn 'Arabi choose on some occasions to remain silent as to the identity of the Muḥammadan Seal, but on other occasions choose to reveal it? He himself seems to have had some difficulty explaining the apparent caprices of his pen. He repeatedly states—and this is a point we will come back to later—that the Futūḥat are a work written under divine inspiration.  
By God, there is not one single letter [in this book] which was not written under divine dictation (imālā' ilāhī), lordly projection (ilqā' rabbāni) or spiritual inspiration (nuqāfā' rāhānī) in the very depths of my being. This is so in spite of the fact that I am neither one of the legislative Messengers nor a commanding prophet.  
And he also says that this applies to all his works: 'In writing these works it has not been my intention to perform the task of a writer, nor has it been my intention to follow a precise aim. Rather, my purpose has been to free myself from an inspiration that burns my heart and crushes my chest'.  

The following passage from the Mawāqī' al-nujūm illustrates one of the modes of this 'lordly projection'. 'I was involved in the process of writing ascension...
an inspired book (kitāb iqlīf) when I was told, "Write: 'This is a chapter of subtle description and most rare unveiling.'" I had no idea what to write next; I awaited the rest of the inspiration with such expectancy that I became so disturbed I was virtually at death's door. Then a luminous tablet was placed in front of me. It contained radiant green lines on which was written "This is a chapter of subtle description and most rare unveiling and the discourse regarding this chapter ...". I copied out [what I saw] right to the end, then [the tablet] was withdrawn."

The second question is how we are to reconcile Ibn 'Arabi's categorical assertion, in the verses quoted above, that he only realised he was the Muhammadan Seal in 594/1198 at Fez, with Ja'idi's interpretation of his Cordoba vision in 586 and of the retreat he made during that same year in Seville. And, for that matter, how are we to reconcile it with Ibn 'Arabi's own account of the vision he had in 589 at Algeciras, when he was shown his future destiny even down to specific details—details which must of course have included his nomination as Seal of the Muhammadan saints? This apparent confusion concerning a divine grace of such major significance can hardly be explained away just in terms of a lapse of memory. Are we then to suppose that one and the same event was repeated several times over? At the risk of anticipating the contents of a report which we will examine later on we can in fact conclude that, as we can see if we read the texts carefully and in the way they should be read, there was indeed a definite series of sequential and complementary events which only found their resolution—and explanation—at Mecca in 598–99.

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'As for my companion, his is a clarity without taint, he is a pure light. He is Abyssinian, his name is 'Abd Allāh and he is like a full moon (badr) that is un eclipsed. He recognises the right due to each person and renders it to him: he assigns everyone their due without falling into excess. He has attained to the level of "distinction" (tamyīz). Through fusion (sahh) he has become purified like pure gold. His word is true, his promise veracious. ' These are the terms in which, at the very start of the Futūḥāt, Ibn 'Arabi describes the man who for twenty-three years was to be his inseparable companion and faithful friend: Badr al-Ḥabashi. The bonds of affection that united them during all those years went far beyond the feelings of veneration and mutual respect characteristic of the normal teacher-disciple relationship. From the moment that he first met up with Ibn 'Arabi in Fez, Ḥabashi never left his master's side. From Fez to Seville, Tunis to Mecca, Damascus to Malatya, he followed him everywhere, a discreet and silent shadow. It is impossible to think of this man, once an Ethiopian slave but now free, without being reminded immediately of that other Ethiopian who used to clean the mosque and according to a tradition was privately pointed out to Abu Hurayra by the Prophet as being one of the seven substitutes (abdāl). In fact there are a couple of references in the Futūḥāt which suggest that Ḥabashi was one of the four 'Pillars' (wulād) of his time. No doubt he was no longer a young man at the time of his first encounter with Ibn 'Arabi: he had already spent some time in the East, where he had been a disciple of a good many shaykhs, and he had a close bond of affinity with Abū Ya'qūb al-Kūmi (one of Ibn 'Arabi's first teachers in Andalusia), who died in Ḥabashi's home.

The notoriety Ibn 'Arabi had acquired for himself throughout the Maghreb drew to him a considerable number of disciples. They were devoted and obedient, and Ibn 'Arabi evokes with nostalgia the time he spent in their company and the 'perpetual praise' to which they dedicated themselves. '... When the imam is aware of this he takes care to ensure that a group of people exists who chant the verses of the Book unceasingly, both night and day. This is what I myself did when I was in Fez, thanks to some blessed companions who had submitted to me and given me their obedience. Then I lost them and simultaneously I abandoned this pure practice, which is the noblest and most sublime of nourishments.'

Among those who came to swell the ranks of Ibn 'Arabi's disciples was the poet and philologist 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Zaydān (d. 624/1227). The philologist 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Zaydān used to keep my company: he had become converted to God but still denied the possibility of man attaining fi ṃa' [extinction in God]. One day he came looking for me in Fez and said: 'Master, the fi ṃa' that the Sufis speak of is indeed true. I have just experienced it myself!' "How so?" I asked. He replied: 'You know that the Prince of the Faithful has

123. See esp. the verses Ibn 'Arabi dedicated to Ḥabashi in Fut., I. p. 198. He wrote a good number of works—for example the Kitāb mawā'iq al-nujum, the Kitāb insā' al-dawā'ir and the Kitāb hijāṣat al-abdāl, just to mention three—specifically for Ḥabashi.
129. According to the author of the Takmīla (cf. § 1771, ed. Codina), 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Ali b. Zaydān excelled not only in hadith, adab and poetry but also in jurisprudence (fi ṃa').
arrived from Andalusia and entered the city today?" "Certainly," I answered, "Well," he said, "I left my home along with the rest of the people of Fez to watch his troops enter town. As the Prince of the Faithful passed me by and I saw him, I became extinguished to myself (janītu 'an nafsī), to the troops and to everything perceived by man; I no longer heard the clashing of the cymbals or the banging of the drums, not even the noise of the rattles or the hubbub of the crowd. My eyes no longer saw anyone in the world except the Prince of the Faithful. What's more, nobody jostled me or bumped into me even though I was in the path of the cavalry and the people in the crowd were pushing against each other. I no longer saw myself and I was no longer even aware that I was looking at the Prince, because I was annihilated to myself..." 130 The Almohad Sultan whose return was celebrated with such enthusiasm by the people of Fez was Mansūr, who left Andalusia for the last time in Jumāda I 594/1198 to return to Marrakech, where he died soon afterwards.131

A good number of Ibn 'Arabi's works are concerned with the rules of sulūk: the conditions and obligations incumbent upon anyone entering the Path. The Kitāb al-khun,132 the Kitāb al-amr,133 al-waṣiyya134 and al-waṣiyya,135 as well as some sections of the Tadhīrat136 and Mawāqif al-nāṣir,137 to cite only these, define for the sālik or wayfarer a body of precepts which he must conform to if he wants to reach the end of his quest. These works are essentially concerned with setting out the fundamental principles of tārīqah or spiritual training as described in all the classical manuals written before Ibn 'Arabi's time. Strict observance of the sharī'ah is, needless to say, the condition sine qua non for success; acquisition of the 'noble virtues' (mukārim al-akhlaq) such as leniency, humility, generosity and 'chivalry' (futauwa) are indispensable for spiritual progress: asceticism (al-zuhhāt)—which implies

135. Kitāb al-waṣīyya, in Rasā'il (not to be confused with the bāb al-waṣīyya in the Futūḥāt); trans. by Michel Valsan in Études traditionnelles, April, May and June 1952.
136. Tadhīrat lāhījya (ed. Nyberg, pp. 225–240); the chapter in question has been translated by Michel Valsan in Études traditionnelles, March and June 1962, and by Asin Palacios, Islam cristianizado, pp. 352–70.
137. For a partial translation cf. Asin Palacios, Islam cristianizado, pp. 378–432. There will be more to say later about the composition of this work.
138. Ibn 'Arabi wrote a short treatise specifically on these four 'pillars' of asceticism: cf. the Kitāb bīyāt al-ābād, in Rasā'il, Hyderabad 1948; trans. by Michel Valsan, Paris 1950.
139. Tadhīrat lāhījya, p. 227; Islam cristianizado, p. 357.
140. Cf. Fut., I, pp. 722–3 and above, chapter 2: also Kitāb al-amr, in Islam cristianizado, p. 318. Where in matters of jurisprudence Ibn 'Arabi instructs the disciple to reject those solutions which have given rise to differences of opinion among the doctors of the Law and only adopt those that have met with unanimous approval. This is precisely the opposite of the position he demands should be adopted with regard to the community as a whole.
141. Cf. e.g. Fut., I, p. 210; IV, p. 270; Rih, preface, pp. 27–44.
143. A Persian expression: its equivalent in Arabic is al-nazar il-murd.
contemplation of beautiful young men as an aid to provoking ecstasy (wujud). ‘As for the use of a “witness”. In other words a young beardless man, this is the most serious of pitfalls and the most immoral form of wickedness.”

Among the spiritual exercises recommended by Ibn ‘Arabi, the practice of muhāṣaba or examination of one’s conscience occupies a special place. It will be remembered that he received this practice from two of his Andalusian teachers who used to note down every evening all their actions during that day. But Ibn ‘Arabi was even more demanding: he invited disciples to follow his own example by examining their thoughts as well as their actions. ‘You must demand that your soul account for itself, and you must verify the thoughts which crossed your mind at various moments in the day—all this while feeling shame with regard to God.”

Regarding the kind of dhikr used and recommended by Ibn ‘Arabi, it would seem that he adopted different ones during the course of his life. To begin with he had followed the example set by his master ‘Urmay and had used the Name ‘Allah’ as his dhikr, preferring it to any other. ‘This Name [Allah] used to be (kāna) the dhikr I practised, and it was the one used by the master through whom I entered the Way. The merit of this invocation is greater than all the merits resulting from other forms of invocation, because God has said: “The mention of ‘Allah’ is greater” (Qur’an 29:45) and because He did not speak of any other forms of dhikr in spite of all the existing forms of invocation by Divine Names. So it is that the men of God have chosen this Name [Allah] on its own as an invocatory formula by itself. It produces in the heart a sublime effect which is not achieved by any other form of invocation.”

Ibn ‘Arabi’s particular turn of phrase here (kāna dhikrūnā as opposed to huwa dhikrūnā) would seem to indicate that he had stopped practising dhikr using the Name ‘Allah’. Another passage in the Futūhāt, which was written later because it comes in the very last chapter of the work, the bāb al-wasāyā or ‘chapter of recommendations’, confirms this hypothesis because it shows that the Shaikh al-Akbar had finally given preference to the shahāda formula, ‘la ilāha illā lāh’.”

Repeat ceaselessly the declaration of Islam, which is “there is no god apart from God”. This is indeed the best of invocations (aḍḍal al-adhāb) by virtue of the increase in knowledge that it produces. There can be no doubt that the Messenger of God said: “The best statement we have made—both I and the prophets who preceded me—is ‘There is no god apart from God’ (aḍḍalū mā qultu).”

In saying “mā” he meant to indicate the merit of those who are also attached to the practice of dhikr using the names “Allah” or “He” (huwa), which are among the utterances [spoken by the prophets] and yet the most excellent of these utterances among those who are knowers in God is “la ilāha illā lāh”.”

We happen to know that on one point at least Ibn ‘Arabi differed from other shaikhs where tarbiya or spiritual training is concerned. According to him other teachers were wrong in placing the emphasis on ghina’i billāh or self-sufficiency through God. He himself advocated faqr lī lāh or poverty in God, which, he explains, is the ontological quality of created beings (ṣuṭuṭum al-baḥā‘īyyu). “As for my companions, they have received this from me and have realised it in themselves. . . . After I had taught it to my spiritual children and they had recognised its importance and so become acquainted with what most gnostics are unaware of, they received an immense benefit and thanks to this benefit committed no impropriety with regard to God.”

‘Do not approach the gates of the sultan.” As we will see, Ibn ‘Arabi showed himself inflexible where this principle is concerned—a principle he lays down in the Kitāb al-ḥusn and one which had frequently been expressed by other Sufis before him. Everything that in one way or another is linked with power is to be held in contempt by the disciple. This is well illustrated by the following rather lengthy anecdote reported by Ibn ‘Arabi in the Rüh al-ṣūq; it concerns Shaikh Ābd Allāh b. Ibrāhim al-Mālaqi al-Quʾāfi, whom Ibn ‘Arabi had met for the first time at Tarif in 589/1193. ‘One day when this shaikh was in Ceuta together with Ibn Tarif, Sultan Abū l-ʿAlā’ sent me two loads of provisions when I happened not to be in. Some brothers who had come to see me helped themselves to the food and ate it, but my own disciples (khwāṣṣ asḥabī) did not touch it. The following evening the sultan again sent me two loads of food, which I neither accepted nor refused. Some brothers had come to my place specifically (bi-l-qarad), because they knew the sultan was sending me food. I gave the call to prayer and did the night prayer itself. One of the brothers, who fancied he belonged to the rank of the Masters, said to me: “One does not perform the prayer when the meal is served”. I remained silent, and my silence angered him. I then said to him: “I did not accept this food and I have no intention of eating it because as far as I am”

146. Fut., III, p. 300.
147. Cl. Mawāṣṣa, qurʾān 32, 346.
151. Rüh, pp. 120–1; Sufis of Andalusia, p. 26, pp. 129–130.
152. This is probably Sultan Abū l-ʿAlāʾ ʿAlī al-Akbar, who was governor of Ceuta before becoming ruler between 624 and 629 under the name of Muʾāmin. It was he who officially abrogated Ibn Tamiyya’s doctrine (cf. above, pp. 82, 47). In his Dhiqāl (vol. VII, ii, Rabat 1984, p. 415) Ibn ʿAbd al-Malik al-Marrakushi describes an incident in which Abū l-ʿAlāʾ—at the time still governor of Ceuta—was confronted by the Sufi Ibn Sādīgh al-Andalūsī, and finally obliged to yield to his wishes.

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concerned it is illicit (harām), and I cannot possibly tell you to eat it because I want for you what I want for myself”. I went on to explain in what respect the food seemed to me to be illicit, then I said to them: “This food is ready. Those who consider it licit may eat it; the rest may abstain”. I returned to the house where I happened to be staying at the time, taking my disciples with me. The next day the brother in question went to the vizier and denounced me... The matter was brought to the sultan, who was an intelligent man. He declared: “My intention was solely to do good, but this man knows his own condition better. Consequently I will do him no harm and will not cause him trouble in any way whatsoever”; and he had the complaint withdrawn. The story of these events reached the ears of my friend al-Qalṭāt, who came to see me. Aware of the gravity of the situation, he was afraid for me and for my companions and rebuked me, saying: “As far as you yourself are concerned you have done well, but this will prove detrimental to our community as a whole because people here will never accept such behaviour!” I replied to him: “The right of God comes first!” (haqqu lillah ahaqq). Then I made a gesture with my hand and stood up as a sign that he was to leave. Subsequently I met Ibn Tarif, who was aware of what had happened. He said to me: “Diplomacy first of all!” I replied: “Agreed—provided the essential is preserved.”

There are several inferences to be drawn from this story. First of all, one notes that the instinctive reaction of Ibn ‘Arabi’s disciples in his absence was to refuse the food offered by the sultan. This shows quite clearly that he must have placed particular emphasis on this issue in his teaching. Secondly, the anecdote is evidence both for the concern of the Almohad authorities to ally themselves with Sufis circles and also for the esteem in which these authorities held Ibn ‘Arabi—whom, it will be remembered, Sultan Mansūr had hoped to take into his service.

One other anecdote, from the Futūḥāt this time, confirms this last point.

...I had experience of this situation in Tunis, in Ifriqiya. One of the greatest worthies of the town—his name was Ibn Mu’tib—invited me to his house to do me honour. I accepted his invitation. When I arrived at his place and we were preparing to eat, he asked me to intercede on his behalf with the sultan (sāhib al-balad) because I exerted influence and a certain authority over him (kuntu maqūāl al-qawwāl inadhu wa mutaḥakkīman). I agreed to do so and left the room without accepting the food or the gifts he had prepared for me. I did what he had asked me to do, and he was restored to power.153

Finally, one notes that when it became a question of defending the ‘right of God’ (haqqu lillah) the Shaikh al-Akbar did not hesitate to take his stand against two Sufis who in other respects were friends of his. All this makes one wonder what his reasons were for adopting such a guarded and even critical attitude with regard to the Almohad authorities, which he appears to have considered corrupt (fāṣūd), whereas in the East his attitude to the ruling princes—both Seljuq and Ayyūbīd—was to prove far more conciliatory. Was this because he regarded the Almohad government (which, it will be remembered, had been founded by Ibn Tumart who himself claimed to be the Mahdi) as illegitimate? If this had been the case there is every reason to suppose that Ibn ‘Arabi would have written or said so, especially in the works he composed during his oriental period. But we find nothing of the kind. Most probably this variation in his attitude was determined by factors of spiritual opportuneness. The Almohad Empire in the West was doomed to disappear sooner or later, and in one way or another Ibn ‘Arabi was aware of the fact. But on his arrival in the East he was, as we will see later, to be consecrated as Seal of the Saints; and simultaneously he was invested by God in quite specific terms with an advisory capacity, or nāṣīḥa, relating to the community as a whole—and that included its leaders.

As for those favoured disciples of Ibn ‘Arabi who abstained from joining in the meal, ‘Ibāshī was doubtless one of them even though he is not explicitly named: from a passage in the Futūḥāt we learn that he was accompanying his teacher at the time of his arrival at Ceuta in 594, which is when the incident is most likely to have taken place. Ibn ‘Arabi had just left Fez, where he had been imprudent enough to reveal a divine secret (he leaves us in the dark as to what it was) to a large number of companions. ‘Ibāshī had communicated one of his secrets to me in Fez in 594. I had divulged it, unaware that it is one of the divine secrets which are not to be told to others. I was reprimanded by the Beloved, and instead of giving any reply I held my silence. Finally I said to Him: “You sort out this problem with those to whom I confided the secret, because it is You who are jealous about it; You have the power to do so, not I!” I had revealed the secret to about eighteen men. He said to me: “I will deal with it”. Subsequently, after I had arrived in Ceuta, He told me that He had removed the secret from their breasts and deprived them of it. I said to my companion ‘Abd Allah al-‘Ibāshī: “God tells me He has done such-and-such a thing; let’s go to Fez to see for ourselves”.


154. As a matter of interest it is worth noting that, according to Idrīsī, Fez was eight days’ journey from Ceuta (Nuzhat al-mushīhāq, trans. R. Dozy and M.J. de Goeje, p.204).

7. Farewells

By the time he had returned to Spain, accompanied by the faithful Habashi, Ibn `Arabi would seem already to have made up his mind to leave the West for the East, the Maghreb for the Mashreq. This is the implication of a letter in the Kitāb al-kutub, Ibn `Arabi’s ‘Correspondence’. The information in this letter, plus the corroboration of some of the details provided by the Rūh al-quds, allows us not only to retrace with a fair degree of accuracy Ibn `Arabi’s itinerary during his many wanderings through Andalusia in 595/1198 but also to conclude that in his mind he was making a final visit to his homeland, and that it was his intention to say goodbye to his teachers before he left. We do not know exactly to whom the letter in question was addressed, but the text shows that the person was a shaikh whom the author had very recently spent some time with in the Maghreb. He may have been Abū Yahyā b. Abi Bakr al-Sanāḥī—a man for whom he had written the ‘Anqā’ mughrib in the same year (595) and together with whom, as he says in the Rūh, he had numerous conversations about the ‘essential truths’ (haqqa‘iq). But whatever the case may be, one thing for certain is that the letter was written in 595 on Ibn `Arabi’s return from Fez. After enumerating for the sake of his correspondent the many shaikhs whom he had visited in Andalusia since taking leave of him in the Maghreb, Ibn `Arabi brings the letter to a close by announcing: ‘Here ends the list of all those I have met, and in future I will not visit anyone for as long as I remain here’ (lā azīru ahadan ba‘d dhī mā baqūtu). Now if one examines Ibn `Arabi’s writings one notes that all references to

2. Rūh, § 29, p.122: Sufis of Andalusia, pp.132-3. This shaikh, who lived and died in the Maghreb, is not to be confused with the Sanāḥī who is the subject of Rūh § 5, and who lived and died in Andalusia. Tadlīl devotes a biographical sketch to him (Tashawwuf, § 152, p.307), but has him die at Marrakech in ‘approximately the year 590’; however, as the Kitāb ‘anqā’ mughrib was written for him in 595, he must have died some time later.
encounters of his in Andalusia come to a stop in, precisely, 595. The references continue in 597—but in Morocco.

After saying farewell to the anonymous addressee of this letter, Ibn `Arabi tells how he continued on his way until he arrived at Qasr Kutama (Alcazarquivir), a fortress some ninety kilometres to the south of Tangiers; there he met Shaikh `Abd al-Jalil b. Musa who, as we have seen, was a disciple of Ibn Ghaliib. He then crossed the Strait—he does not state whether he set sail from Ceuta or from Ksar—and arrived in Algeciras, where he again saw Shaikh Ibn Tarif. Next he kept going until he came to Ronda; there he visited a certain Abu l-Hasan al-Qanawzi (or al-Khuni) who, as he states in the Rih, followed the Path of Chivalry (futuwwa). At this point he appears to have forgotten to tell his correspondent that at Ronda he also met his friend and teacher Abu `Abd Allah Muhammad b. Ashraf al-Rundi; it will be remembered that he had formed a link with this man in 589, and he was determined to introduce him to Habashi. 'I had for a long time wanted to introduce him to my companion `Abd Allah Badr al-Habashi. Well, when we arrived in Andalusia we went to Ronda, where we attended a funeral ceremony. During the prayer I noticed that Abu `Abd Allah [al-Rundi] was there, and I introduced him to my companion `Abd Allah al-Habashi.' I then went back to the place where I was staying. Al-Habashi voiced his wish to see the shaikh do one of his miracles. When the sunset hour arrived we performed the prayer; then, as the person whose place we were staying at had not yet got round to lighting the lamp, my companion Abu Allah al-Habashi asked for some light. 'All right', said Abu `Abd Allah [al-Rundi]. He grabbed a handful of grass that was lying in the house, and while we watched him he struck it with his finger, saying: 'Here's some light!' The grass caught fire and we were able to light the lamp.'

From Ronda Ibn `Arabi and Habashi carried on until they arrived in Seville, where they went to offer their greetings to Ibn Qasim, Abu Allah al-Mawruiri and Abu `Imran al-Murtuli. Something said to them by al-Mawruiri confirms that the greetings were in fact a farewell. As Ibn `Arabi notes in the Rih, 'He said to me in the presence of my companion Abu Allah Badr al-Habashi, 'I used to fear for you because of your youthfulness, because of the absence of help as a result of the corruption so rampant in our times, and because of the degeneration I have noticed in the people of our Way: it is on account of these factors that I have preferred to live as a recluse. But praise be to God who has consolled me through you!'" The next stop on Ibn `Arabi's itinerary as outlined by him in his Risala remains more or less obscure. The editor of the Kitab al-kutub is uncertain about the spelling of the city in question but supposes it was Cordoba; Ibn `Arabi's description of it—he refers to it as the 'venerated' city and as a place of 'sublime contemplations', which is probably an allusion to his own experiences there—appears to confirm the hypothesis. It was in this city that he met a certain Abu `Abd Allah al-Astani, a person who so far has unfortunately proved unidentifiable. On the other hand, we do happen to know from a passage in the Futuwwa that Ibn `Arabi's arrival coincided with the burial of Averroes; he had died a short while earlier at Marrakech, on 9 Safar 595 (11 December 1198), and his remains had been transported back to his home town. Together with the author Ibn Jubar (d. 614/1217) and his disciple Ibn al-Sarraj, Ibn `Arabi attended the philosopher's burial.

From Cordoba the two travellers left for Granada—four days' walk away according to Idrisi. There they lodged with Shaikh Abu Muhammad al-Shakka' and were soon joined by `Abd Allah al-Mawruiri, who told them in detail about a miracle he himself had performed in the same town on an earlier occasion. Ibn `Arabi compared Shaikh al-Shakka' to his own uncle Abu Muslim al-Khawlani on account of his zeal and self-mortifications, and from his encounter with him retained above anything else the following definition of the four types of spiritual men: a definition phrased in accordance with the four aspects or meanings of the Qur'an as enumerated in a famous hadith. 'According to al-Shakka', there are those who 'have been faithful to the pact they made with God' (Qur'an 33:23): these are the 'men of the apparent' (rijal al-zahir). Then there are those who 'are not distracted from the invocation of God by either trade or business' (Qur'an 24:37): these are the 'men of the interior' (rijal al-batin). Then there are those of the 'Araf' (Qur'an 7:46): these are the 'men of the limit' (rijal al-hadd) ... and finally there are those who come to God on foot when He calls them' (Qur'an 22:27): these are the 'men of the ascent' (rijal al-ma'la' or rijal al-mutsallas).

9. Ruh, p.91; Sufis of Andalusia, p.88.
14. Fut., p.127 and IV, p.9, where Ibn `Arabi states that the meeting with Shakka took place at Granada in 595. The hadith in question does not appear in the canonical collections, but it is given by Ghazali (Ihya' `ulum al-din, Cairo ed., I, p.95: Kitab qaaw' id al-`aqa'id, 2nd fazil) on the authority of Ibn Hibban.

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Next Ibn 'Arabi left Granada for his town of birth, Murcia. There he met Ibn Saydabun, a famous disciple of Abu Madyan who at the time of their meeting was evidently going through a period of fara or abandonment. His Beloved had abandoned him and his Friend had taken an aversion to him... for reasons that can only be communicated orally and face to face; and yet the shaikhs' objectives were commendable and his efforts righteous. However, the power over the world which had been conferred upon him had slipped from his hands... When I left him I wept, so distressed was he to see me go, and he accompanied me some of the way so as to bid me farewell'.

Here again, Ibn Saydabun's behaviour shows rather clearly that he was aware of the fact that Ibn 'Arabi's departure was for good and that he would never see him again.

With the description of this last meeting Ibn 'Arabi's letter comes to an end; in it he specifies that from this time onwards he no longer visited anyone else. But his renunciation of ziyara or visits did not mean renouncing siyaha, or wanderings. Scarcely had he arrived in Murcia before he took off again for Almeria, four days' walk away; there his arrival coincided with the start of the month of Ramadan for the year 595/1199. Here in Almeria, as a result of a divine inspiration corroborated by a dream on the part of his disciple Habashi, he composed the Kitab mawqif al-nujum within the space of eleven days. Ibn 'Arabi himself attached considerable significance to this work, in which he deals with the eight parts of the body (eyes, ears, tongue, hands, belly, genitals, feet and heart), with the way in which each of them is made subject to takliif or legal obligation, and with the types of miracle and revelation that correspond to them. As he says in the Futiha: 'This book obviates the need for a teacher: or I would go even further and say that it is indispensable for any teacher, because among teachers there are some who are great and some who are even greater, and this work derives from the most elevated station which it is possible for a teacher to attain to'. A passage from the Mawqif al-nujum itself would seem to explain in what sense the treatise can act as substitute for a teacher: 'The knowledge or science of the obligations incumbent upon these parts of the body is the knowledge of those actions which lead to the state of bliss'. As regards the composition of the Mawqif al-nujum, it is also worth noting that to begin with it did not include the chapter on the heart, which is so obviously essential. In the Kitab 'iljat al-

17. Fut., I, p.334; IV, p.263.
18. Mawqif, p.34.
19. 'Iljat al-‘abdil, in Rasai‘il, p.8.
20. Ruh, p.82: the passage is not translated in Sufis of Andalusia.

As for the time of Ibn 'Arabi's definitive departure from Andalusia, we can be confident that it happened either towards the end of 596 or at the beginning of 597/1200. At any rate, in 597 we find him again in Morocco, more specifically in Salé. In his description of his 'teacher-disciple' Abu Ya'qub Yassuf al-Kumi in the Ruh al-quds he says that he left this shaykh (faraqatuha) at Salé to continue on his way to Marrakech (wa and mutawajjih ila Marrakush), and that he composed a farewell poem for the occasion. In fact we know from elsewhere that Ibn 'Arabi arrived in the Almohad capital in 597/1200—and that new adventures were awaiting him. According to Idrisi it was nine days' walk from Salé to Marrakech. Half-way between the two towns the traveller crossed the valley of Umm Rabi, where there were two villages with Berber names that are spelt differently according to different
authors: the first is called Ḽisal or Ḽisil, the second Ḵanjl or ᴾnaḵūl. According to Ibn Ṣāḥib al-Salāt (d. 600/1203) the second Muʿminid sultan, Abū Yaʿqūb Yūsuf, had a house in the first of these two villages; the village itself, now called Guiser, still survives today. As for the other village—spelt ‘Arabī by Idrīsī, ‘Aljūl by Ibn Ḵarīb—we happen to know from Idrīsī that it was close to Ḽisal, present-day Guiser. It was here, in Ḽisal, that Ibn Ḵarīb broke his journey; the name of this little Berber village, where he stopped off one day in Muharram 597 (October–November 1200), was to remain engraven in his memory forever afterwards. Indeed, for him its name was to evoke one of the most significant episodes in his spiritual destiny: the occasion when he attained to the maqām al-qurba, the station of Proximity. ‘I attained to this station [of Proximity] in the month of Muharram, 597, while I was travelling, at a stop called Ḽisal in Morocco. In my joy I started wandering around in this station; but I saw no one in it apart from myself and this solitude frightened me...’

‘So, when I had entered this station (maqām), found myself alone and realised that if anybody was to appear to me in it he would not recognise me. I started exploring its nooks and crannies. Although I had realised this station as well as is granted by God to those who attain it, I did not know its name. I saw the commands of God manifest themselves to me and I saw His ambassadors descend upon me. seeking my company and friendship. In the state of fear caused by my isolation (because there can only really be friendship between beings of the same species). I continued on my way.

‘In a place called Anjūl I performed the afternoon prayer in its mosque, and there I met one of the men of the Path. The Emir Abū Yahyā b. Waqītān arrived; he was one of my friends, was glad to see me and invited me to spend the night at his place. But I refused his offer and stayed instead with his secretary, a man with whom I was linked by bonds of friendship. I complained to him about my isolation in a maqām which in other respects delighted me. While he was consoling me I saw someone’s shadow. I rose from my bed and went towards it, hoping to receive some solace from it. It embraced me; I looked at it closely and saw that it was Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Yaqūb. Nāṣir had succeeded to the throne when his father Maṣūr died in 595/1199, shortly after the death of the philosopher Averroes whom he had disgraced in 592 but then recalled to court. After thirty-five years of rule Maṣūr left his son a vast empire, but a fragile one. Admittedly he had managed to hold the forces of Castle in check after the victory at Alarcos and the signing of the truce in 593. However, the Reconquest was only temporarily contained; less than fifteen years after his death the Christians were to crush the Almohads at Las Navas de Tolosa. Also, Maṣūr had not been able to stem the Almoravid revolt by the Banū Ghāniyya, who during the reign of his successor continued ravaging Idrīsiyya and even took Tunis in 600/1203. Within the Almohad realm itself he had established an extensive administrative structure run by men he could trust.

21. Idrīsī (id. approx. 560/1165) gives the spelling Ḽisil, adding that the village was particularly pretty and had many springs (Nuzhat al-mustaqīm, ed. Hadj Sadoq, p.80): so too Taddīl. Taṣawwuf, § 243, p.423. Ibn Ṣāḥib al-Salāt spells the name of the village Ḽisal, specifying that Sultan Abū Yaʿqūb Yūsuf stopped off there in 566, the editor of the Mann bi l-ʿimāmān explains that the village in question is Guiser (Mann, II. p.443). For the exact location of the town cf. A. Tawfīg’s map of Morocco at the end of the Taṣawwuf.
23. Mann, II. p.443.

24. The author of the Taṣawwuf al-waḥīlīyya, who died in 421/1030.
25. It will be remembered that Khādir is one of the afrād or ‘solitary ones’ who are unique precisely because they are granted access to this ‘station of Proximity’.
27. For Marrakech cf. El², s.v.
28. Cf. the article by R. le Tourneau in El² s.v. Ghāniyya.
and whom he advised his successor to retain. In the sphere of architecture Mansūr’s name, like his father’s, is still associated with a number of achievements. He brought to completion the famous Giralda at Seville as well as the Kutubiyāna in Marrakech, and simultaneously began work on the expansion of the capital. Finally he totally transformed Rabat, endowing it with two long walls plus the famous Hasan mosque which was intended to be the twin sister of the Giralda and Kutubiyāna mosques but was never completed; even so its minaret—still to be seen today—bears undying witness to its former splendour. Of all these projects, Marrakushiī gives pride of place to the magnificent hospital that the sultan had built in Marrakech and then used to go to every Friday, to visit the sick who were cared for there, accommodated and fed for free. Ibn ‘Idhārī praises the sultan for instituting the compulsory wearing of a distinctive garment by Jews in the same year that he died. In his Ḍuṣqān he makes no bones of his approval for the sultan’s initiative: ‘Amongst his [i.e. Mansūr’s] best-known merits is the fact that he made it compulsory for Jews to wear a distinctive garment. Jews had in fact had the audacity to wear Muslim dress and assume the appearance of nobility by the clothing they wore. In their outer behaviour they resembled the people [i.e. Muslims] and it was no longer possible to distinguish them from the faithful servants of God. This is why Mansūr imposed on them the wearing of a characteristic garment similar to the mourning garment worn by widows. He lengthened their gowns by a span’s breadth and length, specifying that they should be blue in colour with blue hoods and blue bonnets’. The reign of Mansūr’s son Nāṣir marked the beginning of the period of decline. It was to be the period of a great defeat: the defeat of the Almohad army by the forces of Castile in 609/1213 at Las Navas de Tolosa. However, in the year 597/1200 Marrakech still glittered for the time being, and no one was to suspect that the Empire was drawing to its close.

For anyone familiar with Islamic hagiography the name of Marrakech — sometimes referred to as ‘Tomb of the Saints’—is virtually inseparable from the name of its ‘patron’, Abū l-‘Abbās al-Sabtī (d. 601/1205), whom Ibn ‘Arabi promptly went to visit while passing through the city. Abū l-‘Abbās al-Sabtī was originally from Ceuta: he had first settled in the suburbs of Marrakech but subsequently, at the request of Sultan Mansūr who was particularly keen on aligning himself with Sufi circles, he ended up moving into the capital itself. His repeated calls for charity, his virtues, selflessness and generosity aroused admiration in some but exasperation in many others. According to one story the fuqahā’, or jurists, became so enraged that they drew up a bill of indictment intending to submit it to Sultan Ya’qūb; but when Ya’qūb started reading the document the accusations had turned into eulogies… Everyone who knew Abū l-‘Abbās al-Sabtī was unanimous on one point—his most obsession attachment to charity, ṣadaqa. Tādīlī, who was an acquaintance of his over a long period of time, states that ‘his teaching revolved around ṣadaqa’. Averroes echoed the same verdict when he declared that for Abū l-‘Abbās ‘Existence proceeds from generosity’. It is hardly surprising therefore to find Ibn ‘Arabi refer to him as ‘ṣāhib al-sadaqa’, the ‘giver of alms’. He also provides some details about him which appear not to be mentioned in any of the writings of Sabtī’s biographers. ‘He told me himself that he had asked God to give him in advance in this lower world everything [that was reserved for him in the Future Life], and God did so. As a result he was able to cause illness and to heal, to make live and make die, to give power to certain men or withdraw it—all thanks to [the practice of] alms… But he did inform me that he had put aside into His safekeeping [the alms corresponding to an almsgiving of] one quarter of a dirham for his Future Life… I too did the same practice in my early stages and witnessed marvellous results; but in my case and in the case of others similar to me we obtained this from God without any wish for it on our part’.

Ibn ‘Arabi also formed a friendship with another Sufi living in Marrakech: Muhammad al-Marrakushiī, a man who seems to have gone unnoticed by the hagiographers. This saint’s initiatory motto (biṭirr) was the verse: ‘Endure patiently the decree of your Lord, for you are under Our eyes’ (Qur’ān 52:48). From this verse he had derived a quite exceptional capacity to endure misfortunes with joy. As Ibn ‘Arabi writes about him: ‘Never have I seen him despondent. He would greet calamities with joy and laughter… He was also extremely strict in his respect for the times allocated for acts of worship; never have I met his equal in this station’. Marrakushiī for his own part had a profound affection for Ibn ‘Arabi, and never left him for a moment either day or night. When the inevitable time of separation arrived, sadness for once won the upper hand over cheerfulness. ‘No brother was more desolated by my departure than he, at the time when I left him to come to this country [i.e. to the East].’

31. Ḍuṣqān, III, p.205.
34. Tashawwuf, p.453.
35. Ibid., p.454.
36. Fut., IV, p.121.
37. Fut., IV, p.143.
From Marrakech to Mecca is still a very long way—especially so for Ibn ‘Arabi, who insisted on doing in the Maghreb what he had already done in Andalusia by visiting and offering his greetings to all those who in one way or another had played a part in his spiritual life. From Marrakech he headed for Fez with the specific intention of finding a certain Muhammad al-Hassār: God had instructed him in a vision he had in Marrakech that he was to take this man as his companion on his long journey towards the East. ‘Know that God has erected pillars of light as supports for the throne; I don’t know how many there are, but I have seen them. Their light resembles the light from lightning. However, the throne casts a shadow in which an inexpressible tranquility resides. This shadow is the shadow of the throne’s concavity, and it veils the light of He who is seated upon it: the Merciful. I also saw the treasure which is underneath the throne: from it came the utterance “neither strength nor power save through God the Sublime, the Magnificent.” This treasure is Adam, peace be upon him. Above I saw many other treasures which I recognised, and beautiful birds that were flying around everywhere. One of the birds that I saw was more beautiful than the others; it greeted me and informed me that I was to take it as a companion on my journey to the East. I was in Marrakech when all this was revealed to me. I asked: “Who is this companion?” The reply I was given was: “He is Muhammad al-Hassār of Fez. He has asked God to be able to go to the East; take him with you!” I answered: “I hear and I obey.” I then said to him who was the bird: “You will be my companion if God so wishes.”

“When I arrived in Fez I searched for this man and he came to see me. I said to him: “Have you asked for something from God?” He answered: “I asked of Him that He allow me to go to the East, and I was told, ‘So-and-so will take you there’. Since then I have been waiting for you’.

“I took him as my companion in 597 and brought him to Egypt, which is where he died.”

In the company of Muhammad al-Hassār, and probably of Habashi as well, Ibn ‘Arabi next made his way towards Ifriqiya. He no doubt stopped off in Tlemcen, which is eight days’ walk from Fez, to say goodbye to some of his friends there; we can at any rate be perfectly certain that around this time—in 597—he made a pilgrimage to the tomb of Abu Madyan at ‘Ubbad, which is not far from Tlemcen. 39. Tireless pilgrim that he was, he then turned north again and continued along the coast as far as Bougie. It was here, in this town still impregnated with the presence of the great saint of the Maghreb, that the Shaikh al-Akbar saw himself united in marriage with all the stars in heaven and then with all the letters of the alphabet. 40 Intrigued, he asked a friend to submit the vision to an interpreter of dreams, but insisted that the friend avoid revealing his name. ‘When my dream was submitted to this man, he was most impressed and declared: “This is the bottomless sea. Whosoever has this dream will receive a portion of the celestial sciences, of the hidden sciences and of the mysteries of the stars and of the letters which nobody else has obtained in his time.” He was silent for a moment, and then said: “If the person who had this dream is in this town, he can only be the young Andalusi who has just arrived,” and he mentioned me by name. My companion was astounded and quite stunned. Then the man said: “Yes it can only be him! There’s no point trying to conceal him from me!” “Yes, it is him,” my companion replied. The man went on: “In this town, that can only be granted to him. Could you possibly take me to him so that I can offer him my greetings?” “I will do nothing without receiving his authorisation,” was my companion’s reply; he consulted me and I told him not to return to him. As for myself, I resumed my travels almost straight away. 41 Ghubrini (d. 704/1304) recounts this incident in detail, apparently basing his report on information he had heard orally (dukhira); and he also asserts that at Bougie Ibn ‘Arabi met someone called Abū ‘Abd Allah al-‘Arabi. 42 It is rather strange that in his sketch of this saint 43 Ghubrini essentially bases what he says on the authority—no doubt a written one—of Ibn ‘Arabi: strange, because there appears to be no trace of any reference to a man of this name in Ibn ‘Arabi’s writings. Whatever the correct explanation of the anomaly, one clear implication of the passage cited by Ghubrini is that Ibn ‘Arabi seems to have considered Abū ‘Abd Allah al-‘Arabi a malāmī, a follower of the path of blame, or at least as a saint who concealed his true spiritual state by pretending he was mentally retarded. He concealed what he was in reality and disguised it by assuming the appearance of a half-wit his whole life long. [Every year] he would leave Bougie in the month of Dhū l-Hijjah to perform the pilgrimage, and he would return without being noticed by anyone except those who are informed of the mysteries and secrets.

From Bougie Ibn ‘Arabi continued along the coast until he came to Tunis, the last break in his journey before his great departure. And it was quite a long break as well: according to his own statement it lasted nine months. 44 A period spent in the company of Shaikh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Mahdawi. Mahdawi’s 40. Ibn ‘Arabi, Kitāb al-hā, Cairo 1954, pp.10–11: Kitāb al-kutub, p.49.
41. Kitāb al-hā, pp.10–11.
43. Ibid., § 7, pp.80ff.
44. Fat., I, pp.10, 98.
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servant Ibn al-Murābīt⁴⁵ and his own companion Habashi. Gathered together in one and the same place, these four men were to the universe what the four ‘corners’ are to the Ka‘ba:⁴⁶ ‘We were the four pillars supporting the being of the universe and the [Perfect] Man. That was the state in which we parted, as the result of a change that had occurred because I had decided to perform the Greater and the Lesser Pilgrimage (al-hajj wa l-‘umra) with the intention of subsequently returning to your [i.e. ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Mahdawi’s] noble company.’⁴⁷ Is Ibn ‘Arabi telling us here that at the time when he left the Islamic West in 598/1201 to visit the holy places he was unaware that he would never see his native country again? This literal interpretation of the text hardly seems convincing. The methodical way in which he took his leave of the people and places that had played a part in his youth, plus the certainty he so often expressed of a vocation which was to have a sphere of influence reaching well beyond the limits of the West, would appear to exclude the possibility that he viewed his departure as a mere temporary break with his past. He was very probably aware that at least in this terrestrial world he would never see again either Mahdawi⁴⁸ or anyone else whom he left behind in Andalusia. No doubt he derived this certainty as well as others from the vision he says he was granted by God in 589 at Algeciras, when he was allowed to contemplate his entire future. This same certainty will have been confirmed at Fez in 594, when he saw himself chosen to assume the supreme role of Seal of the Saints: a role with a universal dimension which implied that from the periphery of the Islamic world he was to make his way towards its centre and there establish himself. But friendship still has its rights. Whether an expression of regret, or the formulation of an empty wish, or a statement meant to console someone he knew he had left for ever, this incidental remark was powerless to hold in check a divine decree which had an imprescriptible authority that Ibn ‘Arabi knew better than anyone else.

8. The Great Pilgrimage

THE EAST UNDER THE AYYŪBIDS

The Andalusia Ibn ‘Arabi left behind him was gradually losing ground to the Christian reconquest. In the East, where he was making for, other armies—again in the name of Christ—posed the same threat. The heroic deeds of the Crusaders, sung by the troubadours, transformed into image at Saint-Sulpice et Épinay, are one of the greatest topos or recurring themes of the western imagination.⁴ Richard the Lionheart, Saladin, the Templars and the Holy Sepulchre belong as much to mythology as to history. Let us look briefly at some of the facts.

On 22 Sha‘bān 492 or 14 July 1099 the Crusaders ‘liberated the Holy Sepulchre’ in response to the call from Urban the Second. The Jewish and Muslim population were put to the sword, and the Roman Kingdom of Jerusalem was born. In spite of their vast numerical superiority it took the Muslims two centuries to expel all the Franks from Palestine. On the first day of Muharram 567, 10 September 1171, the khutba or sermon was delivered at Cairo in the name of the Abbasid caliph: Saladin had just abolished two and a half centuries of the Fatimid caliphate. On Friday 27 Rajab 583, 2 October 1187, Muslims tore down the cross which for a number of years had adorned the dome of Masjid al-Aqṣā: Saladin had reconquered Jerusalem.

In Europe emotions ran high. Preparations were made for the Third Crusade, under the direction of Frederick the First, Emperor of Germany, Philippe Auguste, King of France, and Richard the Lionheart, King of England. Of these three rulers only Richard would reach the end of his journey. After taking Cyprus he managed to win back Acre, Ascalon and Jaffa from Saladin. But both sides were wearyied by war and, forced for a

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⁴⁵ For Ibn al-Murābīt cf. also Rah, § 50, p. 125, and p. 163; Sufis of Andalusia, p. 141. He is referred to by Ibn Qunfudh in Ums al-faqr, p. 98.
⁴⁶ For the correspondence between awṭūd and arāk al-bayt cf. Fut., I, p. 160; II, p. 5.
⁴⁸ They could theoretically have met again because Mahdawi left for the East and spent some time there after 600 (cf. D. Gris’s note, Sāfī al-Dīn, Risāla, p. 205). But there are no references in Ibn ‘Arabi’s writings which would entitle us to suppose that they were reunited in the East.

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number of reasons to return to their own countries, on 22 Sha’bân 598 or 2 September 1192 the two enemies signed the peace treaty of Ramla which left to the Franks the entire coastline from Tyre to Jaffa. A few months later Saladin died at the age of fifty-five. Whether he was noble, generous, just and pious as Muslims have always believed and still believe, or whether he was ambitious, egotistic and a hypocrite as certain historians seem to want to prove, Saladin remains the conqueror of Hattin and the liberator of Jerusalem. Perhaps his one greatest achievement was to have united under his standard Egypt, Syria, the jazirah and Palestine. However, the coalition was more apparent than real. The premature loss of the founder of the Ayyubid dynasty led to loss of the unity of the Empire, which would be fought over continually and divided up among his successors. From this time onwards Ayyubid history basically became the history of a never-ending fratricidal struggle, a struggle which most often took the form of war between Cairo and Damascus. It was eventually ‘Adil, Saladin’s brother, who was to emerge triumphant from the dissensions that had divided the sons of Saladin for eight years: invited by both sides to play the role of arbitrator in the conflict, he ended up having himself proclaimed sultan at Cairo in 596/1200. He divided up the rest of the Empire between his own sons—except that he failed to take possession of Aleppo, which remained under the suzerainty of Zahir, the fourth and youngest son of Saladin. The Franks, too, were victors. Saladin’s wars had cost a fortune, and after his death the treasury was left bare. ‘Adil intensified commercial relations with the Italian republics and at the same time inaugurated a policy of ‘peaceful coexistence’ with the crusaders. Admittedly, the crusaders probably no longer posed any real threat to the Islamic world, but they did occupy Cyprus, the principality of Antioch and the earldom of Tripoli, not to mention the greater part of the Syro-Palestinian coast. As we will see, this thinly disguised abnegation of the holy war, or jihad, which itself reached a climax in 626/1229 when Kamil handed Jerusalem back to Frederick the Second, was to provoke considerable upheaval in public opinion—especially at Damascus.

Saladin’s successors may, for what in fact were essentially economic reasons, have buried the hatchet in their battle with the infidel but this did not mean that as rulers they were any less preoccupied with religion or any less careful to favour orthodoxy. They tried hard to maintain cordial relations with the caliphate, in harmony with the course adopted by their predecessor who on the one hand brought Egypt back into the Sunni family and on the other hand appealed to the caliphate for a diploma of investiture confirming him in his territorial possessions while also offering proofs of his allegiance to Baghdad. After Sultan Aflâl had succeeded to his illustrious father in 589/1193, his first action was to dispatch a mission to Baghdad with the aim of obtaining a diploma of investiture from the caliph, al-Nâsir. In 599/1202 Sultan ‘Adil (596/1200–615/1218) became a member of the futuwwa: a kind of initiatory organisation which had been institutionalised and made official by Caliph al-Nâsir with the help of the Sufi Suhrawardi (d. 632/1234). Suhrawardi’s aim had been to bring aristocracy and princes together within the framework of one spiritual order and in the name of one common ideal, and by so doing curb the gradual disintegration of the caliphate while also protecting it against its enemies who were assailing it from every direction—from within as well as from without.

In 604/1207 ‘Adil dispatched a delegation to Baghdad with his own request to the caliph for a diploma of investiture legitimising his authority; the diploma was delivered to him in Damascus by Suhrawardi. Membership of the futuwwa on the part of the various Ayyubids, along with the diplomas of investiture which they actually sought for, could a priori be interpreted as simply testifying to their purely formal respect for the institution of the caliphate. However, there are some other factors which seem to indicate that their respect was almost as real as it was apparent. Certainly the Ayyubids did not give up reigning as independent sovereigns over the territories that were theirs, and neither was this something that the caliphate demanded of them: but it is remarkable all the same that on several occasions they took into consideration the caliph’s advice when he intervened diplomatically to try to quell the family conflicts. This happened for example in 606/1209 in the dispute between ‘Adil and his nephew Zahir, and again in the clash between Kamil and Nâsir Dâwût in 633/1236.

As far as the relationship between the Ayyubid dynasty and Islam is concerned, it is impossible not to notice—among a number of other signs—the remarkable extent to which religious architecture flourished. The Seljuqs, followed by the Zangids, had set the example with their fondness for creating large numbers of madrasas. Saladin and then his successors simply intensified their predecessors’ efforts: here and there throughout Syria, the jazirah and Egypt new colleges and khânqâhs started to appear. In 602/1206 ‘Adil gave instructions to his minister for the paving of the enormous courtyard in front of the Great Mosque of the Umayyads, and several years later he gave instructions for extending the Miṣâlilâ. His son Kamil, sultan of Egypt (615/
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1218-635/1238), was responsible for the building of Cairo’s first dār al-hādīth; his other son, Mu’azzam, who was sultan of Damascus (615/1218-624/1227) and one of the few Ayyūbids to adopt the Hanafite form of ritual, had a major Hanafite madrasa built in his city and also restored the Maqṣūra al-Kindi of the Great Mosque. Their father ‘Adil, anxious no doubt to mollify the jurists who were to say the least disappointed by his policy of ‘peaceful coexistence’ with the Franks, redeemed himself in their eyes by taking a strong stand against contraband in wine and by abolishing illegal taxes (mukās). 4 At any rate he made a particularly good impression on Ibn ‘Arabi, who met him at Mayyāfāriqin. ‘I have not met any other ruler who has realised this station [of familiarity], in council and in the presence of princes and ambassadors, to the degree achieved by King ‘Adil b. Abi Bakr b. Ayyūb with regard to his grandchildren at the time when I was his guest at Mayyāfāriqin, as a member of the assembly. I have met many kings but I have seen none who conducted themselves in this sphere in the same way as King ‘Adil. I considered this to be one of his virtues: because of it I esteemed him the higher and I thanked him for it. I noticed that he showed consideration and kindness towards his wives . . . which I have not perceived in any other king.’

As for ‘Adil’s son Mu’azzam, admittedly he was responsible for reintroducing the notorious illegal taxes; but he also enjoyed a considerable reputation among the ‘adāma for his expertise in matters of jurisprudence (he was the author of a polemical work against the historian Baghdadī), grammar and adab, and also for his concern to intensify the war effort of jihād against the occupying Christians. 5 And as we will see, his own son Nāṣir Dāwūd fiercely denounced Kāmil’s surrender of Jerusalem.

While the rapid increase in madrasas testifies to the keenness of the Ayyūbid princes to promote orthodox religious teaching, the foundation under their aegis of several khānqāhs similarly suggests a certain sympathy on their part for Sufism—perhaps reinforced by the unacknowledged desire to control them more effectively. There can be no disputing the fact that in the East during the twelfth century—and even more so during the thirteenth—there was close collaboration between temporal power and Sufi circles. In this respect one has only to think of the role played by Suhrawardī during the time that Nāṣir was caliph, or of the role of the Banū Hamawīh who held a virtual monopoly over the simultaneously political and religious post of

‘Shaikh of Shaikhs’ under the Ayyūbid sultans. As to the precise nature and extent of the influence exerted by Sufis over men of power, we are fortunate in possessing accounts by two contemporary writers, 6 Saﬁ al-Dīn Ibn Abī Mansūr and Ibn ‘Arabī; both of them confirm the existence of close contacts between the Ayyūbid princes and the Men of the Path. From Ibn Abī Mansūr we learn that a ‘bond of brotherhood’ had been formed between King ‘Adil and Shaikh ‘Atiq. Shaikh ‘Atiq b. Ahmad al-Lawraqī was originally from Lorca in Andalusia; he had come to the East together with his master Abū l-Najā and had settled in Damascus, which is where he died in 616/1219 after reaching the age of a hundred. He lived in the house of the qādī of qādīs, Zaki al-Dīn (d. 616/1219), who asked him to intercede on his behalf with Sultan ‘Adil. ‘Al-Malik al-‘Adil wanted to confiscate this qādī’s possessions, and Shaikh ‘Atiq happened to be staying in the man’s home at the time. Twenty thousand dinars were being demanded of him, and just after four thousand dinars had been extracted from him he went looking for the shaikh and asked him to intercede with the sultan on his behalf. ‘I will certainly intercede on your behalf with God’, the shaikh assured him. ‘And would the master be willing to meet with al-Malik al-‘Adil?’, suggested the qādī. The shaikh agreed to the proposal and went to the sultan, who received him respectfully because a bond of brotherhood had already been established between them. The shaikh said to him: ‘Brother of mine, don’t give my brother the qādī Zaki al-Dīn a hard time. Leave him in peace, and God’s blessing be upon you!’ The sultan phrased his response to the shaikh in conciliatory terms and offered his apologies: then they parted. The following night the sultan saw himself in a dream surrounded by the keepers of hell, who were saying to him: ‘Unless you leave the qādī alone now that the shaikh, that holy man of God, has intervened on his behalf, we will see to it that you perish!’ 7 ‘Al-‘Adil woke in terror and gave instructions that the qādī was not to be disturbed any more, and that the amount of money which had already been extracted from him should be returned. The shaikh commented to the qādī: ‘Didn’t I tell you that it would have been quite enough for me to speak on your behalf to my Sultan? You could have spared me the trouble of having to go and speak to yours?’

Also in the Rīsāla we find the following rather strange story, which shows King Kāmil—the same king who ceded the Holy City to Frederick the Second—in a somewhat unexpected light. ‘At Fustāt’, writes Saﬁ al-Dīn, ‘I made the acquaintance of the venerable shaikh Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Qurṭubi, who was one of the most intimate disciples of Shaikh al-Qurashi. He possessed a

4. For ‘Adil’s religious attitude cf. Humphreys, From Saladin to the Mongols, pp. 146-49.
5. Ibid., IV, p. 225.
The spirituality of a very high level and was greatly respected by teachers, by the learned, and by princes alike. He formed a bond of friendship with al-Malik al-
‘‘Adil and was revered by al-Malik al-Kâmil, who went to visit him on foot. He
stayed most of the time at Medina. There was a close link between him and the Prophet: they exchanged questions, answers and greetings. The
Messenger of God even gave him a message to deliver to al-Malik al-Kâmil, and the shaikh passed it on to him in Egypt. On his arrival he stopped off at
Rasad, where the sultan came to meet him, humbled and full of respect. He
took delivery of the contents of the message, which he carried out in every
detail.\(^8\)

What with ‘‘Adil submitting docilely to Shaikh ‘Atiq’s decision, and Kamîl
visiting Shaikh Qurtubi on foot, everything would seem to suggest that the
Ayyûbid rulers—or at the very least some of them—were under the direct or indirect influence of spiritual masters. Apart from there being no \textit{a priori}
reasons to doubt the accuracy of Saﬁ al-Dîn’s testimony (his own father was
in the service of kings ‘‘Adil, ‘Azâz and Ashraf, and was also a disciple of Shaikh
Qurashi), on this particular point the details of his account are corroborated
by what we know of the relationship between Ibn ‘Arabi and certain Ayyûbid
sovereigns. Indeed, for reasons we will examine in due course, in the East Ibn
‘Arabi adopted a quite different attitude towards both Ayyûbid and Seljuq
princes from his attitude in the West: although he did not systematically seek
out their company, neither did he refuse it. Here in the East, just as in the
West, rulers requested his presence, asked him for advice and sought his
approval. Even more surprisingly, the king of Aleppo, Zâhir, examined and
judged one hundred and eighteen requests in the space of one single day at
his request. ‘‘I had some influence over the king and sultan of Aleppo, Zâhir b.
al-Malik Nâsir . . . b. Ayyûb. One day I submitted one hundred and eighteen
matters to him in a single audience, and he passed judgement on them all. In
connection with one of these cases I interceded on behalf of a man who was
one of his intimates, who had divulged a state secret and had attempted to
undermine his sovereignty. [Zâhir] had decided to have him executed. His
lieutenant in the fortress, Badr al-Dîn Ïdâmûr, had advised him to keep his
decision a secret so that I would not know anything about it, but even so
I came to hear of it. When I broached the subject with him, he lowered his head
and said: ‘‘First of all, may the master (\textit{mawâlî} be informed of this man’s sin. It
is one of those crimes that kings are unable to pardon’’. I replied: ‘‘And you
imagine you possess the dignity of kings and think you are a sultan! By God,
in the whole universe there is not one sin I would be unable to pardon. And
yet I am only one of your subjects! How then are you incapable of pardoning a

man for a sin which is not a transgression of the Divine Law? Your
magnanimity is pretty mediocre!’’ He was ashamed, had the man released
and pardoned him . . . . After this meeting he was quick to fulfill every request
I submitted to him.\(^9\)

From Maqqarî (d. 1041/1631), author of the \textit{Naﬁ al-tib}, we also learn that
the prince of Homs used to give Ibn ‘Arabi a hundred dirhams per day.\(^10\) And
finally, there is the question of what we are to make of the certificate (\textit{iqâza})
which Ibn ‘Arabi awarded to al-Ashrâq, the king of Damascus, in 632. Should
we see in all this nothing but political manoeuvring on the part of the
Ayyûbid rulers, aimed at winning over the Sufi circles that were coming to
play an increasingly influential role in society? As a theory this would seem
hardly acceptable: even allowing for the number of disciples Ibn ‘Arabi
brought together into one group, it is difficult to see what the political
advantage for the first Ayyûbid would have been in winning his favour. Just
like his two Andalusian co-religionists, ‘Atiq and Qurtubi, Ibn ‘Arabi was
merely a foreigner who was generously received and tolerated in the East.

Otherwise, the relations between Ayyûbid princes and expatriate Sulûs
were not always idyllic. Suhrâwardi, the Shaikh al-Îshârâq, was executed at
Aleppo in 587/1191 on Saladin’s orders.\(^11\) Similarly, Saﬁ al-Dîn himself
reports a dispute which broke out between Hasan Ïawlî, a shaikh from the
Maghreb, and al-Malik al-Kâmil when the sultan decided to yield to the
Christians’ request that he forbid the shaikh from restoring a mosque which
had been converted into a church. With the support of the populace, Shaikh
Hasan won the case. ‘‘It was summer, and at this time of year sandbanks
blocked the flow of the river between the island and Fusât. The sultan [i.e.
Kâmil] was walking on this bank when, egged on by the shaikh, the crowd
massed in front of him chanting ‘‘The mosque, the mosque!’’ The sultan was
afraid of being stoned and barricaded himself inside the customs warehouse.
He was obliged to dispatch the Great Master (\textit{shaykh al-shuyukh}) Ïadr al-Dîn
along with his vizier al-Îsâhî al-A’âz b. Shukr to find out the facts about
the church and the mosque. These two men went to the actual spot; people
poured into the streets and onto the rooftops and terraces, ready to start
hurling bricks. The shaikh and the vizier had to force their way through the
crowd to arrive at the church, and then they entered it. The Great Master had
no choice but to roll out his rug, pronounce the \textit{takbîr} formula and perform
the prayer which is usually performed on entering a mosque.\(^12\) Saﬁ al-Dîn

\(^8\) \textit{Risâla}, p.127; with the biobibliographical note on Qurtubi, ibid. p.212.

\(^9\) \textit{Fut.}, IV, p.539. The same story is also told in III, p.406 and, more allusively, in III, p.472.

\(^10\) \textit{Naﬁ al-tib}. II, p.166. The prince in question is almost certainly Mujâhid Shîrkhâb, who
was ruler of Homs from 582 until his death in 637/1239.


\(^12\) \textit{Risâla}, pp.126–27.
goes on to describe how Kāmil was angry at being forced to reverse his decision and took his revenge on the shaikh by expelling him from Egypt. But, frightened by a dream in which he saw himself threatened by the keepers of hell, he asked his vizier to have him recalled.

Several points emerge from a reading of this account. Firstly, it is worth noting that the shaikh from the Maghreb enjoyed such popularity that he was able to frustrate the sultan’s scheme. Secondly, and this is the most important point, the report testifies to a certain antagonism between Muslims and Christians, as well as to the favour the Christians seem to have enjoyed in the case of Kāmil. As a general rule, Ayyūbid rulers showed themselves rather tolerant towards the Christian and Jewish religious minorities. But it is equally true that they were not always followed in their attitude by the mass of their subjects. Christians, and Copts in particular, were suspected of collaboration with the Frankish enemy and at times became victims of popular vindictiveness. It is clearly no accident that these waves of anti-Christian riots coincided with the most critical periods of ‘peaceful coexistence’. This was the case in 615, when Damietta was surrounded by the Franks, in 640/1242 when the Templars attacked Bethlehem, and in 648/1250 after Louis the Ninth’s capitulation—when, according to the chronicler Abū Ẓabīl, the Christians demonstrated quite ostentatiously their disappointment in face of the Muslim victory. But, as E. Sivan has pointed out, these three cases of riots won no support from the sultans, and in 1242 al-Salih Ayyūb even took severe measures against the agitators. Finally, it is interesting to observe the role played during the course of the dispute by the shaikh of shaikhs Sadr al-Dīn b. Ḥamawīy, who had been entrusted by Kāmil with the task of appeasing the population. Those who occupied this position of ‘shaikh of shaikhs’ were closer to the seat of political power than the Sūfīs whom they were initially supposed to represent, and they were often used as ambassadors by oriental rulers. It is rather remarkable that in the thirteenth century this responsibility always reverted to Iranians: to Subhawardi in Baghdad, who on a number of occasions was sent on diplomatic missions by the caliph, and to the Banū Ḥamawīy in Syria.

The first member of this illustrious Persian family to receive the title was ʿlāmād al-Dīn ʿUmar (d. 577/1181), who was appointed to the post by Nur al-Dīn; on his death he was succeeded by his son Ṣadr al-Dīn—first at Damascus and then in Egypt. Where Sultan ʿAdil appointed him director of the Saʿīd al-Suʿādāʾ khānaqāh. He also performed the role of ambassador on various occasions, and it was during the course of one of his diplomatic missions (entrusted to him by Kāmil) that he died at Mosul in approximately 616–7. His four sons, known by the title of awlād al-shaykh, all occupied influential positions in the government and army. It is worth bearing in mind that one of them, Fakhr al-Dīn Yūsuf, was Kāmil’s ambassador to Frederick the Second during the negotiations which ended in the surrender of Jerusalem: in 648/1250 he was also put in charge of the defence of Egypt against the Frankish invasion.

In addition to this strong injection of Iranian blood into Ayyūbid society, we must also reckon with a major contribution in the form of immigrants from the Islamic West. In fact this particular period witnessed an upsurge in movement from Andalusia and the Maghreb towards the East. Of course the pilgrimage to Mecca had at all times drawn a number of people from these areas to the shores of the Red Sea; but to this traditional factor a new impulse was now added in the form of the Reconquista, which as it proceeded encouraged Andalusians to emigrate. Those who decided not to return to their native country (and in this case more and more people decided against doing so) settled for the most part in Egypt, and especially in Alexandria where everything possible was done to facilitate their reception and accommodation. As Ibn Jubayr (d. 614/1217) was to write when he visited Alexandria during the reign of Saladin: ‘One of the merits and advantages of this city—the credit for which is really due to the sultan—is the schools and convents that have been founded for the sake of people given to study and piety who have arrived here from the most distant countries. Each of them is given lodgings where he can live, a teacher to instruct him in the branch of science that he wishes to learn, and a pension to satisfy all his needs...’. Encouraged and protected by the Ayyūbid government, a fair number of these immigrants went on to distinguish themselves in the traditional disciplines. This was the case for example with the Zāhirite Ibn Dihya (d. 634/1237): originally from Valencia. Sultan ʿAdil appointed him private tutor to his son Kāmil, who later on was to nominate him rector of the dār al-hadith


15. E. Sivan, L’Islam et la croisade, Paris 1968, p. 181. Regarding the three riots cf. also Sivan’s ‘Notes sur la situation des chrétiens’, pp. 125–29. In 1242 al-Malik al-Salih was confronted with the same problem Kāmil had to face in the incident described above, when the qādi Izz al-Dīn tried to have a church converted into a mosque.


18. Ibid.

The Great Pilgrimage

that he founded in Cairo. It was the same with the grammarian Ibn Mu’ti, who died in Cairo in 628/1231, and with his most famous disciple Ibn Majid (d. 672/1274), author of the renowned Alfiyya. But their presence is most perceptible in Sufi circles. The Risala provides an especially instructive example because out of the hundred and fifty-five shaikhs referred to by Sa’di al-Din thirty-three were from the Maghreb and twenty-seven from Andalusia. The shaikhs most of them had settled in Egypt. Regardless of whether they were disciples of Abū Madyan, Abū Ya’zū or Ibn Saydabūn (just to mention these three teachers), they contributed substantially to the rapid expansion of Sufism in the East, and in particular to its progressive structuring into the hierarchical organisations that would soon come to be known as tariqas. There should be no need to cite the role played by Abū l-Hassan al-Shadhili (d. 656/1258), who took refuge in Egypt after suffering persecution in Tunis; or the role of Ibn Sab’in, who died at Mecca in 660, or of Ibn Sab’in’s famous disciple Shukrit, who died the same year at Damietta. Whereas most of these shaikhs migrated to remain in Egypt, where they had arrived by following the route of the pilgrimage, a majority of them chose Syria as their country of asylum. Included in this category was of course Ibn ‘Arabi himself, who settled in Syria in 620H, plus a fair number of his disciples such as ‘Ali al-Din Tilmisnī, who was also related as son-in-law to Ibn Sab’in. One also notes among those present in Syria at readings from the Master’s work two members of the Birzali family (Berbers who came originally from Seville) as well as a number of individuals bearing the name ‘al-Qurtubi’. It was also to Syria that Abū l-Hassan al-Harrāli, a little-known Moroccan Sufi, came to end his days. Originally from Marrakech, al-Harrāli left the Maghreb for the Mashreq towards the end of his life for reasons which are still unclear. After a brief stay in Egypt he left for Syria; his commentary on the Qur’an seems to have displeased ‘Izz al-Din. ‘Abd al-Salām al-Sulami, who had him expelled from Damascus in 632H. He eventually settled in Hama, and died in the same year as Ibn ‘Arabi. Syria also became the country of exile for Prince Abū l-Hasan Ibn Hūd, a Sab’ian who had the strange custom of inviting Christians and Jews to participate in his teaching.

Shaikh Harrāli, who fell a victim to the intransigence of the jurist ‘Izz al-Din, is a good example of the tensions and misunderstandings which sometimes arose between western Sufis and oriental fuqahā. While on this subject we need to look at the famous report by Ghubrini (d. 704/1304) that Ibn ‘Arabi was condemned to death in Egypt. The people of Egypt reproached him for certain things he had said and tried to have him executed just as had happened to Hallaj and others as well. It was Shaikh Abū l-Hassan ‘Ali b. Abī Naṣr Fath b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Bijā’ who interceded on his behalf and saved him. This picture of Ibn ‘Arabi allowing himself to get carried away and making ecstatic utterances (shuṭahāt)—the continuation of the passage clearly shows that that is what was involved—and then being condemned to death by the jurists just like the man who three centuries earlier had cried ‘anā l-haqq, ‘I am the Truth’, is for a number of reasons hardly credible. To begin with, it is important to note that Ghubrini—the first chronicler to report the incident—fails to cite either sources or transmitters for it. One also notes that in certain details the information he gives is inaccurate and betrays a considerable amount of carelessness. For example, he gives 640 as the year of Ibn ‘Arabi’s death instead of 638. The mistake is all the more aberrant because every other compiler with the exception of Ibn al-Abbar is unanimous in dating his death to the year 638, even though there is sometimes some disagreement about the exact month. He also states twice that Ibn ‘Arabi was known by the name of Ibn Surāqa: a claim which is, to say the least, surprising considering that it does not appear to have been made by any other author. Possibly we are to detect here the signs of a confusion between Ibn ‘Arabi and the fuqahā of Ibn Surāqa (d. 662/1264), a contemporary of his who had the same laqab (Muhī l-Din) as he did and also the same kunya (Abū Bakr). Originally from Jativa, Ibn Surāqa emigrated to the East; first he lived in Syria, where he was rector of the al-Bahā’iyya dār al-hadith at Aleppo, and later in Egypt where he became rector of the dār al-


29. ‘Umān al-dirāwiga, p. 159.

30. Ghubrini goes on to say that Ibn ‘Arabi supposedly told Shaikh Bija’i that he had uttered were shuṭahāt he had spoken in a state of intoxication.

31. Those later writers who mention the incident simply follow the text of Ghubrini, which to this day remains the only source for it.

32. Cf. Tak., ed. Codera, § 1023, where Ibn al-Abbar also gives the date as 640, which suggests that on this particular point Ghubrini probably followed the Takmilā.

33. ‘Umān, pp. 56, 158.
hadith at Cairo between 656 and 660h.\textsuperscript{34} We also happen to know that Ibn Surāqa was linked with Ibn ‘Arabi by some later writers, especially in connection with a story which describes how one day Ibn ‘Arabi declared to Ibn Surāqa as they were both leaving Damascus by the Bāb al-Farādis: ‘After so many thousands of years there will be [one] Ibn ‘Arabi and [one] Ibn Surāqa leaving by the same gate and in the same form.’\textsuperscript{35} We are also told by Sakhāwī (d. 902/1497) that Ibn Surāqa—who we happen to know had affiliations with Sufism via Suhrawardī—was a companion of the Shāikh al-Akbar.\textsuperscript{16} What is more, even though there would seem to be no references to Ibn Surāqa in Ibn ‘Arabi’s writings, two samā‘īs for the Futūhāt do attest to the fact that he read some chapters from this work at Alepp in 639 under the supervision of Iṣmā’īl b. Sawdākin.\textsuperscript{37} These points considered, Ghufrini’s mistake about the date of Ibn ‘Arabi’s death and the confusion with Ibn Surāqa would not in themselves justify rejecting his testimony—were it not that these errors are yet further compounded by other implausibilities. Firstly there is Ibn ‘Arabi’s own silence about the matter. If such a dramatic incident had really occurred it would be difficult to imagine him—a writer so quick to denounce the fanaticism of the fuqahā‘—failing to mention it. But so far not the slightest allusion to any such episode has been discovered either in his own writings or in the writings of his disciples. Similarly, Ibn ‘Arabi seems never to have mentioned his supposed ‘saviour’, Shāikh ‘Ali b. Naṣr al-Bījā‘ī,\textsuperscript{38} although this is not to exclude the possibility that the two men actually met: in fact Ibn al-Abbār (d. 657/1259) states that Shāikh ‘Ali b. Naṣr al-Bījā‘ī transmitted Muslim’s Sahih to Ibn ‘Arabi in Shawwāl 606.\textsuperscript{39} There is also another point to be made, which is that in view of the severity of Ibn ‘Arabi’s criticisms of saints who utter inspired statements (shatāḥāt) when in the grip of ecstasy\textsuperscript{40} it is hard to believe he himself could have done the same and—that is more—boast about them to Shāikh Bījā‘ī: for according to Ghufrini he is supposed to have said by way of justifying his behaviour. ‘Those were ecstatic utterances [which I] spoke while under the sway of intoxication, and he who is intoxicated cannot be blamed’.

All these factors lead one to doubt the authenticity of the anecdote, at least in the form in which it is reported in the ‘Umwān. This is not to say that during his stay in Cairo Ibn ‘Arabi did not come into collision with some of the city’s more intransigent jurists. However, we are perhaps better off positing a connection between this particular anecdote and a legend we will look at more closely in due course: the legend which has it that Ibn ‘Arabi was put to death in Syria for declaring ‘Your Lord is beneath my feet’.

Voyage to the Centre of the Earth

We know the starting point for Ibn ‘Arabi’s journey to the East: Tunis. We also know his point of arrival: Cairo. But as to his itinerary and the stages in his journey from the one place to the other, there is no precise information currently available. Although he refers so often to his encounters during the course of his many wanderings, he does not appear to have recorded one single incident or detail that could help shed light on the route he took: nor does he even tell us whether he made the journey by land or by sea. In a passage in the Futūhāt Ibn ‘Arabi concludes that wherever possible travel by land is preferable to travel by sea, taking as his authority the sequence in which earth (al-barr) and sea (al-bahr) are mentioned in the Qur’ān;\textsuperscript{43} from this one may well deduce that he applied the rule to himself, and yet his silence about the matter tends to suggest that in this particular instance he did not make the journey by land. It is hard to imagine no trace at all surviving in his writings of his passage through the towns that lay along the route normally followed by the hajj caravans. This is also the route taken by Ibn Battūta little over a century later and described by him at the start of his narrative:\textsuperscript{44} Sousse, Sfax, Gabès, Tripoli, Misrratah. The most plausible hypothesis must be that the journey was comparatively short, and was made in one of those boats which at the time plied along the Mediterranean coast between Iriqiyba and Alexandria.\textsuperscript{45} We would perhaps be a little better off if we had the text of the Kita‘b al-riḥlah which is mentioned in the Ijāza (§77) and the Fihris (§72): according to the Fihris it contained Ibn ‘Arabi’s

\textsuperscript{34} Fut., I, p.562, citing Qur’ān 10:22.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibn Battūta, Voyages, trans. Defenmery and Sanguinetti, pp.23-7.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibn ‘Arabi refers briefly to his transit through Alexandria in Fut., II, p.425.
\textsuperscript{37} O. Yahia, Histoire et classification, R.G., § 603.
are indebted for the invaluable Risāla already referred to several times. To read Ibn ‘Arabi’s sketch of the two brothers in the Ruh is to gain the impression—perhaps quite mistaken—that he had a preference for Muham-
mad al-Khayyāt. He returned to the Path long after his brother. He had a mother to whom he professed a pious son; she served her until she died. The fear [of God] dominated him to such an extent that one could hear his heart beating when he prayed .... He suffered wrong without retaliating, his visions were veridical, his conversations with God were frequent. Staying awake at night, fasting during the day, he was never to be seen idle .... He himself served the poor, providing them with food and clothing. He was a man full of leniency, benevolence, compassion and kindness .... That is how he was when I left him [in Andalusia], when I met up with him again [in Egypt], and when I left him there'.

Admittedly, Ibn ‘Arabi was also generous in his praise of Shaikh al-Ḥarīrī: ‘He was a man full of virtues and exempt from vices ... Fervent in self-mortification (muḥādāta), always ready to come to the aid of his fellow man, sociable, tolerant, he approved whatever is pleasing to God but opposed everything that displeased Him .... He gave himself entirely to serving his brother and nobody else, and it is thanks to his brother’s baraka that he is what he is.’ However, two other texts—one by Ibn ‘Arabi, the other by Ṣafī al-Dīn, the disciple of Shaikh al-

Harīrī—reveal that a kind of tension, or rather lack of comprehension, seems to have produced a rift between the two teachers from Andalusia. The Ibn ‘Arabi text occurs in chapter 52 of the Futūhāt—a chapter devoted to ‘those who are fearful of losing their essence when in the grip of revelation and return precipitately to the World of Manifestation (‘alām al-shuhūd)’. In it the Shaikh al-Akbar explains that only he who greets the spiritual instants (wurūd) in the full state of an ‘ābd or servant is capable of mastering it; on the other hand, a person in whom even the smallest particle of sovereignty, or rubūbiyya, remains hastens to return to the sense-world out of fear of losing his rubūbiyya. This, he asserts, was the case with Abū l-‘Abbās al-Ḥarīrī. ‘When he was snatched out of himself he would return to himself rapidly, disturbed and trembling. Whenever I took him to task and reproached him about it, he would reply that he was scared and feared losing his being in the vision of Him. If only the poor chap knew that when he separated himself from matter his soul returned to its original home—that is, to its very own being!’ Quite clearly Harīrī’s state was far from perfect in Ibn ‘Arabi’s eyes; and it will be remembered that for Ibn ‘Arabi the complete and full realisation

46. Tarājim, p.19.
49. Ruh, p.93; Saffs of Andalusia, pp.92–3.
50. Ruh, p.94; Saffs of Andalusia, p.93.
of servitude (ʻubūdiyya) was the acme of sainthood. From the other point of view, Hariri himself seems to have had some reservations about Ibn ʻArabi. This at any rate seems to be how we must interpret the reticence alluded to in a series of letters preserved by Saﬁ al-Din. ʻShaikh Muḥyī l-Dīn Ibn ʻArabi sent him [al-Hariri] the following letter from Damascus: “Dear brother, tell me about your various spiritual openings”. The shaikh [al-Hariri] dictated to me the following reply: “Things have happened, but although the vision is clear the expression is unutterable”. Ibn ʻArabi wrote back to him again: “Oh peerless one, transmit them to me through your inner being and I will reply to you, and to what you transmit to me, through my inner being”. To the shaikh this demand seemed excessive, and he subsequently dictated to me the following response: “I saw the circle of the saints, and two of them were standing in the middle of them—Shaikh Abū l-Hasan Ibn al-Šābābghū and an Andalusian. I was told that one of these two was the Supreme Pole. I was perplexed, asking myself which of the two he could be. Suddenly a sign manifested to them and they fell prostrate. I was then told that the first of the two to raise his head was the Pole. The Andalusian raised his head. I realised who he was, presented myself to him and—without uttering letters or sounds—posed him a question which he answered simply with a breath. I then advanced towards the saints who were forming the circle, and each of them gave me a science according to his capacity. If you are up to it, dear brother. I will reply to you from Egypt”. 52

While Miṣr-Fuṣṭāt was the first city founded by the Muslims after their arrival in Egypt in 20/641, the city of Cairo is much more recent in construction and was only built in 358/969 by order of the Fatimid caliph al-Muʿizz. It was Saladin who—as sultan facing the impending Frankish threat—gave instructions for a long wall to be built surrounding Fuṣṭāt-Miṣr-Cairo, which as a result were united into one and the same city. 53 In addition to the many madrasas and a huge hospital—a veritable palace according to Ibn Jubayr—54 the city of Cairo was also indebted to Saladin for the famous Saʿīd al-Suʿadah khanqah, 55 which welcomed visitors from abroad including Ibn ʻArabi himself, who stayed there for a while after his arrival in the capital. 56 This initial contact with the Orient turned out rather badly: a shaikh from Irbil got it into his head to demonstrate to him that in the Islamic West there were no Sufis worthy of the name. Ibn ʻArabi’s reply to the accusation came two years later in the form of the Rūḥ al-quds, which he wrote at Mecca. Fortunately he soon found his two friends Ahmad al-Hariri and Muḥammad al-Khayyāt, Hariri’s brother, and spent the month of Ramadān 598/1202 in their company. 57 They devised the scheme of setting off together for Mecca, but Muḥammad became seriously ill—no doubt a victim of the plague—and his brother was unable to persuade himself to abandon him. 58 So Ibn ʻArabi seems to have left Egypt accompanied only by Ḥabashi: his other companion—Muḥammad al-Ḥaṣṣār, who had brought with him from Fez—also died in Egypt. 59

To one’s great surprise, after leaving his two friends behind in Cairo in Shawwāl 598, Ibn ʻArabi headed not for the Hijāz but first of all for Palestine. Twice in his letters to Shaikh ʻAbd al-ʿAzīz Mahdawi he is explicit about this, 60 specifying that he went first to Hebron, to the tomb of Abraham, and then on to Jerusalem, where he prayed in the al-ʿAqṣā Mosque. Then he continued on his route to Medina, where he saluted the Prophet, and finally arrived in Mecca. To get from Cairo to Jerusalem he will no doubt have followed the classical itinerary adopted a little over a century later by Ibn Baṭṭūṭa: Bilbays, Ṣāliḥiyā, Qāṭya, al-ʿArish, Gaza, Hebron. 61 As for his journey from Jerusalem to Mecca, there can be no knowing for sure whether or not he covered the distance by foot; but that he did so is suggested by a passage in the Rūḥ where he uses the word mashā in referring to the trip. 62 Whatever the case, at some stage, probably at Jerusalem, he will have had to join up with the hajj caravan (it was now full season) if he was to reach Mecca by the end of Dhū l-qaʿda or the beginning of Dhū l-ḥijja and be in time to perform the pilgrimage rites.

Why did Ibn ʻArabi go via Palestine rather than make his way directly from Cairo to Mecca? Why did he not follow the example of other pilgrims leaving Cairo, and go up the Nile as far as Qūs, make his way over to ʻAyyādhab and from there cross the Red Sea to Jeddah? 63 There are two possible explanations for his detour. Purely practical considerations—unsafe routes, looting and so forth—may have been involved, as in the case of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa who would later

53. Cf. EI 3 s.v. Fuṣṭāt and Kāhirah: Ibn Jubayr, Voyages, I, p. 55, who specifies that the work on the construction of the wall was carried out by Christian prisoners.
54. Ibn Jubayr.
55. Cf. EI 3 s.v. khanqah.
be forced to backtrack to ‘Aydhab or the reasons could have been spiritual. In other words Ibn ‘Arabi either chose deliberately to go to Palestine, Hebron and Jerusalem before continuing on his way to the sacred territory, or he was forced to do so by external factors. In the absence of any evidence supporting this second hypothesis we will, for want of any better alternative, consider the first one.

If the detour was a matter of personal choice, we would seem to have to look to the sīra nabawīyya for an explanation: perhaps the answer lies in the symbolism of the miḥrāj—the ‘Ascension’—and the archetypal itinerary traced out by the Prophet. In fact there are so many correlations and correspondences between the principal stages in the route of the miḥrāj and the chief stages in the destiny followed by Ibn ‘Arabi that it is impossible to avoid trying to decipher and understand the second of these two journeys in terms of the first. In this perspective one can hardly fail to draw a parallel between—one the other hand—the episodes marking Ibn ‘Arabi’s quest from the very start of his vocation in Andalusia through to his arrival in the East in 598/1201 and—on the other hand—the passage through the first seven heavens in the Journey of Initiation. The last of these heavens is none other than the heaven of Abraham, whom Ibn ‘Arabi went to offer his greetings to in Hebron before going on to the Prophet at Medina and arriving at last at the baqī‘ Allāh, the House of God. This critical stage calls to mind the wusūl, the ‘Arrival at God’ which is the culminating point of the Ascension; and indeed the stage in question was marked by a series of major events which we will soon consider. Finally, the period in Ibn ‘Arabi’s life lasting from the year 600 to his death in 638—a period when he devoted himself almost entirely to the oral and written transmission of his teaching to a multitude of disciples—is comparable to the rujū‘: the return to created beings which is the ultimate stage of the miḥrāj.

Whether or not Ibn ‘Arabi’s geographical itinerary was, like his spiritual one, governed by this ‘imitation of the Prophet’, the fact is that at the end of his long journey from West to East he arrived at the ‘navel of the earth’, the ‘Mother of Cities’. It was here that the last act in Ibn ‘Arabi’s accession to the supreme function of sainthood was played out, in the sacred month of pilgrimage in the year 598. Prior events had certainly prepared him for this, but they were only annunciation signs capable of being interpreted in various ways. This time the message was clear, without the slightest ambiguity. In ‘God’s Vast Earth’ (ar-Rahā‘ al-wāsi‘a) in the Imaginal World, with the Seal of Universal Sainthood—Jesus—in attendance, Ibn ‘Arabi saw himself solemnly consecrated by the Seal of Prophets—Muḥammad—as the most perfect Muḥammadan Heir: in whom the walā‘ya muhammadīyya or Muḥammadan Sainthood had become manifest in the most global and complete form and in a way quite unique in the history of humanity. ‘I saw him [the Prophet] in this [Imaginal] World, sovereign, quite unapproachable, protected from every gaze or glance, aided and assisted. The Messengers stood by him according to their rank; his community—which is the best of communities (Qur‘ān 3:106)—surrounded him: the angels of Dominion stood around the throne of his Station and the angels engendered by [men’s] actions were ranged in front of him. The Veracious [i.e. ʿAbū Bakr] was seated on his sublime right, the Discriminator [Umar] on his holy left; the Seal [Jesus] was squatting in front of him and speaking to him about the history of Woman; at the same time ʿAlī—grace and peace be upon him—was interpreting in his own language the words spoken by the Seal, and the Possessor of the two lights [ʿUthmān], wearing the cloak of his modesty, stood in front as is his custom... He [the Prophet] saw me behind the Seal [i.e. Jesus]—I was standing there because of the similarity between his apṣud and mine—and said to me: “This man is your equal, your son and your friend. Draw up for him in front of me the seat of tamarisk”. He then gestured to me and said: “Rise up Muḥammad, take your place on this seat and sing the praises of He who sent me—and mine as well, because in you there is a portion of me which can no longer tolerate being far from me: it is that portion which governs your innermost reality... Then the Seal drew up the seat on that solemn spot. On the top of it the following words were inscribed in blue light: “This is the purest of the Muḥammadan stations! He who sits himself upon it is his Heir; he has been sent by God to preserve the Sacred Law!” In that moment I was granted the Gifts of Wisdoms: and it was as if the Totalities of Words (jawā‘īf al-kalim) had been bestowed upon me... Finally, from this sublime vision I was sent back to the lower world, and I put down the holy praise I had just uttered as a prologue to this book.”

Is this ‘investiture of the Shaikh al-Akbar at the Supreme Centre’ (to use Michel Vâlsan’s phrase) a doublet of that other investiture which took place at Cordoba in 586, where Ibn ‘Arabi had also seen the Elect of God assembled around him? Undoubtedly it is, and yet by his own admission on that first occasion only the prophet Hūd had talked to him; as for the prophet Muḥammad, he had remained in the background. A comparison of the texts

64. Ibn Battuta, Voyages, pp.110–11.
65. For this portion of the text use has been made, with some modifications, of Michel Vâlsan’s translation in Études traditionnelles, § 311. October–November 1953, pp.302–3; Vâlsan’s invaluable notes are also worth consulting. For the remainder of the text cf. Seal of the Saints, pp.130–31.
66. For this same event see also the continuation of the qaṣida cited in chapter 6; Diwan, p.333.
justifies the conclusion that what is involved here is an ordered series of initiatory stages, each confirming but also supplementing the previous one. The Cordoba vision was simply intended to announce to the young Ibn 'Arabi that he had been designated the Muhammedan Seal: the incident that occurred a few years later at Fez, probably at the end of the mirdaj described in chapter 367 of the Futuḥat, reaffirmed and clarified this divine election. As for what happened in Mecca, it marked the definitive and solemn fulfilment of the divine promise, and the recognition by the Messengers of God—that is, by the representatives of all the communities prior to Islam—of the universality of the office conferred on the Shaikh al-Akbar: a kind of pact of allegiance in the tabernacle of Sainthood. It was no longer a matter just of an advent but of an advent in history of an eternal secret inscribed in the Divine Knowledge. The Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood is not simply the individual who in his own person manifests the fullness of the Prophet's walāya or sainthood and after whom no one else will again have access to this impassable summit. He is also—and already was even before his appearance on earth—the source of all sainthood in just the same way that Muhammad, or rather the Muhammadan Reality (haqiqah muhaddadiyya), was always the source of all prophecy from the year dot at the very beginning of time, and always will be through to the fullfilment of the ages. The Seal, khatim, is not simply someone who terminates a series; he is the inviolable seal or 'stamp' preserving a treasure's integrity.

Here once again the relationship between the two functions of Seal of the Saints and Seal of the Prophets calls for a little clarification. To repeat what was said earlier: the Seal of the Saints is simply the nālīb or substitute for the Seal of the Prophets in the ranks of sainthood. In the case of the person of the Prophet, sainthood (walāya) is 'veiled' by prophecy (nubuwātu); in the case of the Seal of the Saints it is openly displayed. And yet 'there can be . . . no question of any superiority over the Seal of the Prophets on the part of the Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood, because in all in both functions plainly belong to one and the same being'.67 In other words, the Seal of the Saints is simply the human medium for the manifestation in history of the most intimate aspect of the Muhammadan Reality. Ibn 'Arabi emphasises this point in his own language by insisting on referring to the Seal as 'heir' (wārīth): he himself has received from another the treasure of which he is the guardian.

Another passage in the Futuḥat apparently also referring to Ibn 'Arabi's investiture makes it clear that the highest degree of sainthood does not—in spite of assertions to the contrary by opponents of Ibn 'Arabi such as Ibn Taymiyya—encroach on the prerogatives of messengers (rusūl) or prophets (anbiya'). 'When, as one of the wāsiliki [literally 'those who arrive'] of my time, I in turn arrived at this divine Gate, I found it open and without either guard or doorkeeper. I remained there until I had been reclothed in the Robe of Honour of the Prophetic Legacy. I then caught sight of a closed skylight. I was going to knock on it when I was told: 'There's no point in knocking! It will not open'. 'But why is it there then? I asked. I was told: 'That is the Skylight of the Prophets and the Messengers: when the Religion had been made perfect it was bolted. It was through this door that the prophets were cloaked in the Robes of Honour of the Laws.'68 Sometimes Ibn 'Arabi defines supreme sainthood as nubuwātu 'anma or mutlaqa: 'general' or 'free' prophecy. However, this is in no way equivalent to confusing it with nubuwat al-tashri', or legislative prophecy in the strict sense of the term.

The account of the 'investiture' which was quoted in part earlier on comes from the khutba or prologue to the Futuḥat. The first chapter describes an event which also occurred at around the time of Ibn 'Arabi's arrival in Mecca, although no exact date for it is given. An enigmatic encounter took place near the Ka'ba, the temple of God which he was to hear himself being told is the 'Heart of Existence', and in front of the Black Rock, symbol of the Divine Right Hand.69 'Know, my noble friend and intimate companion, that after I arrived in the Mecca of Benedictions, the Treasury of spiritual tranquillities and movements, and after I experienced there what I experienced,'70 there came a time when I happened to be performing the ritual circuits around the Ancient Temple. As I was carrying out the circumambulations and reciting the formulas of glorification, praise, magnification and Oneness—now kissing the Black Rock, now touching the Yemenite Corner, now drawing near to the Wall of Multzam—as I was standing in a state of ecstasy in front of the Black Rock I encountered the Evanescent Youth, the Silent Speaker. He who is neither alive nor dead, the Simple Composite, He who envelops and is enveloped. When I saw him perform the ritual circuits around the Temple, like a living person revolving round a person who has died, I recognised his true reality and his metaphorical form, and I understood that the circuit round the Temple is like the prayer over a corpse . . . Then God revealed to me the dignity of this Youth and his transcendence with regard to "where" and "when". When I recognised his dignity and his descent (inzāl), when I

68. Fut., III, p.513.
70. Are we to see in this an allusion to the earlier episode?
saw his rank in existence and his state. I embraced his right side, wiped away the sweat of revelation on his forehead and declared to him: "Look upon him who aspires to your company and desires your intimacy!" He replied to me using signs and enigmas he had created so that he would never have to speak except in symbols: "When you recognise, understand and realise my symbolic language, you know that it can never be grasped either by the most eloquent of orators or by the most competent of rhetoricians"... He gestured to me and I understood. The reality of his Beauty unveiled itself to me and I was overcome with love. I became powerless and was instantly overwhelmed. When I recovered from my swoon, my sides shot through with fear, he knew I had realised who he was... He said to me: "Observe the details of my constitution and the disposition of my form! You will find what you ask of me written upon me, because I neither speak nor converse. I have no knowledge apart from the knowledge of Myself. My Essence does not differ from My Names. I am Knowledge, the Known and the Knower. I am Wisdom, the Sapiential Deed and the Sage!"

Who is this 'Youth' (jatā), described now as an angel, now as a human being? Is he the 'personification of the Holy Spirit', as Michel Vâlsan has suggested in an unpublished study? Is he Ibn 'Arabi's own luminous double, his 'celestial twin', as Henry Corbin believed? Or is he a dazzling theophany that manifested itself on the spot referred to by God as His House? These interpretations are by no means mutually contradictory. At any rate the encounter revealed to Ibn 'Arabi his own essential reality ('He revealed to me all my names; and I knew myself; and I knew what was not me')73. But it was not the first encounter. As we see from his Kitāb al-isrā', dating from his time in the Maghreb, he had already met this 'Youth' at the start of his 'Journey by Night' when he retraced the steps of the Prophet, and on that occasion the Youth had called out to him: 'You are yourself the cloud veiling your own sun! So recognise the essential Reality of your being!'74

Out of this silent dialogue with the 'Youth' a book was born. Apart from being a testimony to his own destiny and his own visionary experience, the 'Book of the Meccan Revelations' is also—on Ibn 'Arabi's own admission—a faithful transcription of all the things he was allowed to contemplate on that particular day in the form of the Spirit he encountered: 'I am [the Youth said to me] the ripe orchard and the full harvest! Now lift my veil and read what is contained in my inscriptions. Whatever you observe in me, put it in your book and preach it to all your friends.'74 So I raised his veil and read his inscriptions. The light lodged within him enabled my eyes to see the hidden Knowledge which he contains and conceals. The first line I read, and the first secret with which I became acquainted, is what I will now record in writing in the second chapter.

In an article already referred to, Fritz Meier starts by offering a rather obscure analysis of Ibn 'Arabi's encounter with the 'Youth' and then goes on to raise the question as to what could possibly be meant by the fact that (if we are to believe him) Ibn 'Arabi 'had really read the five hundred and sixty chapters of the Meccan Revelations' in a supernatural book after his circumambulation.75 In fact the question is purely rhetorical. To begin with, it must be noted that it was in a being, not in a book, that Ibn 'Arabi deciphered the secrets he was subsequently to transcribe. The distinction is fundamental: in front of the Ka'bah he was confronted with a reality in the person of the 'Youth'—not just with the words that describe him. The Youth remained silent. It was his actual constitution (nāsh'atahu) that contained all the knowledge of which Ibn 'Arabi was to become the guardian and interpreter; and it contained the knowledge in symbolic form (ramzan) and synthetically—hence the need for the tafsīl or 'detailed exposition' alluded to in the chapter title. And secondly, regardless of how one chooses to explain the vision, it is quite wrong to suppose that the Futūḥāt immediately assumed their final form in Ibn 'Arabi's consciousness as soon as he had seen what he saw. Quite the opposite is the truth. As we will see, very specific inspirations were to intervene repeatedly throughout the process of composition—which was to span a good number of years—and take Ibn 'Arabi himself by surprise. Also, his disciples' questions and comments were to prompt him to add passages either clarifying or supplementing his discussion of the same subject earlier on. So, for example, when in chapter 296 he tackles the invariably sensitive issue of the attribution of acts, he mentions that a remark by his pupil Ibn Sawdakin had led him to try a different approach to the matter here to the one he had adopted in chapter 2. But the most important point to bear in mind is that—however crucial his encounter with the 'Youth' may have been for him, and however fundamental the role played by the figure as the point of departure for the writing of the Futūḥāt—at the time of the encounter in 598 Ibn 'Arabi was already a 'knower of God' ('ārif bi-llah) and that the broad outlines of his teaching had already assumed a finished form in his early works. This helps to explain the incorporation in the Futūḥāt of a

71. The details of this incident are reminiscent of Moses' swoon when he asked to see God on the mountain-top (Qur'ān 7:134).
74. This sentence is missing in O. Yahia's critical edition, but occurs in the Bulāq edition, 1299H, I, p.51.
75. F. Meier, art. cit.
number of earlier texts. Small treatises, repeated verbatim, become chapters in the *opus magnum*: fragments from more extensive works (for example the *Inšār al-dawla ir* and *Tadbirat ilāhiyya*) are inserted here and there; and earlier writings are expanded, as in the case of the responses to Tirmidhi’s famous questionnaire which fill a hundred dense pages in chapter 73 but in their earlier, skeletal version—the *Jawālib mustaqim*—formed a shorter treatise.

As already mentioned, on a number of occasions Ibn ‘Arabi claims that his writings—and indeed his teaching as a whole, both oral and written—are inspired. ‘Everything I say in my tuḥfah and in my works derives from the Presence of the Qur’ān and from its treasures, to which I have been granted the key of understanding.’ But in the case of the Futūḥat this claim is expressed in more specific terms. In their case, he claims, divine inspiration determined not only the content of the message but also the form of its presentation; hence, he warns, the apparent incoherency in the ordering of the chapters. Regarding chapter 88 (on the ‘secrets concealed in the legal statutes’), he writes that ‘it would have been preferable to place this chapter in front of the one I wrote on the ritual acts of worship (“ibādat”); however, things turned out this way. In fact the sequence was not of my choosing. . . .’ But although the sequence of ideas in this greatest of his works is often disconcerting, one is bound to credit the author with a soberness of style only too rare in Sufi literature. Concise and to the point, his prose in the Futūḥat is generally speaking more easily accessible than in some of his earlier writings such as the *Anqāt muqrib*, or the superb *Kitāb al-isrā’* with its cadences and symbolic expressions that defy any attempt at translation.

Massignon’s verdict on the Futūḥat was admittedly very different. ‘With their authoritarian style—formal and pompous, syntactically clear but crammed with technical expressions—the general theses and personal visions that he [Ibn ‘Arabi] expounds in a uniformly impassive and icy tone provide extremely valuable indications as to the idea he had formed for himself of Ḥallāj’s personality’. The reference to Ḥallāj is clearly the key to Massignon’s attitude to Ibn ‘Arabi: as the author of the *Passion of al-Ḥallāj* he was never able to forgive the author of the Futūḥat for the reservations he expressed about Ḥallāj on a number of occasions. ‘Authoritarian’ he certainly was—if we take the term to mean that Muhīyī l-Dīn expressed himself with the authority of a man whose path has led him to the ḥaqiq al-

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82. Cf. e.g. Fut., II, pp.24. 84. 531; II, p.456; IV, p.75.
Children’ who will also—according to the final paragraph in chapter two of the Fusūs al-hikam—be the last man born on this earth and the last of the saints. To fulfil this task Ibn ‘Arabi embarked on the extraordinary doctrinal synthesis presented in the Futūhāt. In this work—first written between 599/1202 and 629/1231, then revised and expanded between 632/1234 and 636/1238, and in its original edition consisting of no less than thirty-seven volumes— all the particulars of the shari‘a-haqiqa are expounded. Nothing is omitted: neither the ‘letter’ of the Law nor its ‘spirit’. As a compendium of spiritual sciences—ranging from the most fundamental concepts of jurisprudence, clearly and coherently expounded in the last four hundred and fifty pages of the first volume of the Cairo edition, through the metaphysical doctrine and method of initiation expounded in over five hundred chapters, to the sunna, which although omnipresent is dealt with specifically in the bāb al-wasāғā that brings the work to a close—the Futūhāt has no precedent. For the religious community (umma), which cannot continue to exist without the presence in its midst of saints to whom this treasury has been opened, the faithful transmission of these spiritual sciences is the very condition of its survival.

To be able to achieve this Ibn ‘Arabi was simultaneously obliged to do the job of a lexicographer, drawing up lists of the luxuriant terminology used in Sufism, clarifying it and refining it. That explains the frequency of the technical terms (istilāhāt) plus the definitions of them which Massignon found so irritating. This revision of Sufi technical vocabulary has two outstanding characteristics. The first is Ibn ‘Arabi’s predominant concern to accord systematic preference to terminology based either on Qur’anic usage or on terms found in the hadith. So, for example, he reverses the hierarchical relationship of terms normally found in Sufi parlance by placing ‘ilm, ‘science’, above ma‘rifa or ‘knowledge’, on the grounds that the first of these words occurs in the Qur’an while the second does not. He also points out that God refers to Himself as ‘ālim or ‘almūm, but never as ‘ārif.84

The second characteristic is more subtle and difficult to discern, but it expresses at the lexicographical level the very essence of Ibn ‘Arabi’s teaching. This is what Su‘ad Ḥakim (to whom we are indebted for the methodical analysis of his vocabulary)85 has called mi‘rāj al-kalima: the ‘assumption’ of traditional technical terms with the intention of leading them back from their phenomenological or methodological meaning to a purely metaphysical significance. To cite just one out of many possible examples: the word khalwa refers initially to the practice of ‘retreat’, but to Ibn ‘Arabi its only true reference is to the eternal solitude of the Divine Essence: a solitude from the point of view of which the mā siwa lāh—the totality of things perceived by contingent beings as ‘other than God’—is mere illusion. The same incessant orientation towards Unity also manifests itself in the remarkable way that Ibn ‘Arabi devotes the second of the seven sections of the Futūhāt (the fasū al-mu‘āmalah) to compiling an inventory of the classical series of ‘spiritual stations’ (maqāmāt): tawakul (confident trust in God), shukr (gratitude), sabr (patience) and so forth. Each of these notions implies a duality and, consequently, an imperfection which needs to be overcome. This is why, from chapter 118 through to chapter 175, the description of each of these stations is followed paradoxically by the negation of what has just been affirmed: the maqām al-‘ubūdīyya (‘station of servitude’) is succeeded by the maqām tark al-‘ubūdīyya (‘station of the abandonment of servitude’), the maqām al-ikhlās (‘station of sincerity’) is followed by the maqām tark al-ikhlās (‘station of the abandonment of sincerity’), and so on, with the negative title of the second station in each of these pairs conveying transcendence of the limitations inherent in the first. In other words, whoever speaks of servitude (‘ubūdīyya) automatically posits the existence of lordship (rubūbīyya) and in so doing draws a distinction between ‘master’ and ‘servant’. However eminent his spiritual rank, he is still a prisoner of multiplicity and must consequently abandon all these stations in turn until eventually he attains to the ‘non-station’ (la maqām) which is the point where there is only the One without a second, where God is ‘Alone, without associate’ (waḥdahu lā sharika lahu).86

One point should be made here in passing. The examples just cited show the Shaikh al-Akbar transposing and extending the meaning of terms already used in the Sufism of earlier centuries, and in fact when doing so he more often than not cites the names of those who first introduced them into the common language of the ahl Allāh or people of God: Sahil al-Tustari, Junayd, Hallaj (for the binomial tāl‘/ta‘d) and so on. However, these same examples also show that by no means can be accused of rashly coining new words: of the nine hundred or so terms and expressions listed by S. Ḥakim, the majority are already attested in earlier texts. Ibn ‘Arabi also went to the trouble of defining these terms, basing his definitions largely on scriptural authority and on etymology. Generally speaking he would do so on several different occasions, and not just in the Kitāb istilāhāt al-sulūfiyya, or ‘Book of Sufi Terminology’, which is no more than a brief aide-mémoire that he also

83. For the compilation of the Futūhāt see O. Yahia’s introduction to volume 1 of his critical edition.
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reproduced in inverse order in chapter 73 of the Futūḥāt. If these terms present the reader with difficulties, that is due rather to the non-technical use to which he put them. The word wujūd provides one illustration of this kind of problem—which is in fact far from unique to the corpus of Ibn ‘Arabi’s writings although in his case it can be particularly annoying. This one word can occur in the space of just a few lines with a disarming multiplicity of meanings—as a verbal noun from wujāda, ‘to find’: as a term of reference for the created universe in opposition to its Creator: as expressive of the concept of existence: and as applicable in its strict sense to Being (actus essendi). This polysemy, or variety of meanings of one single word, is one of the most perilous privleges of Arabic, and without any doubt is at least partly responsible for the misinterpretations—not only by Ibn ‘Arabi’s opponents but also by some of his defenders—of the notion of wahdat al-wujūd or ‘Oneness of Being’. 87 Similarly, the word haqq can signify not only ‘God’ (as in the traditional Arabic contrast with the term khalq, ‘creation’) but also ‘reality’. ‘truth’ and ‘right’: it too sometimes occurs with embarrassing frequency, although in this case the plurality of its meanings has not had such unfortunate consequences.

It is certainly no accident that this project of drawing together and consolidating the heritage of Islamic doctrine was initiated at one of the most dramatic moments in the history of the Muslim world. Signs of great turmoil were visible everywhere: Ibn ‘Arabi had encountered them at every stage of his journey from Andalusia to the Mashreq. The Reconquest in the West, the Crusades and soon afterwards the Mongols in the East were all creating breaches in the structure of the dīr al-islām; it was falling apart and in danger of collapsing. Caliph Nāṣir, a contemporary of Ibn ‘Arabi, was well aware of the situation and tried in his own way to restore and strengthen the edifice. But his efforts led to nothing: in the West, the Christians succeeded in recapturing Andalusia (Seville fell in 646/1248, only a few years after Ibn ‘Arabi’s death), and meanwhile in the East the Mongols—the worst enemy Islam had ever had to confront—brought the caliphate to an end in 656/1258.

It was also in front of the Ka‘ba, and also towards the end of the year 598 that the Shaikh al-Askar met the woman who was to inspire his finest poems. Night had fallen: in the grip of ecstasy Ibn ‘Arabi started performing the ritual circumambulations round the Temple, while at the same time composing verses at the top of his voice, when he became aware of a presence by his side. ‘All I felt was a light tap on my shoulder, made by the gentlest of hands. I turned round and saw a young woman, one of the daughters of Rūm. Never have I witnessed a face that was more graceful, or speech that was so pleasant, intelligent, subtle and spiritual. She surpassed the people of her age in her discernment, her erudition, her beauty and her knowledge. She said to me: “Oh master! What did you just say?”’ 88 One by one Ibn ‘Arabi repeated to the verses he had uttered only a moment earlier; one by one the young Persian woman interpreted them. Pleasantly surprised by such insight, the Shaikh asked her her name; ‘Freshness of the Eyes’, was her reply. As Ibn ‘Arabi explains, ‘After that I took my leave of her and departed. I subsequently made her acquaintance and spent time in her company’. ‘Consolation’ and ‘Source of the Sun’ were two of the many names he gave this woman who was to become for him what Beatrice was to become for Dante: 89 Nizām, daughter of the imām of the Maqām Ibrāhīm, whom he met on his arrival in Mecca. ‘When I arrived in Mecca in 598 I spent time in the company of a gathering of virtuous people: a group of individuals—both men and women—who were learned and pious. Among them, even though all of them were quite excellent, I saw none more preoccupied with their soul or more concerned with the actions than the shaikh, the imām of the Maqām Ibrāhīm . . . Abu Shujā’ Zāhir b. Rostom al-Isfahānī (God have mercy upon him), and his sister, a woman very advanced in age, the wise shaykhah of the Hijāz, Fakhr al-Nisā’ bint Rostom.’ 90 From the father, Abu Shuja’, Ibn ‘Arabi received Tirmidhi’s collection of hadīths; from Abu Shuja’’s sister, Fakhr al-Nisā’, an ijāza ‘āmma; and from the man’s daughter, Nizām, the inspiration which some years later would induce him to write the Tarjumān al-ashwāq, The Interpreter of Ardent Desires. As Ibn ‘Arabi declares in his preface to this dīwān: ‘Every time I mention a name it is her I am naming. Every time I refer to an abode (dīr) it is her abode I am describing. However, he immediately goes on to caution the reader, ‘in composing these verses my allusions throughout were to divine inspirations and spiritual revelations . . .’. 91 His carefully worded precautions were in vain, and did not prevent the jurists of

87. For the notion of wahdat al-wujūd see W. Chittick’s comments in The Sufi Path of Knowledge. Albany 1984, p. 3. The expression is in fact never used by Ibn ‘Arabi; it seems to have been used for the first time—and even then only rarely—by Sadr al-Dīn Qarawan in the Miṣbāḥ al-ghayb and Naḥwāt liḥāyag, and subsequently by Ibn Sābīn and above all by Farghānī in his commentary on Ibn al-Farrāʾ’s Tafsīr. But it would appear to have been Ibn Taimiyyah who—for polemical purposes—generalised the usage of the term as an emblematic designation for Ibn ‘Arabi’s metaphysics.


89. In this connection it is worth noting that in a highly controversial study Asím Palacios tried to show that Dante’s Divine Comedy was to a large extent inspired by some of Ibn ‘Arabi’s works, and especially by the Kitāb al-‘īsā. Cf. La Escatología en la Divina Comedia, Madrid 1919; also R. Geyron, L’Esotérisme de Dante. Paris 1984, pp. 39–45. L. Massingham. Opera minora, I, pp. 57–58.

90. Tarjumān, p. 7.

91. Ibid., p. 9.
Aleppo from accusing him of producing an erotic work under the pretence that they were mystical poems.\(^92\) He subsequently decided to write a commentary on the *Tarjumān*\(^93\) in which he disclosed and spelled out explicitly the spiritual meanings concealed behind expressions normally used in the language of courtly love.

As for the date of composition of the poems in the *Tarjumān*, we must not be misled by the passage from the preface quoted above in which Ibn ‘Arabī states that he met Abu Shujā‘ in 598. As Nicholson has demonstrated by referring to the prefaces of the second and third recensions of the text,\(^94\) Ibn ‘Arabī in fact only composed the *Tarjumān* at Mecca, during the months of Rajab, Sha‘bān and Ramadān in the year 611. To the arguments adduced by Nicholson two others can be added. Firstly, in the preface in question Ibn ‘Arabī cites the *tarabhum* formula immediately after mentioning Abu Shujā‘—the implication being that he was writing some time after the death of Abu Shujā‘, which occurred in 609/1212.\(^95\) Secondly, in the poems that go to make up the *Tarjumān* he repeatedly refers to Baghdad and to various places in the city,\(^96\) but he only visited Baghdad for the first time in 601/1204; in 598 all he knew of the East was Egypt, Palestine and the Hijāz.

Among the places in Baghdad mentioned in the *Tarjumān* is the Dār al-Falak, a convent for women which—as Ibn ‘Arabī explains in his commentary—was situated on the banks of the Tigris near Musanna.\(^97\) Massignon took this particular verse along with several others also referring to Baghdad as evidence that Nizām—the woman who had inspired the *Tarjumān* and to whom the work was in a sense dedicated—had withdrawn into this convent, which happens to have been the first ever built in Islam.\(^98\) This is far from impossible: it would in fact be quite easy to imagine her going off to live in the convent after her father’s death in 609H. However, the allusions are altogether too vague and inadequate to allow us to be categorical on the point. As it happens, a passage in the *Muhādārat al-‘abrār* would even seem to suggest that the woman in the convent referred to by Ibn ‘Arabī in his poetry was not Nizām at all but one of his wives. In the passage in question\(^99\) he starts by describing the circumstances of his encounter with Nizām at the Ka‘ba in terms almost identical to the ones he uses in describing the meeting in the *Tarjumān*, and he then goes on to quote the first four poems from the *Tarjumān* itself, inserting the following remark between the second poem and the third: ‘I used to have a wife, who was a source of joy but whom time had separated from me; the memory of her came to my mind—at that particular time she was living in the Halba quarter [of Baghdad]—and I recited...’ The wife in question cannot possibly be Nizām: the wording of this passage, and the expressions Ibn ‘Arabī uses when referring to Nizām both in the *Tarjumān* and in his commentary on it, clearly argue against such an interpretation.\(^100\)

In the present state of our knowledge the identity of the woman referred to here is impossible to establish, but that is no great loss because the matter is of purely secondary importance. As far as Nizām is concerned, whatever her historical destiny happens to have been, the fact is that we are indebted to her for one of the masterpieces of mystical poetry in Arabic—and above all for the famous lines in which the Shaikh al-Akbar declares:

My heart has become capable of all forms:

For gazelles, a meadow, for monks, a monastery.

A temple for idols, the pilgrim’s Ka‘ba.

The Tablets of the Torah, the Book of the Qur‘ān.

I profess the religion of Love, and whatever the direction

Taken by its mount. Love is my religion and my faith!\(^101\)

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\(^92\) Ibid., p.110.

\(^93\) The commentary in question, called *Dhakhlī‘īr al-‘alā‘* is published in the margin of the 1961 Beirut edition of the *Tarjumān*.

\(^94\) See his edition and translation of the *Tarjumān*, London 1911 (repr. 1978), pp.4–6. O. Yahia failed to take Nicholson’s comments into account, because in R.G. § 767 he dates the *Tarjumān* to 598.

\(^95\) Shaddārūt, V, p.37.

\(^96\) Cf. e.g. III, v.10; XXX, v.35; LIV, vv.1-6; LV, v.1; LXI, v.1.


\(^98\) *Passion*, II, p.135.


\(^101\) *Tarjumān*, XI, vv.13-6, pp.43–4.

\(^102\) *Fat.,* I, p.701.
As will already have become clear, the Kaʿba occupied a central place in the events that marked Ibn ʿArabi’s first stay at Mecca. Within a short space of time close links of a rather amazing nature were established between it and him—links that exceeded and surpassed the bonds normally formed between the pilgrim and the House of God. In Ibn ʿArabi’s eyes the Kaʿba, like everything else in the universe, is a living being that speaks and listens. This means he was not surprised when one day it called out to him and demanded that he perform the ritual circumambulations around it at the same time as the spring of Zamzam insisted on him drinking its water: he specifies that both the Kaʿba and Zamzam pronounced their requests quite audibly. 103 Afraid that their dignity would veil his own proximity to God, the Shaikh countered with a polite refusal—in poetic form. According to him the rank of the Kaʿba as locus of epiphany for the essential Realities was, in spite of its unquestionable nobility, inferior to his own. Hurt by these words, the House determined to avenge itself. One cold and rainy night in the year 600/1204, 104 Ibn ʿArabi had rashly ventured alone into the ḥaram (the sacred area around the Kaʿba) to perform the circumambulation or ṭawaf when the Kaʿba threatened to crush him: ‘When I came level with the Drainpipe, behind the Black Stone. I looked at the Kaʿba. It seemed to me to have hitched up its veils, risen from its foundations and be bracing itself to eject me as and when on the course of the ṭawaf I reached the Syrian corner, so as to prevent me from performing the circumambulations. It started threatening me in words that I heard with my ears. I was terrified. God revealed to me such displeasure and anger on its part that I was quite incapable of leaving. I hid behind the Wall to take cover against its blows, using the Wall as a shield that I interposed between it and myself. By God. I heard it telling me: “Come on then, come forward so that I can show you what I’m going to do to you! How you have debased my rank and elevated the rank of the son of Adam! You have attributed to the gnostics pre-excellence over me! Through the power of Him who alone holds power I will not permit you to perform the circumambulations around me!”’ I meditated for a moment and understood that God had wanted to teach me a lesson, and I thanked Him for it. From that moment onwards the fear I had experienced on seeing it hitch up its veils—just as someone hitches up his clothing when preparing to jump—simply vanished. . . . I improvised some verses for it, to appease the wrath I had perceived in it. The more I spoke its praises, the more it eased up and sank back down into its foundations. It seemed pleased with what it heard me say.

103 Fat., l. p.700: ‛aʿal nutaq maswur  bi fudhen’.  
104 The incident can be dated on the basis of information provided in the preface and the reading certificates of the Tāj al-rasāʾil, which was written directly after the event. Cf. O. Yahia. R.G. § 736.  

In the shadow of the Kaʿba

and finally returned to its normal state. It reassured me and said I could complete the ṭawaf . . . . 105 After calm had been restored and peace had been made. Ibn ʿArabi, anxious to demonstrate his gratitude and feelings of respect, composed a collection of eight letters in rhymed prose, entitled the Tāj al-rasāʾil in homage to the Kaʿba. 106

The Kaʿba also played the central role in another vision in which the Shaikh al-Akbar saw his accession to the office of Seal of the Saints confirmed once again. ‘When I was in Mecca, in 599, I had a dream in which I saw the Kaʿba built of bricks that were alternately made of silver and gold. The construction had been completed: there was nothing left to add. I contemplated it and admired its beauty. But then I turned towards the side located between the Yemenite and the Syrian corners. There, in a spot closer to the Syrian corner. I saw that the place intended for two bricks—a silver one and a golden one—was still empty on two rows of the wall. one above the other. In the upper row a golden brick was missing; in the lower row a silver one. I then saw myself being inserted into the place reserved for the two missing bricks. I myself was the two bricks: with them the wall was complete and the Kaʿba faultless. I was standing up, observing, and quite conscious that I was in a standing position; but at the same time I knew without the slightest doubt that I was those two bricks and those two bricks were me. Then I woke up, and gave thanks to God. Interpreting the vision. I said to myself: “In my category (i.e. the category of saints or awliyāʾ) I am among the followers, just as the Messenger of God is among the prophets, and perhaps it is through me that God has sealed sainthood . . . .” 107 To understand this incident—which, strangely enough, occurred after the consecration in 598—we need to remember that 599 was the year when the Shaikh al-Akbar entered the fortieth year of his life: a decisive turning-point according to Islamic tradition, in which the age of forty possesses a special significance. It was at the age of forty that the Prophet received the visit from the angel Gabriel; and forty is said to be the age at which a man reached his full maturity. 108 It would appear that Ibn ʿArabi’s vision of the Kaʿba in this particular year simultaneously marked two separate events: firstly his transition through his fortieth year and secondly his transition, equally significant in terms of the journey of initiation, from the ascending stage of the isrāʾ to the descending one—the sacrificial return to created beings for the sake of guiding them.

It was also in front of the Kaʿba, in 599/1203, that Ibn ʿArabi was invested

105 Fat., l. p.700.  
106 The text has been published in an anthology called Majmūʿ al-rasāʾil, Cairo 1328Ht.  
107 Fat., l. p.319, following M. Chodkiewicz’s translation. Cf. his Seal of the Saints, p.128.  
with the khiraqa for the third time. This time it was the khiraqa of ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī, which he received from a man originally from Baghdad but then resident in Mecca: Yūnūs b. Yahyā al-Hāshimi (d. 608/1213).109 As in the case of Muhammad b. Qāsim al-Tamimi of Fez, Yūnūs al-Hāshimi was for Ibn ‘Arabi simultaneously a spiritual master or murshid and one of his main teachers in hadith.110 However, Yūnūs al-Hāshimi differed from Muhammad b. Qāsim—whose qualifications as a rāwi had, it will be remembered, been questioned by Ibn al-Abbār—in that in particular sphere his reputation was more solid: Ibn Hajār describes him as a dependable transmitter.111 Among the hadiths he transmitted to Ibn ‘Arabi in the haram facing the Ka‘ba’s Yemeni corner—a spot for which Ibn ‘Arabi evidently had a special preference112—were hadith qudsīyya: those ‘holy sayings’ in which God addressed Himself to men through the mouth of the Prophet. At this same period the Shaikh al-Akbar undertook the task of selecting forty of these hadith qudsīyya and putting them together in a compilation that came to form the first part of the Mishkāt al-anwār.113 Among the transmitters named in the Mishkāt we find—apart from Yūnūs al-Hāshimi, Habashi and M. b. Qāsim al-Tamimi whom we have already met—a certain muhaddith called Abū l-Hasan ‘Ali al-Farāyibi (d. 646/1248)114 and also the name of a disciple of Ibn ‘Arabi called Muhammad b. Khalīl al-Ṣaḍāfi al-Tilimsānī.115 Had he already met this disciple in the West—where, as the nisīrah implies, Muhammad b. Khalīl originally came from? There is no way of knowing. However, it is worth noting that his name only occurs in Ibn ‘Arabi’s writings in connection with incidents from the year 599.116 For example, it was at his request as well as Habashi’s that Ibn ‘Arabi composed the Ornament of the Abdal in Jumādā I 599 at Tārif, where he had gone to meditate at the grave of Ibn ‘Abbās. This short treatise expounds the four virtues characteristic of this particular category of saints: silence, solitude, staying awake and fasting.117

111. Ishān al-mithān, VI, p. 315: cf. also Shadharai, V, p. 36.
112. A number of accounts indicate that this is where Ibn ‘Arabi liked to meet his teachers or disciples. Cf. e.g. Fut., I, pp. 32, 71, 309; II, p. 338.
114. GAL, S.I, p. 596: Mishkāt, §§ 7, 13, etc.
115. Mishkāt, §§ 8, 9, etc. To date I have not found any references to M. b. Khalīl al-Tilimsānī in the compilers.
117. Hilghat al-abdal, published at Hyderabad in 1948 and translated by Michel Vālsan, Paris 1950. Details about the places, date and circumstances of composition are given at the beginning of the text.

In the shadow of the Ka‘ba

Iranians, Ethiopians, Andalusians, Syrians, Egyptians . . . vast numbers of pilgrims came from the most distant lands in both East and West to the Holy Places. to perform the hajj and in so doing renew the miḥāq, the Primordial Pact made with God by all men, without exception. But the Sacred House was also a temple of worship for other pilgrims who came from the World of the Mystery (‘alam al-a‘żab), the home of spirits. So it was that, in this same year 599, Ibn ‘Arabi encountered the son of Caliph Hārūn al-Rashid, who had been dead for four centuries. ‘One Friday at Mecca, after the communal prayer. I had started performing the tawaf when I saw a man of fine bearing, with a serious and impressive appearance, who was doing the ritual circumambulations in front of me. I looked at him a little closer to see if perhaps he was someone I knew. But I became aware that he was not a resident of Mecca: also, from his relaxed expression and vigour, that he had not just arrived after a journey. Then I saw him pass between two men who were holding onto each other as they performed the tawaf: he went through them without separating them and without them noticing anything. So I started following him, step by step, placing my feet just where he had put his; every time he lifted his foot from one particular spot I immediately put down my foot in the same place. Focussing my awareness on him. I didn’t let him out of my sight because I didn’t want to lose him. I passed between the same two men—they were still holding onto each other—whom he had passed through, and I got ahead of them in turn just as he had, without separating them, and this amazed me. When he had completed the seven circumambulations and was preparing to leave. I grabbed him and greeted him. He returned my greeting with a smile, while I kept my eyes fastened on him out of fear of losing him: I had begun to suspect he was a spirit who had assumed a body and I knew that being looked at bound him. I said to him: “I know you are a spirit who has taken a body!” “You are correct,” he replied. “Who are you?” I asked him. “I am al-Sabti b. Hārūn al-Rashid”, “I would like to ask you some questions about your spiritual state when you were in this lower world”, “Ask me your questions!” “I gather that you were called al-Sabti because you used to work on Saturdays (al-sabt) to obtain food for the rest of the week”, “What you have been told is quite correct”. “Why did you choose Saturday rather than some other day of the week?” “A pertinent question. I had learned that God began the creation of the world on a Sunday and completed it on a Friday. and that when Saturday arrived He rested. placing one leg on the other and saying: ‘I am the Sovereign’. This is what I had been told when I was alive. I said to myself: I would do the same. So, from Sunday through to the sixth day I devoted myself to the worship of God, saying to myself: ‘just as He concerned Himself with us during those six days, I will dedicate myself to the adoration of Him during those six days—entirely to
population into complete and utter darkness. In the Hijaz and Iraq people saw the ‘stars dance and disintegrate into fragments’ in the sky. Abū Shāma noted that ‘this had only happened twice before, at the birth of the Prophet and in the year 241: but this time it was far more spectacular’.125

We also have the Shaikh al-Akbar’s own testimony about these events, which sealed the sixth century of the Hegira in so dramatic a way.123 I once saw these streaks of light last for an hour at the most. I was in the middle of performing the tawaf when we spotted them—both I and the others who were circumambulating the Ka’ba. People were astounded; never had anyone seen a night with so many comets. They continued right through the night until daybreak. There were masses of them: they kept hitting each other like sparks from a fire, so much so that we were unable to see the stars. On witnessing this we said to each other that this was a sign heralding a grave event. Soon afterwards we were informed that an incident had occurred in the Yemen at exactly the same time we were witnessing this phenomenon. A wind of dust, similar to zinc, had borne down on the inhabitants of the Yemen; it was so dense that it covered the earth to knee-height. The people were terrified, all the more so because the atmosphere had become so dark that they needed lanterns to be able to walk about during the day: in fact there was such an agglomeration of dust clouds that the light of the sun could not reach them. Also, people in Zabid heard a terrible noise coming from the sea. This happened either in the year 600 or in 599: because I only recorded the events much later, in 627. Instead of when they actually happened. I am not too sure about the exact date. But everyone experienced these events, both in the Hijaz and in the Yemen. And during that same year we also witnessed other amazing things. It was in that year that the plague struck the inhabitants of Tā’if—so completely that nobody was spared. It lasted from the start of the month of Rajab through to the start of the month of Ramadan. 599: in this case I have no doubt whatever about the dates.124 This plague that swept down on them was of such a kind that when the first symptoms appeared either the patient died within five days or, after the five days had elapsed, his life was spared. At that time Mecca was filled with people from Tā’if who had abandoned their homes without even closing the doors, leaving their possessions and livestock in the fields...

118. Fut., IV, p.11-12. The same encounter is also referred to in Fut., I. p.638 and in II. p.15, where Ibn ‘Arabi specifies that the meeting took place in 599.

120. Fut., II. pp.455-6: cf. also Fut., II. p.14: Rāh § 53: Sufis of Andalusia, pp.141-2. There will be more to say about Saqīt al-Ra’raf in the next chapter.
123. Fut., II, p.450.
124. As we have seen. Ibn ‘Arabi had been in Tā’if one month earlier.
9. ‘Counsel My Servants’

In a passage in the ‘Book of Visions’ Ibn ‘Arabi admits that, one evening at Mecca, he experienced a brief spell of despondency in face of the weakness of his disciples and felt like leaving them so that he could concern himself with himself alone. ‘When I realised that those who [truly] enter the Path are rare indeed, I lost courage and decided to devote my efforts in future to myself alone and abandon men to their fate...’ The temptation was selfish but also human, and yet he did not yield to it. That same night he saw himself in a dream facing God on the Day of Judgement. ‘I was standing in front of my Lord, head lowered and fearing that He would punish me for my negligence (takrīf). But He said to me: “Servant of Mine, fear nothing! All I ask of you is that you counsel My servants.”’ After being given this vision I taught men, pointing out to them the plain way and the dangers to be feared, addressing myself to all—jurists (fuqahā’), dervishes (fuqara’), Sufis and simple believers.

In accordance with the famous hadith that ‘Religion is good counsel’ (al-nasīḥah) in the service of God. His Messenger, the Muslim leaders and the community in general, every Muslim is under an obligation to counsel his neighbour. But, as the Shaikh al-Akbar emphasises on a number of occasions, this obligation was incumbent on him personally in an even more imperative form. ‘He [God] addressed Himself specifically to me, without any intermediary, more than once, in Mecca and at Damascus, and in the course of various visions told me: “Counsel My servants!” This obligation is accordingly incumbent upon me more than upon anyone else.’

The first vision, the one at Mecca, must have occurred in 600/1204 at the latest because in the very first line of the Rih al-quds, which was written during that year, Ibn ‘Arabi refers to this same privileged task entrusted to him by God.

Whatever the precise chronological details, through these texts we are given an insight into an entirely different dimension of the mission entrusted to the Seal of the Saints. His task is not just to preserve the heritage of spiritual sciences passed on from the Prophet to this heir of his par excellence: that is a deposition (amāna) which by its very nature is destined only for the elite of the community, namely the awliyā’ or saints. In a more general sense—and in conformity with the example set by the Prophet, who was sent to all men—his task also involves giving guidance to all beings regardless of whether they are kings, jurists, gnostics or simple believers. It is important to note that this universal nature of Ibn ‘Arabi’s function is often ignored by his western interpreters, even though it is fundamental to the task as he himself perceived it. Although certain aspects of his teaching were (and are) only destined for and accessible to an intellectual and spiritual elite, his message was addressed to the umma or religious community as a whole—either directly or through the intermediary of that elite. This doubtless helps to explain the obvious variations in style and language between Ibn ‘Arabi’s different writings. It also helps to explain why both while he was still alive and during the first few decades after his death the circulation of some of these works was deliberately restricted to such an extent that, according to Dīhabī, only at the start of the eighth century did the ‘ilmam start to become aware of the ‘scandalous’ nature of his doctrine.

In line with this broader aspect of the task entrusted to the Seal of the Saints, it is easier to understand the apparent change in attitude which led Ibn ‘Arabi to visit palaces and rub shoulders with princes when in the East—directly contrary to his line of conduct in the West and also in contradiction of his own advice to disciples. Offering counsel to rulers in line with the hadith quoted above and exhorting them to respect the shari‘a is obviously a way of contributing to their salvation; but it is also a way of protecting the community they govern. This would seem to be how we must understand the relationships Ibn ‘Arabi established with the Seljuq and Ayyubid sultans: with Zahir, the king of Aleppo who at his insistence pardoned a traitor, with Ashraf, king of Damascus, to whom he granted an ijaza for his works, with ‘Aziz, prince of Banyas, for whom he composed a poem on the occasion of his death, with Kaykā’us, the sultan of Anatolia, with whom—as we will see in due course—he came to be on very close terms.

On a more general note, from 600/1204 onwards one notices an intensification in Ibn ‘Arabi’s activities. Between 600 and 617 he kept crossing and then re-crossing Syria, Palestine, Anatolia, Egypt, Iraq and the Hijaz. But

2. Bukhari, Ṣmān, 42.
5. He was one of the sons of King ʿĀdil, and died at Damascus in 630. Cf. Tarjīm, p.161.
these continual to-ings and fro-ings did not prevent him from adding considerably to his corpus of writings: according to O. Yahia's Repertoire Général he produced almost fifty during the period in question. Admittedly the majority of these were only short treatises less than ten pages in length, and as a rule written very rapidly: so, for example, the Kitab al-μaṣāṣil was composed at Hebron in 602 on the afternoon of 14 Shawwal. However, from the point of view of doctrine and teaching the number of pages is irrelevant. Even a few lines written by the 'Greatest of Shaiks' often contain references—themselves almost always indirect and allusive—to the principal ideas that govern his thinking; hence the need to be an assiduous reader of the Futuḥat, which is where these ideas are expounded in detail, to be able to make the most of these small treatises and appreciate their true value. This is the case for instance with the Kitab al-αlif, the Kitab al-bā‘ and the Kitab al-mīm, just to cite three examples: 9 here the science of letters along with its metaphysical implications is expounded in a few highly condensed pages. Of the many treatises produced by Ibn ʿArabi during this period, another three in particular are worth mentioning: the Kitab ʿJa‘ādun, and the Kitab al-ta‘ālījīyat and the Kitab al-tanazzulat al-mawṣiliyya. The first of these 10 contains Ibn ʿArabi’s first reply to the questioner which Tirmidhi had drawn up as a challenge to those who illegitimately lay claim to the rank of wālîyya, sainthood; Ibn ʿArabi was later to provide a more detailed version of his reply in chapter 73 of the Futuḥat. Then there is the Kitab al-ta‘ālījīyat, or ‘Book of Theophanies’, 11 the task of deciphering its frequently enigmatic turns of expression is made somewhat easier by Ibn Sawdakin’s Sharh, which is itself simply a transcription of the verbal commentary Ibn ʿArabi supplied to this favourite disciple of his. The work combines and intertwines two themes that lie at the very heart of Ibn ʿArabi’s teaching: the theme of Tatāwīd, of the secret of the One without a second, and the theme of the theophanies (ta‘ālījīyat) that provide the basis for the multiplicity of beings while at the same time managing not to compromise the unity of Being because they are merely manifestations of Himself to Himself. The text is highly allusive and paradoxical; Ibn Sawdakin tells us that it scandalised a reader whom he had believed to be a friend (mum kantu aṣūmu khalīla). 12 It also has the distinctive feature of on a number of occasions assuming the form of dialogues between the Shāikh al-ʿAţbar and the great Sufis of the past such as Junayd, Sahîl al-Ṭustārī, Hallâj, Dihâ ʿl-Nûn al-Misrî. One could easily dismiss this as pure literary artifice. However, Ibn ʿArabi himself states that everything he describes actually happened (ʿaḥād thāqīlīyya), and that if these meetings with dead masters had occurred corporeally in the sense-perceived world he would have had nothing either to add to or to subtract from the discussions he reproduces. 13 As for the Kitab al-tanazzulat al-mawṣiliyya, 14 its author explains in the preface that he wrote it in an ‘enigmatic and symbolic language’ so as to ‘frustrate and punish the ‘ūlamā‘ al-rusūm’ or esoteric scholars; according to Ibn ʿArabi himself the text comprises fifty-four chapters, although strangely Hājjī Khalīfa counted fifty-five and O. Yahia fifty-three. 15 After nine chapters of introduction, the work is devoted entirely to the esoteric interpretation of the different phases of ablution and prayer, which is correlated with the celestial spheres and with the prophets who dwell in them. Among Ibn ʿArabi’s works as a whole, this one certainly falls into the category of those whose ‘inspired’ nature is most self-evident. Many of the pages (especially chapters 46 to 54) refer, in a style reminiscent of the Kitab al-īsrā‘, to Ibn ʿArabi’s own ‘Ascension (mīrāj).’

Faithful to his commitment to guiding humanity Ibn ʿArabi also enlarged the circle of his disciples—a fact that emerges clearly from analysis of the sama’s issued by him during this period. The sama—literally ‘hearing’—is one of the chief methods of transmission of knowledge in Islam. 16 It assumes the form of a reading certificate normally placed at the end either of the work as a whole or of each of its chapters and containing the names of the people who were present—either with the author himself or not 17—at the reading of the document in question; failing this, simply the date and place of the reading session are given. In the case of a writer as prolific as Ibn ʿArabi these sama’s are of inestimable value. On the one hand they enable us to retrace with considerable accuracy the chronology and itinerary of his own movements; on the other hand they help give us some idea—even if incomplete—of the disciples who gathered around him.

In this connection it should be noted that, by way of contrast with the listeners during the ‘Syrian period’ of 617 to 638 which we will be looking at

7. Cf. the chronological table of Ibn ʿArabi’s works in Yahia’s Historire et classification, pp. 103–6.
8. Ibid., R.G. § 834.
9. The Kitab al-αlif and Kitab al-mīm are included in the Rasa’il: the Kitab al-bā‘ was published in Cairo in 1954.
10. R.G. § 177.
13. Ibid., p.112.
14. Published under the title Latâ‘if al-‘āṣrā‘, Cairo 1961.
15. O.Yahia, R.G. § 762.
17. In the case of Ibn ʿArabi’s works, the sama’s reproduced by O. Yahia in his Répertoire Général were all delivered in the presence of the author himself with the exception of a few certificates for the Futuḥat which were given out by Ibn Sawdakin after his master’s death.
'Counsel My Servants'

I went to bed determined to tell the man the following day to remove the food from the Mosque for the sake of the angels. But I saw God in my sleep, and He said to me: "Don’t speak to him about the food, because his odour is not the same for Us as it is for you". The next morning the man came to see me, as was his custom, and I told him what had happened. He burst into tears, prostrated himself in gratitude to God, and said to me: "In spite of that, it is preferable to observe the law". As a result he removed the food from the Mosque.25

As a rule the other hearers were natives of the town, or at any rate the region, in which the hearing session took place. So, the samā’s delivered in Mosul include several ‘mawṣūli’ nisbas, as in the case of Ahmad b. Mas‘ūd al-Muqri’ al-Mawsili: his name occurs in a certificate for the Rūḥ dated Mosul, 601,26 and Ibn ‘Arabi refers to him on a number of occasions in his Muḥādārat al-abrār in connection with hādiths and akhbār that he received from him.27 Some certificates for the Fatawā also reveal that Ahmad Mawsili’s two daughters Umm Dalāl and Umm Rasūl attended the reading of several chapters from the work at Damascus in 636 and again in 657.28

On the whole it would seem to have been a simple consequence of the particular routes travelled which, in a sense additionally, brought most of the hearers mentioned in the samā’s issued between 600 and 617 into contact with the Shaikh al-Akbar for a period of time; some of them were travellers whose own path happened to cross Ibn ‘Arabi’s, others were from the local population and took advantage of the master passing through their region to benefit from his teaching. It is interesting to note that, for very obvious reasons, during this period of incessant travelling the names of almost all the hearers only appear once; only from 617 onwards, after the shaikh had begun to put down roots in Syria, did a group of regular listeners start to form. A few odd exceptions only serve to confirm the rule. There is of course Habashi. Ibn ‘Arabi’s companion of long standing, but also Ismā‘il b. Sawadakin:29 his name appears in most of the samā’s for the period. A reading certificate for the Rūḥ al-quds30 establishes that he was together with the Shaikh al-Akbar in Cairo in the year 603/1206. In 611/1214, at Aleppo, he

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25. Fut., I, p.603.
27. Muḥādārat, I, p.237; II, pp.240, 259. Cf. also Fut., IV, p.490, where Ahmad al-Mawsili describes to him a vision in which he questioned the Prophet regarding the lawfulness of chess, singing and so forth.
28. R.G. § 115, samā’s §§ 21, 29, 34, 38, 44.
persuaded him to write a commentary on the Tarjumān al-ashwāq, a collection of esoteric poems branded by spiteful jurists as erotic poetry. The tenor of the Kitāb wāsīl al-sādīl—a small treatise in which he piously copied out his teacher’s answers to his questions along with pieces of advice and other confidential matters—together with some verses in Ibn ‘Arabi’s own Dhūwān which are dedicated to Iṣmā‘īl, are more than adequate testimony both to the master’s profound affection for him and to the intellectual collaboration established between them. With the death of Ibn ‘Arabi in 638/1240 this collaboration did not really come to an end, because out of all his disciples it was Iṣmā‘īl who continued to issue reading certificates, or samā‘īs, for the Futtāḥāt. We are also indebted to him for a number of commentaries on Ibn ‘Arabi’s works—in particular for his commentary on the Kitāb al-ta’ayyālīq. It must be emphasised here that, apart from Qūnawi who was an especially prolific author, Ibn Sawdakīn was one of the rare direct disciples of Ibn ‘Arabi who transmitted his teaching by writing.

One also notes the presence of two other regular listeners: Muhammad b. Sa‘d al-Dīn b. Barangush Ibn Qamar al-Dīnshāq and Iṣhāq b. Yūsuf al-Rūmī. The first of these two, in all probability a native of Damascus, seems only to have started associating with the Shaikh al-Akbar in 615/1218 at any rate that is when his name makes its first appearance, in a samā‘ for the Rūh issued at Malatya. From Anatolia he must have accompanied Ibn ‘Arabi to Syria, because he is mentioned again in certificates issued by him in 61716 and 61817 at Aleppo, and in 63018 and 63319 at Damascus. All three of the name of this assiduous disciple occurs in thirty-five samā‘īs, twenty-seven of them for the Futtāḥāt. This perseverance is not really surprising when one considers that Ibn Qamar was Ibn ‘Arabi’s son-in-law. That is what we learn from a short passage in a still unpublished text called the Kitāb nātā’īj al-adhikār, where Ibn ‘Arabi refers to him as ‘ṣhirī’ and specifies that on 25 Sha‘bān 631 the man attained a very exalted station.40

As for Majd al-Dīn Iṣhāq b. Yūsuf al-Rūmī, it is no exaggeration to say that his meeting with the Shaikh al-Akbar—a meeting which, as we saw earlier, Ibn ‘Arabi had been notified of in advance by his vision at Algecirias in 589—marked a decisive turning-point in the history of Iranian Sufism, both Shi‘ite and non-Shi‘ite. To be more specific Majd al-Dīn was the father of Sadr al-Dīn Qūnawi, the disciple of Ibn ‘Arabi who was to play a fundamental role in the spread and expansion of his school in the eastern part of the Islamic world. In other words the various aspects and consequences of the friendship struck up in Mecca between Majd al-Dīn, an Iranian, and Ibn ‘Arabi, an Andalusian, were to assume a very special significance.

Apparently the only source that tells us anything about Majd al-Dīn Iṣhāq al-Rūmī is Ibn Bībī’s history of the Seljūq dynasty of Rūm; called al-Awāmir al-adīla ‘īyāta fī l-umār al-adīla ‘īyāta’, the first draft of this work was completed in 680/1281.41 From the various passages referring to him two general conclusions emerge. First, Majd al-Dīn’s contemporaries seem to have considered him a man of great piety and a spiritual guide. That at least is the implication of the honorific titles bestowed on him by Ibn Bībī, such as ‘model of devotees’ and ‘glory of the Pillars’ (shara‘f al-awtād)—the term ‘Pillar’ (watād in the singular) designating one of the highest functions in the hierarchy of initiation. But there is also the testimony of Caliph al-Nāṣir himself, who, in a letter to Kaykāwīs, refers to him as ‘support of the gnostics’ (‘umdat al-‘ārifīn).42 Second, the passages in question portray Majd al-Dīn as a high dignitary in the Seljūq kingdom of Anatolia, a person very close to Kaykhusraw and to his son and successor Kaykāwīs. For example, in one passage we are told that King Kaykhusraw wrote him a long poem after he had emigrated to Syria for reasons of political opportuneness, inviting him to return to his native country, and that when he did arrive in Malatya he was given a royal welcome.43 The historian ends his account by comparing...
Risālit al-anwār, Qūnawi’s father was reinstated in his position and function at the Seljuq court. Ibn ‘Arabi was under the age of 12. In 612, although on that occasion he stayed until 615 at the very least, possibly even until 618. There would seem to have been two reasons for this prolonged stay of his in Anatolia: his friendship with Kaykā’us and his new domestic responsibilities. Everything tends to suggest that on Majd al-Din’s death Ibn ‘Arabi married his widow. In 614, he was then the mother of the still young Sadr al-Din Qūnawi at any rate we are told that this is what happened by a number of Arab and Persian biographers. But it should be noted that as of yet not one reference to the event has been found in Ibn ‘Arabi’s writings or in the writings either of Qūnawi himself or of his direct disciple, Jandi. On the other hand, the marriage is mentioned in the Manāqib Awhād al-Dīn Kirmānī—a Persian text which, according to its editor, Professor Fuzuzanfar, was written in the seventh century of the Hegira and consequently either while Qūnawi was still alive (he died in 673/1274) or very shortly after his death. The anonymous author of this work describes the marriage in the following terms. ‘Muḥyī l-Dīn was in Egypt when he heard that Shaykh Kirmānī had arrived ... At that time the mother of Shaykh Sadr al-Dīn [Qūnawi], who had been the wife of Majd al-Dīn Ishāq, the sultan’s master, married to Shaykh Ibn ‘Arabi, and Shaykh Sadr al-Dīn was attached to his service ...’ We also find three references to the marriage in al-Qari al-Baghdādi’s Manāqīb Ibn ‘Arabi; one of them is a quotation from Yāfī, a Yemenite author who died a hundred and thirty years after Ibn ‘Arabi in 768 and may have been acquainted with first-generation disciples of his. And finally a much later hagiographical writer, Jāmī (d. 898/1492), records in his Nafahat al-uns that ‘when he [i.e. Ibn ‘Arabi] arrived in Konya after the birth of Qūnawi and after the death of Qūnawi’s father, he married Qūnawi’s

45. Ibid. In other words Majd al-Din and Kayhushraw were as close to each other as Hallaj in this famous verse of his claimed he was to God.

46. Awāmir, pp. 155–58. It should be noted that there is a chronological inconsistency in Ibn Bibi’s account: at the end of the passage he states that the diplomatic mission was dispatched in 608, but the battle of Simnā only took place in 591/1204 (cf. R.G., s.v. Anatolia).

47. This we learn from sana’at § 1 for the Taj al-ṣulūk (R.G., § 736), dated 24 Dhu ‘l-Qa‘da 600 at Mecca, and from sana’at § 4 for the Ruh (R.G., § 639), also dated 600 at Mecca.


49. R.G., s.v. sana’at § 5.

50. R.G., s.v. sana’at § 7.
mother and the boy himself was brought up in the service and in the company of the Shaikh.\textsuperscript{57} In the light of these various texts Ibn 'Arabi's marriage to Majd al-Din's widow seems more than probable. Perhaps we should also add to the dossier a passage from the Naft al-Tib where Maqarji asserts that one of Ibn 'Arabi's sons, Muhammad Sa'd al-Din, was born at Malatya in 618.\textsuperscript{58} very probably the son in question was an offspring from the same marriage. However, this does not help us determine when the marriage alliance was actually formed. We do not know the year of Majd al-Din's death; what we do know is that he was still alive in 611/1214 and that his son Sadr al-Din was born some time between 607 and 612.\textsuperscript{59} It is therefore probable—although this remains no more than a conjecture—that the marriage took place some time between 612 and 618, during Ibn 'Arabi's final and lengthy stay in Asia Minor.

Whatever the exact dates, only a few years separated Ibn 'Arabi's departure from Anatolia (which cannot have been any earlier than 615) from the time when the young Sadr al-Din found himself together with him in Egypt. Ibn 'Arabi must have made the journey to Egypt, which is mentioned in the Manaqib ... Kirmáni referred to above, by 620/1223 at the latest, because it was during that year that he settled permanently in Syria; at the time Qunawi will have been no more than around twelve years old at the very most. The same document\textsuperscript{60} also reveals that during this period Ibn 'Arabi made the decision to entrust the responsibility for Sadr al-Din's education to Shaikh Awhad al-Din Kirmáni. 'Shaikh Kirmáni stayed for a while in Egypt. He and Ibn 'Arabi used to meet and see each other constantly. Shaikh Kirmáni wanted to go to the Hijaz. After his intention had been confirmed, and he had started making preparations for the journey and his project was taking form, Shaikh Muhyyi l-Din took Shaikh Sadr al-Din along with him and went to Shaikh Kirmáni. He said to him: "You know the good will and affection I feel for Sadr al-Din. He is like a real son to me. What am I saying? He is far dearer to me than a son by the flesh (farzand-e solbi). We are linked to each other by various kinds of kinship—first he was a child (farzand), then a disciple (muríd), then a student (shagird)—and by a companionship which has spanned several years.\textsuperscript{61} I have fulfilled all the proper duties of a father towards his son, of a master towards his disciple, and of a teacher towards his student. and [have obtained for him] the fruit of companionship and of understanding of such a kind that no further obstacles remain. I have adorned his outer being with knowledge and with virtue; as for his inner being—that is, as regards the secrets of Reality and the method of following the Way—that also has been well and truly accomplished thanks to guidance and good direction. God has transmitted the fulfilment of these things to you, and it now depends on your consideration and response to the matter." Shaikh Kirmáni responded favourably and accepted Shaikh Muhyyi l-Din's request. Accordingly Shaikh Muhyyi l-Din confided Sadr al-Din to Shaikh Kirmáni's charge.\textsuperscript{62}

Awhad al-Din Kirmáni was, as his name indicates, a native of Kirmán; via his master Rukn al-Din Sijassi he was affiliated with the school of Ahmad Ghazáli.\textsuperscript{63} Like Ahmad Ghazáli himself he had a pronounced taste for samrat or musical recital, and for the practice of shahid bázi, the contemplation of beautiful young men, which brought down upon him the censure of several Sufis including Shams al-Din Tabrízí, the famous master of Jalal al-Din Rumi.\textsuperscript{64} Ibn 'Arabi—normally so reserved about these practices, as we saw earlier—seems not to have held them against him; if he had, he would certainly not have entrusted him with bringing up the boy who in his eyes was 'dearer than a real son'. Doubtless he, like Jámi,\textsuperscript{65} considered that in the case of Awhad al-Din it was a question of a genuine mode of spiritual realisation. According to the Kitab al-amr,\textsuperscript{66} Ibn 'Arabi became friends with Kirmáni in 602/1205 at Konya. Subsequently their paths were to cross frequently, because the anecdotes recorded in the Manaqib ... Kirmáni show them together in both Egypt and Syria.\textsuperscript{67} One of these anecdotes goes to some length to describe the affection they had for each other. 'The union, affection.

\textsuperscript{57} Naft al-uns. 1317 edition, p. 536.
\textsuperscript{58} Naft, II, p. 170.
\textsuperscript{59} Prof. Foruzanfar gives around 612 as the date of Qunawí's birth (cf. Manâqib ... Kirmáni, p. 81) on the basis of a remark by Safádi (Wa'f, II, p. 200) to the effect that Qunawí was '12 years old' when he died in 673; Foruzanfar justifiably assumes a slip of the pen and reads '62 years old' (but why not 72?); Ruspoli on the other hand, in his critical edition of Qunawí's Mi'raj al-ghâbir entitled La Clé du monde suprasonible, states that Qunawí was born in 607; as we will see, this is more likely to be the correct date.
\textsuperscript{60} Manâqib ... Kirmáni, p. 85.
\textsuperscript{61} This passage suggests that Sadr al-Din was already a teenager at the time. If he had been born in 612 he would have been only 8 years old in 620. This would seem to make it preferable to hold to 607 as the date of Qunawí's birth—unless, that is, we are to suppose contrary to all the evidence that Ibn 'Arabi travelled outside of Syria between 620 and his death in 638.
\textsuperscript{63} Naft al-uns, pp. 890–90.
\textsuperscript{64} Naft al-uns, pp. 590–91.
\textsuperscript{65} I have not been able to consult the complete edition of the Kitab al-amr which was published in Beirut in 1912, and the version of the text given at the end of the Dhikhr al-alam. Cairo 1968, is incomplete; but the passage in question is translated by Asif Palacios in Islam cristianizado, p. 310.
\textsuperscript{66} Manâqib ... Kirmáni, p. 85 (Egypt); ibid., pp. 85–6 (Syria).
love and friendship between Kirmānī and Ibn ‘Arabi were so great that one day in Damascus Shaikh Kirmānī asked Shaikh Muḥyī l-Dīn: “I don’t see you in your usual state, and get the impression that you are troubled and anxious. What’s the reason?” Shaikh Muḥyī l-Dīn replied: “Nothing is hidden from the shaikh; thanks to his inner light and perfect knowledge he can discover the reason”. Thereupon Shaikh Kirmānī concentrated for a moment, performed an istikhāra [the traditional ritual for ‘asking counsel’] and became aware of the cause. “Shaikh Muḥyī l-Dīn is bothered because he has left some of his books in Malatya!” Shaikh Muḥyī l-Dīn said to him: “We have believed and recognised the truth (āmanā wa qaddaqa). It is just as you say!” . . . And in spite of Shaikh Muḥyī l-Dīn’s protests, Shaikh Kirmānī went from Damascus to Malatya, took all the books and returned.” For his own part, in his chapter on ‘the Earth of Reality’ in the Futuḥāt Ibn ‘Arabi describes a very peculiar incident in the life of the young Kirmānī. Apart from the Manāqib . . . Kirmānī, a number of documents attest to Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī’s link (using this word in the technical sense it has in Sūfīsm) with Shaikh Kirmānī. Firstly there is Ṣadr al-Dīn’s own will and testament, in which he advises his disciples to ‘lay out Shaikh Awhād al-Dīn’s prayer rug in my tomb’. Secondly, in a manuscript letter addressed to a disciple Qūnawī states that Awhād al-Dīn had been his master ‘in certain respects, and for two years at Shiraz I was his companion and in his service’. Finally, the relationship is confirmed in the sīsīla qāsimiyya preserved in Murtadā al-Zabīdī’s Ta’līf al-jawhar al-thamīn. We are already in a position to understand why it is that Qūnawī was destined to play a crucial role as a ‘crossroads’ in the transmission of Ibn ‘Arabi’s teaching to Shī‘ite Gnosis. He was in fact the recipient of a double spiritual inheritance—Arab from Ibn ‘Arabi, Islamic from Awhād al-Dīn—which predisposed him to become the pivot or link between these two aspects of Islamic esotericism. He himself used often to say, ‘I have tasted milk from the breasts of two mothers!’ On top of the influence from Kirmānī he was also influenced by other Iranian Sūfīs—in particular by Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273), with whom according to a number of sources Qūnawī had very close links. Henry Corbin seems to have been one of the first scholars to appreciate the full significance of this relationship. ‘This friendship is in itself a factor of primordial significance, because it makes Ṣadr al-Dīn the bridging link between the Shaikh al-Akbar and the author of the immense Mathnawī . . . At first sight Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī’s teaching and Ibn ‘Arabi’s would appear to reflect and express two different forms of spirituality . . . And yet to remain content to emphasise the contrast between the form of Mawlānā’s spirituality and the form assumed by the spirituality of Ibn ‘Arabi would be to stay on a totally superficial level of perception. It is the same sense of theophany which inspires them both, the same nostalgia for beauty, the same revelation of love.’ We also happen to know that Ṣadr al-Dīn was in contact with two disciples of Najm al-Dīn Kubrā (d. 618/1221)—Sa’d al-Dīn b. Hamawayh (d. 650/1252) whom he spent time with in Aleppo24 and Najm al-Dīn Rāzī whom he met in Konya25—and that he maintained a correspondence with the philosopher Nasir al-Dīn Tūsī (d. 672/1273). But, granted the significance of these contacts and connections, it must be said that Mawlānā’s or Kirmānī’s influence on Qūnawī’s development and intellectual growth were far less decisive than the influence exerted on him by the Shaikh al-Akbar. Whether or not he actually was his stepson is a matter which ultimately is of very little importance. There can be no denying that at the very least they were extremely close to each other, and that their mutual affection was immense: Ibn ‘Arabi declared as much in his words to Shaikh Kirmānī, and demonstrated it by dedicating the second draft of the Futuḥāt to Qūnawī27 (the first version he had dedicated to his eldest son). As for Qūnawī, he expresses his own affection on a number of occasions in his writings28 but even more so through his writings as a whole. The Shaikh’s [i.e. Ibn ‘Arabi’s] intention with regard to the question of wāḥid al-wujūd can only be grasped in a way that harmonises with reason (aql) and with law (sharī‘ah) through the study of Ṣadr al-Dīn’s works and through understanding them as they should.

69. Personal communication from W. Chittick.
70. Murtadā al-Zabīdī (d. 1790), an Indian, wrote the Tā’līf al-‘arīr and a famous commentary on the Bīgā‘ al-‘ulom al-dīn. He also wrote two treatises—the Ta’līf al-jawhar al-thamīn and Bīgā‘ al-‘ulom al-dīn—consisting simply of lists of sīsīlas. See the sīsīlas reproduced below in Appendix 5.
73. L’imagination créatrice, p.61 (English trans., Creative Imagination, p.70).
74. C.f. e.g. Jandī, Sharḥ al-fusūl, pp.107–8; Jāmī, Naẓūf al-uluns, p.429.
78. In this respect his treatise entitled al-Naẓūf al-lāḥiqa is a document of special value because it is the only one of Qūnawī’s writings in which he describes his own spiritual experiences and his ‘posthumous’ relationship with the Shaikh al-Akbar. There will be more to say about it later.
be understood. This statement by Jāmī—himself a commentator on Ibn 'Arabi—shows quite clearly Qūnawi's importance as an interpreter of Ibn 'Arabi's doctrine. In fact, regardless of whether or not they are actually written in the form of commentaries on Ibn 'Arabi's works, all of Qūnawi's writings serve to clarify and add definition to the governing ideas in Ibn 'Arabi's teaching. This had the effect of ensuring that his works made an indelible imprint on the subsequent development of Ibn 'Arabi's school as a whole—to such an extent that there is no exaggeration in saying that 'in the Eastern lands of Islam . . . the influence of Qūnawi through his own writings and those of his immediate students has been such that Ibn 'Arabi has always been seen through his eyes'. Not only did Sadr al-Dīn give Ibn 'Arabi's doctrine a precise form and outline but he also gave it a name: waḥdat al-wujūd, 'Oneness of Being'. This expression has the definitive merit of offering a simple and handy designation for Ibn 'Arabi's doctrine; but it is also highly reductive, and provided Ibn 'Arabi's critics with a dangerous weapon. In more general terms, by systematising Ibn 'Arabi's thought Qūnawi made it more vulnerable to the attacks of the exotericists, the ahl al-rusūm. Out of all of Qūnawi's works—approximately twenty-five in number according to W. Chittick—the Miftāḥ al-ghayb and Fī jāz al-bayān were doubtless the most read and the most studied. The Miftāḥ al-ghayb, which has been available for several years now in a critical edition, deals with the kind of metaphysical problems expounded by the Shaikh al-Akbar, whereas the Fī jāz al-bayān, which has been published twice, consists of an original commentary on the sura al-Fātihah. But there is one other treatise by Qūnawi that deserves a critical edition in the near future: the Nafahāt ilāhīyya, about which Jāmī said, 'Tell whoever wishes to learn of Qūnawi's perfection in this Way that he should read his Nafahāt ilāhīyya, because in this work he has recorded many of his states, ecstasies, unveilings and revelations'. On reading this work

82. Ibid., p. 47.
83. Ruspoli, La Clé du monde suprasensible, It must however be added that, 'critical' or not, the edition leaves much to be desired, and that the accompanying translation requires thorough revision.
84. At Hyderabad in 1499 and at Cairo in 1699.
86. It was published at Tehran in 1416/1898, but I have consulted the manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. 1154. It is p. 138.

one discovers that after the death of his master Sadr al-Dīn stayed in regular contact with the principal members of Ibn 'Arabi's circle. For example, it contains the text of letters he wrote to the qādi Ibn Zakī (the 'protector' and host of Ibn 'Arabi at Damascus), and to Ibn 'Arabi's sons Sa'd al-Dīn (in one of them he complains at receiving no news from him 'even though I see you wherever you are') and 'Imād al-Dīn.

But it was perhaps chiefly through the intermediary of his Iranian disciples who studied the works of Ibn 'Arabi under his direction that Sadr al-Dīn contributed to the propagation of Ibn 'Arabi's ideas in Iran and Turkey. In this respect three of his disciples in particular played a considerable role: Fakhr al-Dīn 'Irāqi (d. 688/1290), author of the famous Lāmā'át 'uC or 'Divine Flashes' which were inspired by his study of the Fushūs al-hikam; Sa'd al-Dīn Farghānī (d. 700/1300), who produced a commentary on Ibn al-Farrā's τā'īyyat al-kubrā; and Mu'ayyad al-Dīn Jandi (d. 700/1300), author of a major commentary on the Fushūs which was to provide much of the inspiration for subsequent commentators such as Qāshānī (d. 730/1329) and his disciple Qaysāri (d. 761/1359). And yet to see in Qūnawi nothing but a theoretician and more or less faithful interpreter of Ibn 'Arabi's teaching would be a mistake. He was also a spiritual master, an 'Akbarian heir' (wārith akbarī), and, as such, a transmitter of the rāhīniyya or spiritual influence of the Shaikh al-Akbar. Here, too, examination of the 'chains' or silsilas reveals the central place he occupied in the transmission of the khrīqa akbarīyya.

It will now be clear why the friendship between the Shaikh al-Akbar and Qūnawi's father, and their companionship in Anatolia, were in the long term to have decisive implications for the general orientation of Ibn 'Arabi's school and for the growth of Sufism in the eastern parts of the Islamic world. But in the short term they were also to have repercussions on the Seljuq politics in Anatolia. We have on this point the specific testimony of Ibn 'Arabi himself, who on a number of occasions in his writings mentions his contacts with King Kaykaus (d. 615/1218). The only information about this relationship preserved by the chroniclers is an anecdote to the effect that the Seljuq sultan made a gift of a house to Ibn 'Arabi, who subsequently gave it in alms to a

89. For Jandi see Prof. Ashtiyānī's introduction to the edition of the Sharh al-fusūs.
90. See the silsilas listed in Appendix 5.
beggar.92 Before we look at the nature of the links between the shaikh and the king in more detail it is worth recalling that although Kaykā’ūs was an opponent of the Ayyūbids,93 Ibn ‘Arabi himself was on excellent terms with them; that Kaykā’ūs attacked northern Syria in a frustrated attempt to take Aleppo; and that he was suspected of shady dealings and compromises with the Franks and, in more general terms, of having too much sympathy for Christians.94 This last point would seem confirmed by criticisms which Ibn ‘Arabi was at level to him, as we will see.

Nothing would seem to indicate that Ibn ‘Arabi had any contact with Kaykā’ūs’ father, Kaykhusraw, whose rule over Anatolia dated from his first visit to the region in 602/1205. It is probable nonetheless that Majd al-Dīn introduced him to the Seljuq court during the reign of Kaykhusraw and that his friendship with Kaykā’ūs dates from this period. At any rate a passage in the Futūḥāt95 attests to the fact that already in the year 609—only one year after Kaykā’ūs’ enthronement—he was exchanging letters with him. As Asín Palacios has very justifiably noted, Ibn ‘Arabi’s letters to the sultan of Rûm are more reminiscent of a father’s correspondence to his son than of a subject’s letters to his overlord; in fact in one of the letters Ibn ‘Arabi specifically refers to himself as Kaykā’ūs’ father (wālī).96 But here one’s agreement with Asín Palacios’ views must come to an end, because he goes on to express indignation at Ibn ‘Arabi’s advice in one of his letters to Kaykā’ūs about Christians. He is entitled to his reaction—which, coming from a pious ecclesiast trained in a seminary on the Iberian peninsula during the nineteenth century, is perfectly understandable. But when he declares that ‘the Futūḥāt exude political hatred for the Christians’,97 no attentive reader of Ibn ‘Arabi can possibly take him seriously. And historians will be even more amazed to find Asín Palacios assert a little later on—quite peremptorily and without citing any evidence—that Ibn ‘Arabi’s reason for returning to Anatolia in 612 was ‘to supervise the Empire’s anti-Christian policy’. So what exactly did the Shaikh al-Akbar say in the famous letter about the status of dhimmis which, as he himself specifies, he wrote to

Kaykā’ūs in response to a missive addressed to him by the sultan in 609?98 After reminding Kaykā’ūs that as sultan he is the substitute (nāštīb) for God on earth and, as such, is responsible for injustices perpetrated in his realm, he draws the sultan’s attention to the situation of the Christians in his land. ‘The worst thing that Islam and Muslims suffer in your realm is the sound of bells, the manifestation of infidelity, the affirmation of an associate of God, and the disappearance of the rules instituted by the Prince of Believers, ‘Umar b. al-Khattāb, regarding dhimmis; namely that neither in the city itself nor in the surrounding regions are they to build new churches, monasteries or hermitages, that they are not to repair any of these buildings if they become dilapidated, that they are not to prevent any Muslim from being given food and shelter in their churches for a period of up to three days, that they are not to hide spies, that they are not to conspire in secret against Muslims, that they are not to teach the Qur’ān to their children, and that they are not to make public show of their polytheism …’. In short, Ibn ‘Arabi is simply requesting the Seljuq sultan to apply the principles which traditionally (in spite of the fact that the attribution to Caliph ‘Umar of the institutionalising of these rules is historically questionable) governed relations between Muslims and ‘People of the Book’; in other words, to observe the shari’a scrupulously. This attitude may seem shocking today, but for a man who considered himself the defender of the shari’a par excellence, entrusted by God with the mission of preserving it, it stems not from hatred but from a sincere concern to see the Sacred Law respected in every detail by everyone. Similarly, when he announces elsewhere that it is illicit for a Muslim to go to or stay in Jerusalem while the city is governed by Christians,99 his guiding motive is the desire to spare Islam and Muslims from humiliation.100 But, these considerations apart, we must also remember that Ibn ‘Arabi wrote the letter at a time when Christianity represented a threat to Islam. While day by day the Spaniards gained more ground in Andalusia, and in the very same year that the letter was written (609/1212) annihilated the Muslims at Las Navas de Tolosa, in the East the Franks still occupied a part of the dār al-islām and Byzantium remained a power to be contended with. The man who addressed his words to Kaykā’ūs was not someone full of hatred; he was a Muslim who was quite justifiably disturbed by the conquests being made by the Christian armies, and was

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92. See e.g. Wafī, IV, p.173.
93. For example he fought against al-Malik al-Ashraf, and was beaten by him in 615. Cf. From Saladin to the Mongols, p.160, and, for Kaykā’ūs himself, EP s.v.
94. Cf. From Saladin to the Mongols, pp.440-41. Abu Shama accused Kaykā’ūs of inciting the Franks to attack Damietta (cf. Tarajīm, p.111)—a detail which Asín Palacios seems to have overlooked.
95. Fut., IV, p.547.
97. Islam cristianizado, p.94.
99. Fut., IV, p.476. He is obviously referring to Jerusalem’s status after Kāmil had handed it over to Frederick the Second in 626.
100. Ibn ‘Arabi also based his judgement on the words of the Prophet when he declared, ‘I am free from all obligation towards a Muslim who remains among infidels’ (Abū Dāwūd, jihād, 95).
afraid of possible collusion with those armies on the part of their autochthonous co-religionists.

Anatolia marked a major stage in Ibn ‘Arabi’s wanderings in the East: we have already seen some of the reasons why, and we will soon discover others. But it was by no means the only stage. No attempt will be made here to retrace the itinerary and chronology of all his movements during this lengthy period, movements which can in fact be reconstructed with a fair degree of precision thanks both to the sanā’īs and to the information contained in Ibn ‘Arabi’s writings. However, it will be worth trying to isolate the most decisive phases in this period of wandering.

In 601 Ibn ‘Arabi left the Hijāz for Asia Minor, accompanied by Habashi and Qinnawi. After a brief visit to Baghdad—where, as was later to tell Ibn Najjār, he only stayed twelve days—he stopped off for a while at Mosul. There, as we have seen, in 601/1204 he received his fourth investiture with the khirqa; this time the khirqa of Khadir was transmitted to him by a disciple of Qādīb al-Bān. It was also in Mosul that he composed his Revelations of Mosul (al-tanazzulāt al-mawsīlīyya), on the secret of prayer and ablation: and there too he made the acquaintance of a rather strange individual, Abū al-Hasan Thābit b. ‘Antar (or ‘Anbar) al-Hilli. The judgements passed on this man by a number of chroniclers—they call him a liar, stupid, uncouth, conceited and a slanderer—are so severe and critical that it is difficult to explain how Ibn ‘Arabi for his own part could possibly have seen in him ‘one of the most devout and noble of men’ (min azhadī l-nāsi wa ashrufihi). The difficulty is compounded by the fact that, apart from producing an imitation of Abū Tammām’s Hamāsa, Ibn ‘Antar also wrote an imitation of the Qur‘ān—something which in Islam is normally considered a crime. We happen to know that he read some of the ‘suras’ from this work of his to Ibn ‘Arabi, who acknowledged that in this respect the man was suffering from ‘a certain disequilibrium’ (kāna fi mizājihi ikhīlūl). Continuing on his way, Ibn ‘Arabi crossed the Jazira and stopped off at Dunaysir. There (although perhaps not during this first visit but on a later occasion) he encountered two men, each of whom belonged to a very specific spiritual category. One of them, ‘Umar al-Farqawi, was one of the ‘mīyātīyyān’ or ‘men of energetic intention’; the chief characteristic of these men is the permanent watch and control they keep over their intentions. Ibn ‘Arabi explains that they are ‘on the heart of Jonah’ (‘ala qalb Yūnūs) and are dominated by sadness. The other man, al-Rajabi al-Khatari, was—as his unusual nishā suggests—one of the ‘men of the month of Rajab’ (al-rajabīyya). These men are given this name because they are only seized by the spiritual state corresponding to their station during the month of Rajab; during that period they are incapable of performing the slightest movement. ‘However, among some of them something of what they perceived through intuitive revelation during the month of Rajab remains throughout the year…’ That was the case with our man from Dunaysir, who was a greengrocer by trade and had the strange power of being able to unmask extremist Shi‘ites (rāwīfī) even when they tried to pass themselves as Sunnites because he would perceive them in the form of pigs. As Michel Chodkiewicz has very correctly pointed out, Ibn ‘Arabi would never have told such an anecdote if he had had any leaning—even a secret one—towards Shi‘ism, as Henry Corbin and his pupils have so insistently ascribed to him. Here it is only right to underline the fact that Ibn ‘Arabi’s reference to the first four caliphs as each fulfilling the function of Pole—which it will be remembered, was the highest position of all in the hierarchy of initiation—during their respective reigns leaves no possible room for doubt as to the profundity and sincerity of his attachment to Sunnism. His severe criticisms of the Shi‘ites who, he claims, have been led astray by the devil (shayṭān) in their excessive love for the ahl al-bayt or inner circle of the Prophet’s immediate family point exactly to the same conclusion.

Although any explicit reference to the fact in Ibn ‘Arabi’s own writings is lacking, two items of information allow us to establish that in 602/1205 he visited Syria, apparently for the first time. Firstly, we happen to know that in Safar 602 he was in Konya and that eight months later, on Wednesday the 14th of Shawwāl to be precise, he was in Hebron: to get from Anatolia to

101. See the chronological table in Appendix 1.
104. Cf. e.g. Tarājīm, p.53; Shadhārat, V, pp.4–6.
106. Ibid.
107. Ibn ‘Arabi mentions his journey through Diyar Bakr several times in the Futuhāt (cf. e.g. I, p.231, II, pp.8, 15, IV, p.223). Even though in these passages he gives no dates, it must have been in the year 601/1204 that he crossed the Jazira on his way from Mosul to Sivas and from there to Konya, passing through Malatya.

108. Fut., I, p.233. It will be remembered that Ibn Majhīd and Ibn Qussim also belonged to the same category.
109. Ibn ‘Arabi refers to his encounter with this ‘rajā’ in Fut., II, p.8; Muḥādārat, I, pp.245–46; and also in the Darat (Sufis of Andalusiya, p.160), where he only mentions his name. Cf. also Seal of the Saints, p.105.
111. Fut., II, p.8; in the Muḥādārat, II, p.246 they are seen as dogs.
112. Cf. e.g. Fut., II, p.6.
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Palestine he will have had to pass through Syria. Secondly, in the Futuhat he states that he had met Mas'ud al-Habashi, a famous 'madman of God' (muwallath) who lived in Damascus and died on 15 Shawal 602; this means Ibn 'Arabi must have been in Syria earlier on in the year 602, some time between the months of Safar and Shawal.

On his arrival for the first time in Syria—which was the country he was soon to choose as his home from home—Ibn 'Arabi had an experience of mad love', of that insane passion which takes hold of the heart although the heart itself is unable to give any name to the object of its love. As he writes in the Futuhat: 'The most subtle love I have known is the love which makes one experience an inner passion, an agonising desire, a state of subjugation and languor, which prevents one from sleeping and eating while making one incapable of knowing for whom or through whom... I experienced it myself on my arrival in Syria for the first time. I felt an unknown desire (majan majhiilan) for a considerable period, during the course of a spiritual and imaginal adventure in a corporeal form (fi qissat ilahiyya mutakhabayyila fi sarratin asadaya).... I loved, and I had no idea whom I loved. Was the Beloved my Creator, or was He in my image?... Has a lover ever said this? During this period Ibn 'Arabi was quite literally possessed by love, or rather possessed by God; he could not even sit down at a table without seeing Him at the other end. 'My imaginal power had attained to a stage where my love was able to give my Beloved a corporeal form in front of my very eyes, just as Gabriel had assumed a body in front of the Messenger of God. I could not look at Him; He would speak to me, I would listen to Him and understand what He said. In this way He rendered me incapable for several days of eating anything whatsoever. Every time the table was pulled up in front of me so that I could eat. He would stand in front of it, look at me, and say to me in words that I heard with my ears: 'So you can eat while you contemplate Me!' Instantly I would stop eating. Even so, I experienced no hunger because I was nourished by Him [literally 'I was filled with Him'] to such an extent that I grew fatter and put on weight simply by looking at Him: in this way He became a substitute for food. My companions and my family were amazed to see me get fatter even though I was not taking any food at all. This actually went on for a number of days, with me eating nothing and, even so, experiencing neither hunger nor thirst. But He was before my eyes at every moment, regardless of whether I was standing, sitting, moving around or motionless.' From this time onwards Ibn 'Arabi was able to practise continuous fasting (al-wisal), just like the Prophet. As he says elsewhere in the Futuhat: 'I myself have gone through the experience of continuous fasting. I would pass the night without breaking my fast, and it was my Lord who nourished me and quenched my thirst during the nights of my uninterrupted fast. In the morning I would be full of energy and would have no desire to eat. People could even smell the odour of the food my Lord would give me. They would be amazed by its delicious aroma and would ask me: "Where did you get this smell of food? We have never smelt anything like it."'

Tireless, Ibn 'Arabi continued on his travels. After a stay in Palestine, where he wrote several treatises in 602/1206, he rejoined Ahmad al-Hariri in Cairo in 603/1207 before departing for Mecca once again in 604/1207. We have no information about his activities during 605; perhaps he remained in the Hijaz. We only catch up with him again in 606 at Aleppo, but then lose sight of him once more until 608/1212. In that year—on the eleventh of Ramadan, 609—while in Baghdad Ibn 'Arabi saw the gates of heaven open in a dream, and the coaches of the divine ruse (khazin al-makr al-ilahi) pour their contents onto the earth 'like rain'. 'I awoke in a state of fear', he writes, 'and I pondered on how it is possible to escape from the ruse, and I saw that this is only granted through knowledge of the Scales of the Law.' It was perhaps during this second stay in Baghdad (unless we are to date the incident to his first visit in 601) that one day Ibn 'Arabi happened to cross paths with the caliph, who was riding through the city on horseback. Although he does not give the caliph's name, it can only have been al-Nasir, who reigned between 580 and 622. 'I was out walking one day, surrounded by my companions, when we saw the caliph coming our way. We drew back from the road, and I said to my disciples: 'Whoever is the first among you to greet him [i.e. before the caliph has

116. Tarajim, p.54.
117. There are, however, grounds for doubting whether the expression 'al-slam' which Ibn 'Arabi uses here refers to Syria in the strict sense of the term rather than—as was often the case in his time—to Syro-Palestine. In that case the events in question would have taken place in 598, which is when Ibn 'Arabi passed through Palestine for the first time, and not in 602.
120. The Prophet said in this connection, 'I am not like you: during the night my Lord nourishes me and quenches my thirst' (Bukhari, sahd. 48, 49, 60). For Ibn 'Arabi's interpretation of this hadith cf. Fut., I, pp.568-67.
121. Fut., I, p.638.
122. See the chronological table, Appendix 1.
123. Rah, samah § 9.
125. Kitab al-tajdid d, samah § 2.
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greeted you] will lose my respect!" When he drew up directly opposite us on his horse, he expected us to greet him because that is what people were accustomed to do in the presence of kings and caliphs; but we did nothing of the kind. He then looked at us and greeted us with a clear voice; all of us returned his greeting in a chorus . . ." 127 Once again it is necessary to draw attention to the distortion in Asim Palacios' approach, because in commenting on this incident he talks of Ibn 'Arabi's 'irreverent attitude' and 'his spirit of occult rebelliousness'. 128 In fact Ibn 'Arabi states at the very beginning of the passage that the attitude he adopted was in conformity with one of the elementary rules of the Sunna which requires that a person on horseback should take the initiative in greeting a person on foot. 129 The caliph himself drew the right conclusion, because according to Ibn 'Arabi he praised and thanked them for their behaviour.

According to Osman Yahia 130 it will also have been in Baghdad in the same year, 608. that the Shaikh al-Akbar met Shihâb al-Dîn Suhrawardî (d. 632/ 1235), author of the 'Awârif al-mi'ârif and personal adviser to Caliph al-Nâṣir. However, although the passage in the Shadhîrât al-dhâhâb 131 on which Yahia bases his conclusion does mention a têta-à-têta between the two Sufi masters, it gives no indication whatsoever of either place or date. In fact Ibn 'Imâd simply quotes the report by Yâfî (d. 768/1369) in his Mirât al-janâin 132 —Yâfî apparently being the first compiler to mention the incident. The two masters and guides, Ibn 'Arabi and Suhrawardî, met each other. They stayed together for a while, with lowered heads, and then parted without exchanging a single word. Subsequently Ibn 'Arabi was asked: "What is your opinion of Suhrawardî?" He replied: "He is impregnated with the Sunna from tip to toe". Suhrawardî was also questioned as to what he thought of Ibn 'Arabi, and he replied: "He is an ocean of essential truths (baqîr al-laqîq)". This memorable incident is also recorded by al-Qârî al-Bughdâdi, who adds that it took place at Mecca. 133 However, a passage in the Futûhât does raise doubts as to the authenticity of the anecdote. In the passage in question 134 Ibn 'Arabi alludes to the 'station', maqâm, of Suhrawardî, basing what he says not on his personal impressions but on the testimony of one of Suhrawardî's disciples: the fact that he adds the tamâlhîm

formula after mentioning Suhrawardî's name shows he was writing some time after the shaikh's death in 632. Ordinarily, however, when Ibn 'Arabi refers to a spiritual teacher he has known—and this is particularly the case with famous Sufis—he does not fail to mention the fact; but in this case he makes no such statement. Also, knowing Ibn 'Arabi and his spiritual intuition, it is fair to suppose that if he had met Suhrawardî, however briefly, he would have divined his maqâm without having to resort to the testimony of a third party.

Finally, during the course of one of his two periods in Baghdad Ibn 'Arabi struck up an acquaintance with two disciples of Shaikh 'Abd al-Qâdir al-Jilânî: 'Umar al-Bazzâr 135 (d. 608/1211) and Abû l-Badr al-Tamâshîkî. 136 These two men told him many stories about Abû l-Su'îd b. Shibli, who was another famous disciple of Jilânî.

After Baghdad, what was Ibn 'Arabi's next destination in his wanderings during 608-9? Very probably it was Mecca. Indeed in his Durrat al-fâkhirî 137 he mentions that in 608 he buried one of his companions at Shibli's Ali, which is the name of one of the paths used for climbing to the summit of Mount Abû Qubays at Mecca. 138 Also, during the course of his discussion with Ibn Najîr in Damascus, Ibn 'Arabi told him he was performing the pilgrimage with a caravan (hâjjan ma'a raakhir) when he stopped off at Baghdad in 608. 139 We can at any rate be quite sure that he was in the holy places during the months of Rajab, Sha'bân and Ramadân of 611 (1214-5), which is when he wrote the Tarjumân al-ashwâq. After another stay in Syria—during the course of which he produced the commentary on the Tarjumân also in the year 611—the Shaikh al-Akbar took to the road again back to Asia Minor. At the beginning of Ramadân, 612, he was staying in Sivas when a vision announced to him the imminent victory of Kaykâûs over the Franks of Antioch. 140 While I was in Sivas, during the month of Ramadân in the period when the sultan [i.e. Kaykâûs] was besieging Antioch, I saw in a dream that he had set up mangonels all round the fortress and was hurling projectiles, and that the [enemy] chief was killed. I interpreted the vision, explaining to myself that the

127. Fut., IV, p.492.
129. Bukhârî, Isâ'dhâm. 5. 6; Muslim, Salâm. 1. adhâb, 46.
130. Histoire et classification, p.98.
133. Mawânikh Ibn 'Arabi. p.29.
134. Fut., I. p.609; also IV. p.192.
136. Ibid., p.235.
137. Sûfs of Andalusia § 58, p.149.
139. Na'h, P. p.163, where the words are 'hâjjan ma'a raakhir', whereas in Wâfi. IV. p.178 we find 'hâjjan min Mukka ma'a raakhir'. According to this second version Ibn 'Arabi was returning from the pilgrimage with the Iraqi caravan. We have no information about Ibn 'Arabi's movements between 608 and 610; some time around this period he must have gone to Anatolia, as we saw earlier, and from there to Aleppo in Syria, where in 610 he provided his disciples with a commentary on the Kitâb al-ta'jâlîyât (cf. O. Yahia, al-Mashîrî. 1966. I, p.109).
140. For the battle in question cf. Shadhîrât, V. p.49.
rocks which were being hurled symbolised the success of his plans and the realisation of his aims, and that he would take the city. Thanks be to God, that is just how things turned out. He conquered the city on the day of the festival of the breaking of the fast; twenty days had passed between my vision and his victory, and this all happened in the year 612. A short time before his victory I wrote a poem to him from Malatya, informing him of my vision." 141

As we have seen, from this time onwards Ibn 'Arabi settled for a number of years in Anatolia, the bâlid al-Râm; he seems to have stayed mostly in Malatya.142 As a rule, his stays in Anatolia are only considered for their immediate repercussions on Seljuq politics (Asin Palacios) and for their longer-term repercussions on the development of oriental Sufism (Henry Corbin).143 What seems to have been forgotten is that these stays represented a very important period in the spiritual and emotional life of the Shaikh al-Akbar. So, for example, it was in Konya (exactly when, we do not know) that he experienced the most painful night in his life—the night when he was given the knowledge of the distinction between qâdâ', or pre-eternal decree, and qadar, existentiated decree.144 I contemplated this Abode in Konya, during the course of a night which was the longest I have ever had to live through . . . It was then that I understood the difference between qâdâ' and qadar . . . . The continuation of the text, written in the form of a letter in verse and rhymed prose addressed by Ibn 'Arabi to 'a brother in God'145 to describe to him his experience, suggests that this particular revelation marked the culmination of what had been a trying and difficult period. 'When', he writes to him, 'your friend decided to take to the road and realise his aim, a steep hill ('aqaba ka'ûd) interposed itself between him and the

142. This is at any rate the implication of a number of sama'a's: cf. the chronological table, Appendix I.
144. Regarding the distinction according to Ibn 'Arabi between qâdâ' and qadar, cf. Fâsiq, I, p. 131. Here he explains that qâdâ' is God's decree concerning things according to what He knows of them and in them (luknum lakâ fi l-asâyîd 'ala lwaâd lilmâ lahi wa fiha), whereas qadar is 'the actual existentiation at a given moment in time of that for which things are predestined by their essence, and no more' (wa l-qadar tarqiq ma lahi 'alaqayî al-asâyîd fi 'aqqâma min qahtiq mutah . . .). We will examine this distinction more closely in the next chapter.
145. Fat., III, pp. 112–5; part of the letter is also reproduced in Kitâb al-katsâh, pp. 55–6. This text poses a problem. In Ibn 'Arabi's specifications that he went from Konya to 'Dâr al-Bayda' to attend the funeral of this 'brother', Shihâb al-Din, who died shortly after receiving the letter; but which town was he referring to? (In his mu'jam Yaqût lists 16 places called 'Dâr al-Bayda'.) It cannot have been Casablanca (as O. Yahia believed: he also made the mistake of dating the episode to 598 and so to Ibn 'Arabi's Maghreb period, Histoire et classification, p. 96), because Casablanca was only built in the eighteenth century (cf. El s.v. Dâr al-Bayda), but must have been somewhere either in Anatolia or nearby.

147. In the Cairo edition of 1329H, the reference corresponds to III, p. 114.
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born in 618—that at approximately the same time Ibn 'Arabi buried the man who had been his friend and travelling companion for more than twenty years: Badr al-Habashi. But between two beings such as Ibn 'Arabi and Habashi death is no real separation, and from beyond the tomb Habashi continued to sustain his master and have conversations with him. 'When death came to him [i.e. Habashi], in my house, he was completely willing and prepared to meet his Lord. He died in the night . . . . I went to his tomb during the afternoon and complained to him about something that had happened to me after his death. He answered me from his tomb and praised God. I heard his voice quite distinctly when he expressed his concern regarding what I had told him.'150 But although their discussions continued beyond the tomb, Ibn 'Arabi's physical separation from the man who for so long had travelled the roads of the Maghreb and Mashreq beside him coincided with the termination of his own period of wandering: the coincidence was no doubt more than accidental. When he set off for Damascus, where he ended his life on earth, he was never to return.


10. Damascus, ‘Refuge of the Prophets’

IBN 'ARABI AND THE SYRIAN *FUQAHĀ’*

As for Damascus, she is the paradise of the East, the horizon from which its dazzling light arises, . . . the young bride among the cities whose veils we have lifted. She is adorned with plants whose flowers are full of fragrance, and she rises up under the silky finery of her gardens . . . . On her ceremonial bed she glitters with the most magnificent of ornaments. She is so glorious that God had the Messiah and his mother stay there . . . . Her soil is so weared with the abundance of her waters that it longs to be thirsty . . . . Orchards form a circle around her similar to the halo surrounding the moon; they hug her like the calyx hugs the flower . . . . How right they were, those who have said about her: 'If paradise is on earth, then it is certainly Damascus; and if in heaven, then this city vies with its glory and equals its beauties'.

It is impossible to read this famous passage from the *Voyages* by Ibn Jubayr (d. 614/1217) without being reminded immediately of certain descriptions of Seville, also compared to the garden of Eden; and one may well wonder whether, in choosing Damascus from all the cities of the East, Ibn 'Arabi’s wish was not to rediscover a little of the atmosphere and landscape of his native Andalusia. Damascus was like Seville in another respect as well: it was highly coveted. Between 589 and 658 the city was besieged no less than a dozen times; each time, it will be noted, both the besieged and the besiegers were Ayyūbids.1 This determination on the part of Saladin’s divided successors

2. Sometimes the besieging force was helped by outside allies, such as Seljuqs or Khwarazmians. The siege of 658 was conducted against the Ayyūbids by the Mongols.
to attempt to take possession of the ancient Umayyad capital is perfectly understandable. Thanks to its geographical position Damascus was simultaneously the terminus for the commercial routes from the Jazirah, Anatolia and Northern Syria, and one of the chief centres for assembling the pilgrimage caravans. At the same time it was also a vital crossroads for the control of the military routes between Northern Syria and the Jazirah on the one hand and between Palestine and Egypt on the other. With Saladin dead a fratricidal struggle broke out between his heirs, with Damascus both the stake and the hostage. After four successive wars it was Saladin’s brother, Adil, who in 595 finally succeeded in capturing the city, which heentrusted to the governance of his son Mu’azzam. Between 595 and 624 the Syrian metropolis enjoyed a period of relative peace, disturbed however in 597 by a fresh attempt to take the city on the part of the brothers Zahir and Afdal.  

It must however be emphasised that—with the exception of the sieges in 626 and 635, which led to violent conflicts—the city and its population were hardly if at all affected by these wars taking place beneath its walls: wars which all in all were not particularly violent and as a general rule ended in amicable arrangements being agreed on between the opposing sides. Similarly, the repeated changes of ruler seem hardly to have produced any noticeable alterations in the configuration of Syrian society in general or Damascene society in particular; in both cases things remained much the same as they had been under the Zangids. Soldiers occupied the most important posts and held the reins of power; it was they who determined the outcome of the fighting and so, in a sense, the destiny of the country. As for the religious dignitaries, it was they who guaranteed the smooth functioning of the institutions governing the city’s social and everyday existence. The nature of their role made them intermediaries between the political powers, which nominated them, and the population, which consulted them. They served the prince who, when the need arose, appealed to their good services to mobilise the population in the direction of his political aims: Nur al-Din, and to an even greater extent Saladin, are just two rulers who resorted to this procedure in their policy of inciting people to holy war, jihād. However, sometimes the ‘ulumā’ proved recalcitrant. Two well-known historical events (which we will come back to later) provide illustrations of these two alternative scenarios. In 626/1229 Nāṣir Dāwūd, sultan of Damascus, asked

3. For the history of Damascus throughout the Ayyubid period see Stephen Humphreys’ invaluable work From Saladin to the Mongols.
4. We will come back to these events in due course, but it is worth mentioning here that the siege in 643—which is outside the scope of this study—also resulted in considerable damage.
5. Cf. From Saladin to the Mongols, pp. 6-7.

Ibn ‘Arabi and the Syrian fuqahā’

Sibt Ibn al-Jawzī, khatib of the Great Mosque, to stir up the population of Damascus against Kāmil, who had just handed Jerusalem over to Frederick the Second. On the other hand, in his sermon in 637/1240 ‘Uzz al-Dīn Sulami criticised the policies of Sālih Ismā‘il—who was proposing to hand over two strongholds to the Franks and was even inviting them to come and buy arms in Damascus—and issued a fatwāa prohibiting the sale of weapons to non-Muslims.

The grand qādi or judge (qādi al-qaḍāt) was, like the khatib or city scribe, appointed by the sultan, but he enjoyed even greater prestige as a consequence of the responsibilities and range of powers entrusted to him. On his shoulders fell the responsibility of ensuring that justice ruled. And consequently of applying the sharī‘a throughout the bilād al-Shām—in other words the territory extending from Qinnasrin in the north down to al-‘Arish in the south. It will be remembered that prior to Baybars’ reform in 664, the qādi al-a‘lā was always given to a Shāfi‘ite, which was the majority madhab or school in this part of the Muslim world. Qādis and khatibs alike were preferably chosen from the buqṭaṭ or noble families of Damascus, and in all cases were selected from the ‘ulumā’—those men who, as Ibn Juybar tells us, gave themselves amazing surnames and were fond of trailing their coat tails.

One hears one’s fill of “Heart of the Faith”, “Sun of the Faith”, “Full Moon of the Faith”, “Star of the Faith” ... and there is no end to their lists of artificial names and all the accompanying paraphernalia. Particularly among the jurists, you will find all you want in the way of “Princes of the Wise” and “Perfection of the Imāms” ... there are no limits to these absurd titles. Each of these individuals makes his way to the da‘ī of the great, haughtily trailing his coat tails, tilting his body and head to give himself an air of importance. 8 Regardless of whether or not they occupied official positions, the ‘ulumā’ taught in the madrasas, training new generations of fuqahā’ and muhaddithīn. They appeared to be—or rather wanted to appear to be—the conscience of Islam at the heart of society, issuing religious decrees (fatwās) and giving advice to princes who listened to them or at the very least treated them with consideration. So, we see Adil abolishing illegal taxes (mukās) to mollify the fuqahā’ who had become profoundly annoyed at his policy towards the Franks; and in 628 al-Malik al-Ashraf ordered the incarceration of Shāikh ‘Ali al-Harrī at the request of ‘Uzz al-Dīn Sulami and Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Salāh, who were accusing the shāikh of being a heretic and were demanding his execution.

It is true that during this troubled period the doctors of the law were having

8. Voyages, p. 344.
a hard time. There were many people who came both from the East and from the West, bringing subversive ideas with them; they invaded the bilād al-Shām and started propagating their pernicious doctrines, disturbing and confusing people's minds. As early as 587/1191, the 'ulama' had had Suhrawardi of Aleppo executed for professing a disquieting doctrine in which Plato, Zoroaster and Avicenna rubbed shoulders with Abū Yazīd al-Bistāmī, Dhū l-Nun al-Misrī and Ḥallāj. The danger had become more acute by the beginning of the seventh century, with the arrival of a growing number of immigrants from Andalusia and the Maghreb. Ibn 'Arabi was by no means the only person whose heart had become set on Damascus: other people from the Maghreb had shown their preference for Syria over Egypt and had settled in Damascus. And there, just as in Cairo, they were rather well received. The advantages enjoyed by foreigners in this city were innumerable—particularly the benefits reserved for those among the faithful who knew the Qurʾān off by heart or who aspired to learn it. The prestige they enjoyed in the city was truly wonderful. No doubt every country in the East had the same attitude towards them; but the attention they were given in this particular country was greater, and they were honoured even more generously. They admitted this account by Ibn Jubayr was written in 580/1184, when Saladin was ruler; but things do not seem to have changed very much under his successors. People from the Maghreb still had at their disposal a zawiya or place of retreat in the mosque of the Umayyads as well as in the Kullas, not to mention two additional madrasas. However, these were the only gathering-places specifically for people from the Maghreb, who—as Louis Pouzet’s investigations have shown—never created special districts or quarters for themselves any more than they ever formed themselves into a community in the strict sense of the word.

Faithful to their traditions, the chroniclers and the writers of obituaries only chose to record the names of those foreigners who distinguished themselves in some particular discipline. Examples are the grammarian Ibn Mālik, who produced his famous Aflījya in Damascus and died there in 672/1273, the Banū Birzal, who came from Seville and made names for themselves in hadith, and the Banū Zawāwi, who were from Bougie and provided Damascus with two great Mālikite qādis: as we will see later on. Ibn 'Arabi had close connections with various members of these two families. And there were others, evidently greater in number, who owed the privilege of their prominent position in these vast biographical catalogues to the violent polemics their teachings provoked. These were the ittiḥādiyyūn or teachers of Union, sometimes also referred to as asḥāb al-hulull, 'those who teach incarnationism'. This is the rubric—a little vague but very convenient—under which Muslim writers from the Middle Ages down to the present day continue to class all adherents of forms of Sufism which in their eyes are on the adventurous side: not the Sufism of a Ghazālī or a Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardi (respectable and inoffensive men, or at least that is how they were perceived) but the Sufism of men like Ḥallāj, Ibn 'Arabi and Ibn Sabīn who, in spite of the considerable differences between their teachings, all shared in common the one vision of the Real (al-ḥaqīq) in creation (khālaq), of the Face of God in the face of man. Although these lists of heretics, hunted down by Qutb al-Dīn Qastallānī, Ibn Taymiyya, Sakhāwī and Ibn Khaldūn (to mention only the most famous of their adversaries), do present a few occasional variations, they are all agreed on a basic number of individuals guilty of 'major impiety': Ḥallāj, who always tops the list, Ibn 'Arabi, Ibn al-Fārid, Ibn Sabīn, Shushari, Tīljānī, Ibn Sawdakīn, Qūnāwī, and so on. The list drawn up by Sakhāwī (d. 932/1497) has the advantage of laying claim to be exhaustive, and this means that we find in it the names of a good number of disciples and supporters of Ibn 'Arabi in the East, especially in Damascus. The list compiled by Ibn Khaldūn (d. 868/1465) is much more concise, but also contains more subtle nuances. As the author of the Muqaddima, he was able to distinguish between heretics who were 'People of Theophany' and those who were 'People of Absolute Unity'—in other words, put more simply, between the school of Ibn 'Arabi and the school of Ibn Sabīn, which less subtle polemicists often confused.

Of all the ittiḥādiyyūn from the Maghreb given a welcome in Damascus during this century, the 'witch-hunters' cited first and foremost Ibn 'Arabi, Abī al-Dīn Tīljānī (d. 690/1291) and Ibn Ḥūd (d. 699/1299), who were both notorious Sabīniyyūn, and also Shaikh Abū l-Ḥasan al-Jarrāṣī (d. 638/1240). The lengthy biographical sketches of al-Harrāṣī by Ghurbrīn and Māqqārī do not allow us to connect him either with any specific trend in Sufism or with any known master, which means we will have to wait until some brave pioneer undertakes the task of editing and publishing his works

9. Ibid., p.332.
11. Aspects de la vie religieuse à Damas, I. pp.44. 106. 503. etc.
16. We will come back later to Abī al-Dīn, who met Ibn 'Arabi in Damascus. As for Ibn Ḥūd, he was born in 633—five years after Ibn 'Arabi's death—and so they never met.
before we will be in a position to know any more about his teaching and spiritual genealogy. On the other hand, it is well known that his commentary on the Qur’an aroused the displeasure of the jurist ‘Īzz al-Dīn Sulamī, who had him expelled from Damascus in 632; this would seem to be the sole reason for his inclusion in Sakhawi’s list of ittiḥādīyīn. But, all this aside, it is important to emphasise the fact that—unlike Ḥarrālī—Ibn ‘Arabī did not suffer from any form of persecution in Syria; on the contrary, we happen to know that he was on close and good terms with a number of eminent people in Damascus, and in particular with some of the city’s most highly reputed jurists. So, among his teachers in hadīth whom he mentions in the Ījāz,19 we find the great qādī ‘Abd al-Ṣamād al-Ḥarastānī20 (d. 614/1217) who, as Ibn ‘Arabi tells us at the start of the Muḥāداد ar al-‘abrār,21 transmitted to him Muslim’s Siḥā in the Mosque of the Umayyads and also bestowed on him an ījāza ‘āmmī. He had links as well with the qādī Shams al-Dīn Khwawayy (d. 637/1239), and had a vision about him regarding his nomination to the post of qādī al-dīn.22 Khwawayy was in fact qādī al-ṣalāt in two occasions, firstly between 623 and 629, and again from 635 until his death in 637.23 We also possess some reports by later writers to the effect that Khwawayy ‘served Ibn ‘Arabi like a slave’ (kān yakhdhumu khādmal-‘abīd).24 and the author of the Manāṣib Ibn ‘Arabī25 even adds that the qādī used to give him thirty dirhams a day. But as to how credible these pieces of information are, originating as they do from sources that postdate Ibn ‘Arabī by several centuries, that is another matter. All the authors in question—Maqrīzī, Sha‘rānī, Ibn al-‘Imād, al-Qārī al-Baghdādī—repeat the same thing in almost identical terms one after another, and if we trace what they say back to its source we arrive at Fayruzābādī, author of the famous Muḥīhī who died in the Yemen in 817/1414. One also notes that Fayruzābādī is the first person to transmit a set number—or rather a set type—of traditions (akhbār) about Ibn ‘Arabī’s life, and more specifically about his relations with the jurists (fuqahāʾ) of his time. In fact all of our authors have based themselves on the text of a fatwā drawn up by Fayruzābādī at the request of the king of


27. Manāṣib Ibn ‘Arabī, p.614; Fayruzābādī’s fatwā together with an account of the circumstances which led to its composition, is to be found on pp.63–72.

28. Presumably this is why Sakhawi includes him among the ittiḥādīyīn cf. al-Qud al-munir, I, p.276.


was in contact with ʿAbd al-Salām, the future qādi and the first of the Banū Zawāwī to settle in Syria (starting from 616). However, in the absence of further information it is impossible either to confirm or deny that he married the man’s daughter. One other point worth mentioning is that these same late sources specify that ʿAbd al-Salām renounced his office of qādi as the result of an intervention by the Shaikh al-ʿAkbar. In fact Zayn al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Salām did indeed resign from his post—which he had only accepted with reluctance—but in 673. Are we to see in this an allusion to a post mortem intervention on the part of Ibn ʿAraibil, or the proof of a total and hardly believable ignorance on the part of our authors as to the dates when the first Mālikite qādi of Damascus held power?

One other statement by Fayrūzābādī was to provoke a great deal of controversy: the claim that ʿĪzz al-Dīn Sulāmi, the ‘great shaikh of the Shāfiʿīs’, had confided to someone close to him that Ibn ʿArabī was the Pole, qutb. Considering the impassioned debate that for several centuries now has made this story a focus of dissension between Ibn ʿArabī’s opponents and supporters, we need to bring some order into the mass of texts which over the course of time has built up around the ʿĪzz al-Dīn affair’. The first point to be established is that the first author to refer to this episode is not Fayrūzābādī but ʿAbd al-Ghaffār al-Qūqūrī, who died in 708 and may therefore have been personally acquainted with disciples of Ibn ʿArabī and of Shaikh ʿĪzz al-Dīn. This is what he writes in his Waḥīd: It is said that one day the servant of ʿĪzz al-Dīn entered the Great Mosque in the company of his shaikh [i.e. ʿĪzz al-Dīn] and said to him: “You have promised to show me the Pole!” The shaikh replied: “That is the Pole”—pointing with his finger to Ibn ʿArabī, who was sitting surrounded by his students. “Oh master, do you really mean to say that about him?” “Yes, he is the Pole”, the shaikh reiterated.” When one compares this relatively succinct report with what we find in later writers, one notes immediately that over time the anecdote has been remarkably extended, and has even become twice as long. Along with Saṣafī (d. 764/ 1362) the ‘counter-anecdote’ appears: Ibn ʿArabī has become a ‘bad guy’. In this case, it is important to draw attention to the fact that Saṣafī is following Dāhābī, who himself quotes Ibn Taymiyya whose sentiments with regard to

Ibn ʿArabī are well known. According to this second version of events, ʿĪzz al-Dīn declares that Ibn ʿArabī is a bad and false shaikh (shaykhū bi wa kadhdhāb) who teaches the eternity of the world and has deprived sexual habits. Ṣafādī also addsuce another report—which also goes back to ʿĪzz al-Dīn—to the effect that Ibn ʿArabī had married a jinn who on top of everything else used to beat him! Finally, with al-Qārī al-Baghdādī, Muṣṭafā b. Muḥammad al-Baghdādī, ʿAlī b. ʿAlī b. ʿAbd al-Qarā and ʿAbd al-Qarā b. Ṣāliḥ Marqārī b. Ṣāliḥ Marqārī (both base their accounts on Fayrūzābādī’s fatwā) and Ibn al-ʿImām, who for his part quotes from Munāwī (d. 1031/1621), the third version appears. According to this, ʿĪzz al-Dīn supposedly kept silent when one of his pupils described Ibn ʿArabī as a heretic (zinādīq), but on the same evening revealed to his servant that Ibn ʿArabī was the Pole. To round off our analysis it must be added that Sāḥīḥ—who is certainly unflagging in his efforts to be exhaustive—gives all three versions of the story together in his Qawāl al-munībī, and also adds details about the chains of transmission of the negative version, which come out as follows: Dāhābī—Ibn Taymiyya—Ibn Daqiq al-Īd—ʿĪzz al-Dīn Sulāmi on the one hand, Ṣafādī—Ibn Sayyid al-Nās—Ibn Daqiq—ʿĪzz al-Dīn on the other. Needless to say, Sāḥīḥ rejects all the other versions. As to who is wrong and who is right, it is impossible to give a conclusive answer: however, it is worth noting that Shaikh Qūṣī is not exactly someone whom one could call a defender of Ibn ʿArabī, and that in this same passage in the Waḥīd he says some very harsh things about ʿAbī al-Dīn Tīlmīzānī. Otherwise, it is important to understand that the reason why all these writers made such an issue of proving or disproving the authenticity of the anecdote was ʿĪzz al-Dīn Sulāmi’s exceptional reputation among the ʿulāmā. The man whom MāssĪgh described as ‘a Shāfiʿīe canonist of the rarest rectitude’ was the perfect embodiment of an upright jurist and uncompromising Sunnite. As already mentioned, he did not hesitate to take a stand against the king for colluding with the Christian enemy, or to have those who seemed to him to endanger orthodoxy expelled or put in prison. He was himself sent into exile to Cairo by Sāliḥ Ismāʿīl; once there he was appointed grand qādi and was instrumental in triggering off anti-Christian riots at Fustāṭ when the Templars attacked Nablus in 640/1242.

Before leaving the ʿĪzz al-Dīn affair’ behind it will be worth quoting a passage from Ibn ʿArabī which is apparently the only place where he refers to

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Izā al-Dīn. It must be said straight away that the passage in question fails to throw any light on the story discussed above because it has to do with an incident that occurred in Ibn 'Arabi's 'Imaginal World'. This is how he describes the incident in his Divān: 'During the course of a vision I saw the Shāfi‘ite jurist Izā al-Dīn b. Abd al-Salam. He was on a platform, as though in a madrasa, and was teaching the people there the system of law (madhhab). I sat down beside him. I saw a man come up to him and ask him about God's generosity: he cited a verse which described in a quite general manner God's generosity towards His servants. Then I said to him: "I have myself composed a verse on this subject in a poem". But however hard I tried to remember it, I was simply unable. Then I said to him: "God has in this very instant sent me something on the subject". He replied: "Speak!" God then made me say some verses which I had never heard before ... He [i.e. Izā al-Dīn] listened to me with a smile. Just at that moment the qādī Shams al-Dīn Shīrāzi passed by. When he saw me he dismounted and first of all went and sat down near Izā al-Dīn; then came close to me and said: "I would like you to kiss me on the mouth!" He held me forcefully against him and I kissed him on the mouth. Izā al-Dīn asked me: "What does that signify?" I replied to him: "I am in a vision and I am kissing him because he has asked me to: and what is more, he is a person who has a good opinion of me. He has become conscious of his errors and his sins, and he knows that his end is near.".44

Regardless of whether they were opponents or supporters of Ibn 'Arabi's school, and regardless of whether they were contemporaries of Ibn 'Arabi or writing at a later period, all our compilers are agreed on at least one point: the good will, friendship and protection offered him by the powerful family of the Banū Zaki. No doubt we have here one of the factors that encouraged the Shaikh al-Akbar to settle in Damascus (rather than in Aleppo, where his disciple Ibn Sawdakin was living) and which enabled him to pursue his teaching in complete tranquillity, undisturbed by the religious authorities. The Banū Zaki constituted a veritable dynasty of grand qādis, with no less than seven of them occupying the post between the sixth and seventh century.45 We no longer know exactly when Ibn 'Arabi established links with the family: but he was almost certainly acquainted with Zaki al-Dīn Tāhir Ibn Zaki (d. 617/1220), who twice held the post of grand qādi, firstly from 598 to 612 and then again from 614 to 616.46 This ill-fated qādi died in 617 after suffering terrible harassment at the hands of Sultan Mu'azzam for sheltering Shaikh 'Atiq al-Lawrāqi.47 whom Ibn 'Arabi tells us he met in Damascus—a meeting which must have taken place either in 616 or at the very latest in 617, the year of 'Atiq's death. It is rather remarkable that Zaki al-Dīn's brother, Muhīyī l-Dīn, chose in turn to offer protection to another Andalusian Sufi in the person of Ibn 'Arabi. Before examining more closely the relationship between the Shaikh al-Akbar and Muhīyī l-Dīn b. Zaki (d. 668/1270), it is worth noting that this man's name is linked with one of the most tragic incidents in the history of Damascus. At the time of the Mongol invasion in 658/1260 it was he who—along with the qādī Sadr al-Dīn b. Sāni al-Dawla—was selected to go to Hulagu to ask for security (amān); Hulagu immediately nominated him grand qādi over all the 'territory extending from Qinnasrin to al-'Arish'.48 Abu Shāma criticises him violently for his attitude during the course of these events, accusing him of taking advantage of the circumstances to monopolise all the madrasas. At this point in time the qādi [Ibn Zaki] started monopolising affairs for himself, his children and his friends. He allocated either to himself or to them the majority of madrasas, for example the 'Adhrawiỵa, the Sultāniyya, the Fulkīyya, the Rūkūnīyya, the Qaymariyya and the Kallasa, which he took from Shams al-Dīn al-Kurdi, just as he took from him the Sālihiyya madrasa and gave it to 'Imād al-Dīn Ibn al-'Arabi ... He did all this while everyone was perfectly aware that he had acted unjustly towards the jurists [who taught] in the two madrasas that were already in his possession: the 'Azīziyya and the Taiqīyya. He also gave his son 'Isa control of the Sufi khānqāhs, and chose his uterine brother to assist him in the magistracy ... 49 It will be noted in passing that on this occasion Muhīyī l-Dīn b. Zaki took care of Ibn 'Arabi's elder brother, 'Imād al-Dīn. What Abu Shāma does not say is that Ibn Zaki was also suspected of being a sympathiser with the Shī'ites. Several authors,50 on the basis of two verses he once wrote, asert that he preferred 'Ali to 'Uthmān'—even though, as Ibn al-'Imād points out, he claimed to be a descendant of 'Uthmān.51 There is obviously a considerable temptation here to postulate a compromising link for Ibn 'Arabi between Muhīyī l-Dīn b. Zaki's 'pro-Shī'ism' and the friendship

43. Shams al-Dīn Shīrāzī was qādi in 631 and died in 636/1: cf. Tarājīm, p.166.
44. Divān, p.256.
45. For the Banū Zaki cf. Pouzet, Aspects de la vie religieuse à Damas, I, pp.43-44, 72, etc.
46. Tarājīm, p.118; Pouzet, Aspects de la vie religieuse à Damas, I, pp.130-1.
47. For Shaikh 'Atiq cf. Safī al-Dīn, Risāla, pp.129-133.
52. Cf. Shaddārīt, loc. cit., and for the Banū Zaki's claims to be descendants of Caliph 'Uthmān, Tarājīm, p.31.

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that existed between the two men. This is precisely what Yūnīnī does, declaring that ‘in this respect he was in agreement with his shaykh Muhīyī l-Dīn Ibn ‘Arabī’. 53 But, as we have already seen, Ibn ‘Arabī’s own writings, which are the most dependable source of evidence for the matter, refute any suggestion of Shi‘īte tendencies on his part.

Ibn ‘Arabī’s connections with the Banū Zākī are referred to by a good number of authorities. There is no need to rely on Fayruzābādī for the information that the Shaykh al-Akbar was buried in their turbe: the detail is already mentioned by Abū Shāma, who attended his funeral. 54.Yūnīnī (d. 726/1326) even speculates that Ibn ‘Arabī died in the home of the qādi Muhīyī l-Dīn b. Zākī (at the time he did not yet hold the post of qādi), and that it was he who, with the assistance of two other people, washed the body of the deceased. 55 Maqārī adds the further information (although without stating his sources) that Muhīyī l-Dīn b. Zākī used to give Ibn ‘Arabī thirty dirhams each day— which is exactly the same sum he was given by the qādi Khuwayyīn according to al-Qārī al-Baghhdādī. Finally, the son of the Emir ‘Abd al-Qādir states in his Taḥfīz al-zā‘irī that Ibn ‘Arabī married a girl from the Banū Zākī. Obviously it is impossible to verify assertions of this kind, originating as they do from such late writers, but two facts must be mentioned which all our sources appear to have been unaware of. Firstly, three reading certificates prove that Ibn Zākī attended the reading of several chapters from the Futūhāt in 633 at Damascus. 56 Secondly, various passages in the Naẓfahat liḥājiyya 57 testify to the fact that Ibn Zākī remained in close contact with the ‘Akbāri’ circle after Ibn ‘Arabī’s death—and especially with the shaykh’s two sons and his stepson Qūnawi.

While this means we are fairly well informed regarding Ibn ‘Arabī’s relations with the ulama’ at Damascus, for the sake of completeness it should also be added that he had connections with another less well-known jurist as well: Zayn al-Dīn Yusuf al-Kurdi (d. 643/1245), 58 who according to Ibn ‘Arabī was one of the few men who observed the Sunna of the two supererogatory rak‘a before the sunset prayer. 59 All in all, then, even if we

leave aside the dubious testimony of writers such as Fayruzābādī or Qārī Baghdādī whose boundless love and veneration for Ibn ‘Arabī meant that they quite blatantly distorted history in his favour, a clear picture emerges. Ibn ‘Arabī’s teaching may not necessarily have been identical for all his audiences but it was certainly not carried on in secret, as is clear from the number of listeners (approximately a hundred and fifty) recorded in the samā‘is which were issued between 620 and 638; and this teaching apparently provoked neither polemics nor attacks on the part of the faqīhāt, who for the most part held the Shaykh al-Akbar in high esteem. When one thinks of what happened later—of the ruthless war triggered off against him, his doctrine and his supporters less than half a century later by men such as Ibn Taymiyya and Qutb al-Dīn Qastallāni—one is forced to conclude that while still alive Ibn ‘Arabī remained above all possible suspicion by virtue of a mode of existence and lifestyle which were in the strictest conformity with the shari‘a.

On the other hand, we are much less well informed regarding Ibn ‘Arabī’s relations with Sufi circles in Damascus. For example, did he know Shaykh Harrāli? And what were his links with, or his attitude towards, the Harrīyya who became the talk of the town when their master was imprisoned in 628? In the present stage of research no answers to these questions can be given. We do, however, know that he met ‘Aṣif al-Dīn Tīlimsānī during this man’s visit to Damascus in 634. A native of the Tlemcen region, 60 ‘Aṣif al-Dīn left for the East while still a young man and travelled to Anatolia, where he is said to have performed forty retreats (khulwa). 61 There he met Sadr al-Dīn Qūnawi and became his disciple; 62 and it was Qūnawi who in 634 took him to see the Shaykh al-Akbar in Damascus—as is proved by the twelfth samā‘ of the Futūhāt, where both men are mentioned. It was also through Qūnawi as intermediary that he made the acquaintance of Ibn Sāb‘īn in Egypt some years later. When Tīlimsānī’s shaykh, Qūnawi, arrived on a mission (rasīlan) in Egypt, he met Ibn Sāb‘īn who had just arrived from the Maghreb. Tīlimsānī was accompanied by his master. Ibn Sāb‘īn was subsequently asked: “How did you find Qūnawi?” He replied: “He is one of the men of spiritual realisation (min al-muḥaqqaqīn), but there is a young man with him who is

58. R.G. § 135, samā‘ §§ 49, 50, 51, 53. He is referred to here by his full name—Yāḥyā b. M. b. ‘Alī al-Qurashi—and is also accompanied by one of his sons, called Mūsā.
60. For further details about him see Tarājīm, p.177.
61. Fat., I, p.492.

63. Wafī, XV, p.408.
wiser than he!" 65 This meeting took place some time between 648—-the approximate date of Ibn Sab'în’s arrival in Egypt—and 652, which is when he departed for good to Mecca. The encounter with Ibn Sab'în was to be followed by others, because Tilimsânî became his son-in-law and disciple.66 The author of commentaries on Ibn 'Arabi’s Fustâh al-ikhâm, Nîbîrî’s Mawâqîf and Shâhîk al-Haraâwi’s Manâzîl al-sâ‘îrûn, and of a Dîwân, 'Affî al-Dîn Tilimsânî was the one person among the ‘ittihâdîyyûn’ who was held in the greatest contempt by the jurists; the most pernicious of the lot, and the most excessive in his impiety’, according to Ibn Taymiyya,67 and ‘pigs’ meat on a China plate’, as he was described even more crudely by another writer.68 The ‘China plate’ here is doubtless a reference to Tilimsânî’s poetic talent, which was acknowledged by all—even by Ibn Taymiyya.

We also happen to know that Ibn ‘Arabi was acquainted with three ‘madmen of God’ (muwâllahûn) in Damascus: Mas‘ûd al-‘Abâshî (d. 602/1205),69 who—as he tells us in the Futûhât—was dominated by ‘stupification’ (baht): Ya‘qûb al-Kurâni, a rather sad madman whom he met at the White Bridge;70 and the famous ‘Ali al-Kurdi (d. 622/1225) ‘regarding whom, as Abû Shâma explains, ‘the people of Damascus were of different opinions—some said he performed miracles, others denied it and retorted that no one had ever seen him pray, fast, or wear sandals’.71 Saîf al-Dîn Ibn Abî Manṣûr, who as a young man met him in Damascus, states that he presided over the inhabitants of Damascus as a master over his household, and he goes on to give a detailed description of the meeting that took place between ‘Ali al-Kurdi and Suhrawardî.72 In the Futûhât Ibn ‘Arabi only refers very briefly to his encounter with this ‘divine madman’,73 but he must have visited him often because he also composed a short work in which he explained and reformulated the madman’s sayings.74 Finally, at the end of the tenth volume of the Futûhât Ibn ‘Arabi discloses that at Damascus he met up again with four men he had known in Andalusia who (although he had been unaware of the fact at the time) were the four ‘men of reverential Fear and Majesty’ (rijâl al-hayba wa l-jalâ). It is they who assist the [four] Pillars. Their hearts are celestial; they are ignored on earth, known in the heavens . . . . One of them is on the house of Muhammad, the second on the heart of Shu‘âyb, the third on the heart of Sâlih, the fourth on the heart of Hûd . . . . The adoration of the universe is united in these four men . . . . I met them in Damascus and realised that they were these four men: I had known them earlier in Andalusia, but then I was unaware that they possessed this station and I mistook them for simple believers.’75

THE MEETING OF THE TWO SEALS

After criss-crossing the East for a period of twenty years Ibn ‘Arabi—now aged sixty—decided to settle in Syria. As to why he chose the land of Shâm in preference to Egypt, which so many other émigrés from the Maghreb, including a good number of Sufis, had decided to make their home, nowhere does he provide us with an answer—except in the ‘Chapter of Recommendations’ in the Futûhât.76 There he specifically states: ‘Live in the land of Shâm if you are able, because it has been established that the Messenger of God said “Take care of the land of Shâm because it is the land for which God has shown His preference, and it is from there that He selects the elite of His servants”.’77 No doubt it was his intention to apply this precept to himself. On the other hand, he seems not to have found in Cairo the sanctity he hoped for; at any rate it is noticeable that not a single remark either in his own works or in his biographers suggests that he made any friends there; Harîrî and his brother are of course an exception, but he had known them since his childhood in Andalusia. In this respect it is interesting that according to Ghubrîn’s anecdote—fabrication though it appears to be—Egypt is where Ibn ‘Arabi was condemned to death by the fuqahâ. By way of contrast, as we saw in the last chapter the Shâhîk al-Akbar established a large number of contacts in Syria, and this seems to have made it a more receptive and favourable environment for the pursuit of his mission. This was true of Damascus, where the Banû Zaki kept a watchful eye over him; but it was also true of Aleppo, where until 613 he enjoyed the protection and friendship of King Zâhir.’78

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65. Shadharât, V. p.412.
68. Shadharât, V. p.412.
69. Cf. Tarâjîm, p.54.
70. Fut., I. p.250.
71. Fut., I. pp.249-50. This bridge, which spanned the river Tawra, no longer survives, but the quarter that bears its name still exists.
72. Tarâjîm, p.146.
77. Fut., IV, p.506.
78. Ibn Hanbal, IV, p.110; Abû Dâwûd, jihâd, p.553.
79. See above, chapter 8, and to the references given there add Fut., III, pp.69-70, where Ibn ‘Arabi reports a conversation he had with the king of Aleppo regarding a jurist who had issued a
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Due emphasis must also be laid on the fact that it was in Aleppo—where he stayed no less than six times between 600 and 618—19—that the fourteen apostles' emerged for the first time. The names of this group of fourteen apparently inseparable disciples feature together in around thirty 'sami's of Ibn 'Arabi's works—one of them issued in Aleppo in 617, the others at Damascus in 633. Their names are as follows:

'Abd al-'Aziz al-Jabbâb
Ali b. Mu'azzaf ar-Nushbi
Husayn b. Ibr. al-Irbili
Husayn b. M. al-Mawsili
Ibrâhîm b. M. b. M. al-Anšârî al-Qurtubî11
Ibrâhîm b. 'Umar al-Quarashi
'Isâ b. Ishâq al-Hudhâbî
Ismâ'îl b. Sawdana
Muhammad b. A. al-Mayûrqi
Muhammad b. Muhiy i-Din Ibn 'Arabi
Muhammad b. Sa'd al-Din al-Mu'azami
Naṣr Allah b. Abî l-Izz al-Shaybâni Ibn al-Saffâr
Ya'qub b. Mu'âdh al-Warabi
Yûnus b. 'Uthmân al-Dimashqî.

Three of the names in this list are immediately recognisable. There is Ibn Sawdana: Muhammad al-Mu'azami, who had come into contact with Ibn 'Arabi in 615 at Malatya and had become his son-in-law; and also one of Ibn 'Arabi's two sons. The Muhammad in question must have been the older son. Muhammad 'Imad al-Din (d. 667/1269), because Muhammad Sa'd al-Din, the younger of the two, had not yet been born: it will be recalled that Ibn 'Arabi was to dedicate the first draft of the Futûhât to this elder son of his in 629.80

Reference to various biographical repertories has also made it possible to unearth the curricula vitae of four other members of this group. Ali b. Mu'azzaf ar-Nushbi (d. 656/1258) was a muhaddith in Damascus, and he must have had a sizeable reputation because he is mentioned in Dimyāt's

83. Tarajim, p. 199.
84. Shadharât, V, p. 274.
86. Tarajîm, pp. 132–31; Êf. also Shadharât, V, p. 312.
87. Tarajîm, p. 201.
88. Shadharât, V, p. 285, where he cites some verses on the mim, nûn and wâw which were attributed to Ibn Saffâr.
89. They are all mentioned in approx. 30 'sami's for the Futûhât, all dated 613, and in 'sami 192 for the Kitâb maqâm al-qurba (R.G., § 414) and 'sami 2 for the Kitâb aqâm al-ashûr (R.G., § 671, 'sami ...192 for the Kitâb maqâm al-qurba (R.G., § 414)) and 'sami 2 for the Kitâb al-vasâ'il (R.G., § 736).

80. Section 2 for the Kitâb aqâm al-ashûr (R.G., § 671, 'sami 2 § 1) for the Kitâb muqâm al-qurba (R.G., § 414) and 'sami 2 for the Kitâb al-vasâ'il (R.G., § 736).

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taught at the Sayf al-Din b. Ghulām al-Din madrasa.³⁵ It was he who recommended to Ibn ʿArabi a man who had attained to the ‘maqām al-ʿazīma’ or ‘Abode of Magnificence’—an abode where, according to Ibn ʿArabi, the universe no longer contains the believer but the believer’s heart contains God. In the Futūhāt he writes:³⁶ ‘I have met nobody who belongs to this category with the exception of one man from Mosul who had attained to the station. However, he was faced with a complex problem and was unable to find anyone who could resolve it for him. The jurist Najm al-Din Muhammad b. Shāhī al-Mawṣili, who had faith in me, brought the man to see me. He explained his problem to me and I freed him from it: he found contentment and relief. I took him as my companion while he was in this station and I tried without ceasing to raise him to a station that was higher.’

The other jurist was none other than Kamāl al-Dīn Ibn al-ʿAdīm³⁷ (d. 660/1262), the author of two histories of Aleppo which is where he held the post of qāḍī and then the post of vizier under the kings ʿAziz (d. 634/1236) and Nāṣir (d. 658/1260). This was the man instructed by Ibn ʿArabi to give a reading of the Dhakhāʾir al-ʿalāʾiq in front of a gathering of Aleppo jurists.³⁸ As we saw earlier, the Dhakhāʾir is the commentary Ibn ʿArabi wrote on his Tarjumān in Aleppo in 611 at the request of Ibn Sawdakīn and Hābashi, who had heard some jurists make malicious remarks about this collection of poems.³⁹

Ibn ʿArabi was probably also in contact with the grand qāḍī of Aleppo, Bahāʾ al-Dīn Ibn Shaddād (d. 633/1235), and his successor Ibn al-Ustādī (d. 636/1238): at any rate he had an encounter with them during the course of a rather strange vision.³⁹ It was not quite as strange—and certainly not as significant—as another vision he had in Aleppo, during which he was given the sura al-Ikhāṣās. ‘This sura epiphanised itself to me in the city of Aleppo. When I saw it I was told: “Neither man nor jinn has ever sufficed this sura” (Qurʾān 55:56). I observed in it and proceeding from it a great sympathy (maqām azīma) towards me. It had already showed itself to me in an Abode that was almost identical to the one where I now was. I was told again: “It is yours to the exclusion of all other believers” (hiya khaliṣa laka min dānī l-muʿminin). In that moment I understood the allusion and realised that it was my essence, the essence of my form, none other than my very self.’³⁹

³⁸. Dhakhāʾir, Cairo 1968, p.4.
³⁹. Ibid.

It was finally Damascus—‘refuge of the prophets’ (maʿwā al-anbiyāʾ), where it is said Jesus will descend again to earth at the end of time⁶⁰—that Ibn ʿArabi chose as his place of residence from 620/1223 onwards. According to the Tarjumān⁶¹ his home was in the vicinity of the Rawḥiyya madrasa, not far from Bāb al-ʿArādīs in north Damascus. The same source of information also tells us that he became caught up in a scandal which flared up over this madrasa after the death of its founder, Ibn Rawḥa. When the man died in 623, Ibn ʿArabi announced—or ‘pretended’, to use Abū Shāma’s own word—that Ibn Rawḥa, a rich merchant who was one of Damascus’ ‘witnesses on oath’ (ʿulāʾ), had had him come round one evening along with Shaikh Taqi al-Dīn Ibn Khizar and had called them to witness that he was withdrawing control of the madrasa from the hands of Ibn Salāḥ al-Shahrzaḏūrī: this, as Abū Shāma goes on to say, gave rise to endless controversy.

The house where Ibn ʿArabi lived was doubtless the home of the Banū Zāki. According to Yūnīn⁶² this is where he died: it was also to give shelter for a while—some six centuries later—to the Emir ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jazaʾirī.⁶³ It will be remembered in this connection that Ibn ʿArabi refused all possessions,⁶⁴ and that his only means of subsistence were the gifts he was given—gifts which would seem to have been quite substantial because according to the Nafḥ al-tib⁶⁵ the ruler of Homṣ granted him a daily pension of a hundred dirhams while Muhīy al-Dīn Ibn Zāki and Khwawīy the qāḍī gave him thirty dirhams per day. Certainly these details, coming as they do from a fervent supporter of Ibn ʿArabi, are subject to caution: but we must also not forget that according to the entirely credible testimony of Ibn Jubiayr’s patronage was a common occurrence in Damascus. ‘Any person from our Maghreb who is seeking peace of soul has only to emigrate to this place [i.e. Damascus] and devote himself there to the search for knowledge and he will find many favourable circumstances, starting with the end of all concern for his subsistence—which is the greatest and most essential of all aids.’⁶⁶ Admittedly Maqqari adds that the Shaikh al-Akbar redistributed everything

¹⁰⁰. For the traditions relating to Damascus cf. Yaqūt, Muḥjam, II, pp.463-70; also El² s.v. Dimashq.
¹⁰¹. Tarjumān, p.149.
¹⁰². Wujūḥ, IV, p.175.
¹⁰³. Taḥfīṣ al-aʿzīr, p.597.
¹⁰⁴. See above, chapter 2.
¹⁰⁶. The man in question is Muḥīy al-Dīn Ibn Zāki, who ruled over Homṣ from 581/1184 to 637/1239.
that he received in alms, but he must have kept part of it to help meet the needs of his family. At the time he would seem to have had at least two wives: Fātimah bint Yūnus, whom he mentions in the very last lines of the Futūhāt, and Maryam bint Muhammad b. ʿAbdūn, whom we know from a certificate for the Naẓm al-futūḥ to have still been alive in 630. We also know that he then had two sons: ʿImād al-Dīn Muhammad, Fātimah’s son, being the elder, and Saʿd al-Dīn Muhammad who had been born in Malatya in 618. Ibn Ṭarabàdis also refers in the Futūhāt to his daughter Zaynab, even as a small baby was capable of pronouncing fatiwās. One day I started questioning my daughter Zaynab in jest—she was only about a year old and still at her mother’s breast—and I asked her: “When a man has intercourse with a woman without emitting sperm, what must he do?” She replied, “He must perform the great ablation (ghush), to the amazement of everyone present.” Apart from this passage we also have Ibn Ṭarabàdis’s description in his Diwan of the terrible moment when he consigned his daughter to the earth with his own hands. He does not mention her first name, so we cannot be sure whether or not the daughter in question was Zaynab or precisely when he was afflicted by the bereavement. But, these details aside, his home was certainly large enough to accommodate more than thirty disciples at a time, when they gathered to attend the reading of his works. Other Damascenes had started to swell the number of the fourteen disciples who had gathered at Aleppo in 617. The first fifty-seven certificates for the Futūhāt which Ibn Ṭarabàdis issued between 633 and 638 contain no less than a hundred and twenty names; and to them we must add the names of a further small number of hearers recorded in the other certificates dating from the Damascus period (620–638). Around twenty of these hearers are familiar to us. Apart from the ‘fourteen apostles’ we find Qānūnī, who was reunited with his master at Damascus in 626; Tilimsāni, who attended a reading of the Futūhāt in 634; Ahmad al-Mawsīlī’s two daughters Umm Rasūlān and Umm Dalāl; and Ibn Ṭarabàdis’s younger son Saʿd al-Dīn Muhammad. As for the other hearers, naturally one’s attention is drawn to those whose names reappear with significant frequency or in different years and who on this basis can be considered to have been regular disciples. Around thirty people fall into this category. One of the names worth noting is Abū Bakr b. Muhammad al-Balkhi; he attended the reading of the Kitāb al-tajayyubīt in 620, the reading of the Kitāb al-ʿabādīl in 626, twenty-seven readings of the Futūhāt in 633 and, finally, the reading of the Kitāb al-tannazzulat al-mawsīliyya in 634. Even more interesting is the case of Ayyūb b. Badr b. Mansūr al-Muqīrī, whose Sakhlawī includes in his list litṭiḥādīyyīn on the basis of a perfectly accurate remark by Dahhabī to the effect that he had copied a good number of Ibn Ṭarabàdis’s works. His name also occurs for the first time in 620, alongside Abū Bakr al-Balkhi’s in the first of the samā’ī’s for the Tajayyubīt; it then recurs in the following year in eight certificates for a variety of works, each time accompanied by the names of only two other hearers, Ibrahim b. Umār al-Qurashi (one of the ‘fourteen’) and a certain Ibrahim b. Ahmad al-Qurtubī (not to be confused with Ibrahim b. M. b. M. al-Anṣārī al-Qurtubī); his name crops up again in 626 in a certificate for the Kitāb al-ʿabādīl, and then again in 638 in a samā’ī for the Tannazzulat issued by Ibn Ṭarabàdis on the 10th of Rabī’ 1—that is, just over a month before the Shāhīd al-ʿAkbar’s death—where he features simultaneously as reader, writer and one and only hearer.

Also distinguishable in this group are veritable dynasties of hearers: the record was held by the Jamsawīs, who kept up their attendance for three generations. The eldest of them was Abū Bakr b. Sulaymān al-Hamawī, who held the post of preacher (wālī) in one of the mosques of Damascus and died in 649/1251 at the age of ninety; his name features in thirty-three samā’ī’s

108. Fut., IV, p. 554. Ibn Ṭarabàdis does not add the tarabūnām formula after mentioning her name, which would suggest that at the time when he wrote these final lines of the Futūhāt, in around 636, his wife Fātimah was still alive.
110. Fut., IV, p. 554.
111. Fut., IV, p. 517.
113. This is proved by a good number of samā’īs for the Futūhāt which specify that the reading in question took place ‘in the house of the author at Damascus’. Cf. R.G. § 115, and e.g. samā’ī’s §§ 15, 16, 37 and 39.
114. The samā’ī’s numbered between 58 and 71 were handed out after Ibn Ṭarabàdis’s death by his two disciples Ibn Sawāāqān and Qānūnī. Cf. Kitāb al-ʿabādīl (R.G. § 2), samā’ī’s §§ 1–2.
115. R.G. § 135, samā’ī § 12.
116. R.G. § 135, samā’ī §§ 21, 29, 34, 38, 44.
117. R.G. § 135, samā’ī’s §§ 21, 29, 34, 38, 44.
120. al-Qawāl al-mubīl, p. 288.
121. He is indeed cited as ‘writer’ in a substantial number of the samā’īs.
125. R.G. § 762.
for the Futūḥāt, all of them by the year 633, and more often than not he is accompanied by his two sons Ahmad and 'Abd al-Wáhid. The first of these sons, Ahmad, was born in around 600, in 657, and is accused by the author of the Wāfi of being a hypocrite: 'He concealed what he was by passing himself off as an ascetic until the day arrived when he testified against the qādir ibn Sā'īgh. He was accused of lying but he persisted in his testimony.'127 The second son, 'Abd al-Wáhid, was a preacher like his father, and he died in 658.128 His own son, Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Wáhid al-Ḥamawi, appears alongside his father and grandfather in seventeen of the sama's for the Futūḥāt.129 Similarly, two generations of Birzālis are recorded in the certificates for the Futūḥāt. The father, Muhammad b. Yūsuf (d. 636/1238), was the first of the Banū Birzāl to come and settle in Damascus; he taught hadith there and held the post of imām.130 His name occurs in nine sama's for the Futūḥāt, and in certificates for the Ayyām al-sha’r, Tāj al-rafā’l il and Kitāb maqām al-qurba:131 that of his name. Ahmad, in three sama's for the Futūḥāt during the year 633.

Finally, note the mention of the three Muḥammad Ibn al-Sā’īgh brothers in a dozen or so sama’s for the Futūḥāt. One of them was ‘Imād al-Dīn (d. 674/1275), who was a teacher at both the ‘Audhrawiyya and Khadiriyya madrasas;132 his name is included in the list of the ‘ireligious’ drawn up by Sakhāwī,133 who once again is basing what he says on comments by Dhahabi. The two other brothers were probably ‘Alī al-Dīn Muhammad ibn al-Sā’īgh (d. 682/1283), who taught at the Fathiyiya madrasa,134 and ‘Uzayr al-Dīn Muhammad ibn al-Sā’īgh, the most famous of the three brothers, who held the post of grand qādir from 669 to 678 and again from 680 to 682135 and, as we have seen, became embroiled in a conflict with another of Ibn ‘Arabi’s disciples, Ahmad al-Ḥamawi. However, it must also be noted that according to the Wāfi ‘Uzayr al-Dīn was born in 628 and will therefore only have been five years old at the time of the readings from the Futūḥāt in 633—unless that is, there is a fourth Muhammad ibn al-Sā’īgh involved. On the other hand, the same passage in the Wāfi reveals that ‘Uzayr al-Dīn ibn al-Sā’īgh was on close terms with ‘Imād al-Dīn ibn ‘Arabi, the elder son of the Shaikh al-Akkar; it also reveals that his master was Kamāl al-Dīn Tīlisī, who was grand qādir in 658 and according to Qūnawī136 was also the master of Sa’d al-Dīn, the younger of Ibn ‘Arabi’s sons. And to draw further on our analysis of this group of regular hearers—many of whom remain completely unknown—it is worth noting the names of Maḥmūd b. ‘Ubayd Allāh al-Zanjānī (d. 675/1275), who was also a disciple of Suhrawardi and imām at the Taqwiyāya madrasa,137 and of Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Takriti, who is mentioned in twenty-five sama’s for the Futūḥāt and was to become a preacher in Damascus during the reign of Nāṣir Yūsuf (648/1250–658/1260).138

Of those hearers whose names occur irregularly or rarely in the sama’s, only two are familiar to us: Mūsā b. Yahyā b. M. al-Qurashi,139 son of the qādir ibn Zakī, and Yūsuf b. Dirbas al-Ḥumaydī, nephew of Ibn Sawdakī140 and one of the principal members of the Damascus halqa (a term which in the Ayyūbīd and Mamluk periods meant a kind of military aristocracy).

This—admittedly partial—examination of the certificates issued by Ibn ‘Arabi between 620 and 638 allows us to draw several conclusions. Firstly, if we leave aside Qunawī, Tilimsāni and Ibn Sawdakī who were widely known for their affiliations with Sufism and with the tendency their adversaries denounced under the name of ittiḥādiyya, all the other hearers whom we have been able to trace in the various compilations belonged to the circle of ‘ulamā’ in the broadest sense of this term, and to the circles of religious dignitaries: qādis, khattībs, preachers, imāms, muḥaddiths and so on. It is important to emphasise that it was precisely because these men held such positions that they were given a place in these biographical repertories, which by definition were not concerned with the ‘amāma, the ordinary rank and file. This entities one to suppose that those other hearers who are not mentioned in these compendia were more modest in their social standing. On the other hand, the relatively sizeable number of hearers plus their social background prove that although Ibn ‘Arabi’s teaching may have been discreet, it was not really clandestine. Nonetheless, it is probable that he selected his pupils carefully and that they formed a closed circle. One also notes that the reading sessions which attracted the largest number of hearers were for the Futūḥāt: certainly Ibn ‘Arabi’s major work but also the one

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127. Wāfi, VI, p.269–70.
129. He was doubtless very young at the time but, as we will see, he was by no means the only child present at readings from the Futūḥāt. The presence of children at reading sessions was in fact a common occurrence: cf. Vajda, La transmmission du savoir, pp.4–5.
133. al-Qudr al-munhd, 41 102b.
which was least susceptible to criticism thanks to its sheer size and the diversity of the themes it covers, scattered over thousands of pages. On the other hand, one notes that those writings by Ibn ‘Arabi whose doctrinal, initiatory and metaphysical content are most obvious had a much more limited audience, which no doubt corresponded to the circle of ‘initiates’. This is especially true of the Fusūs, the one work of Ibn ‘Arabi’s which—as we will soon see—was to trigger attacks from the jurists shortly after his death: we only possess one single samā’ for it, granted to Qūnawi and Qūnawi alone. 144
Apart from these facts one also notes the existence of three distinct groups within the boundaries of this circle. For example, we have the trio consisting of Ayyūb al-Muqrī’, Ibrāhīm b. ‘Umar al-Qurashi and Ibrāhīm b. Ahmad al-Qurtubi, who in 621 attended the reading of a number of works whose titles clearly reveal their doctrinal nature. 144 Then there is the group consisting of the ‘fourteen’, who in addition to numerous readings devoted to the Futūḥat also attended readings from, for example, the Kitāb maqām al-qurba 143 and the Tāj al-rasā’lī. 144 And finally there is the group of Ibn ‘Arabi’s own relatives, which included Ibn Sawdakī. Qūnawi, his son-in-law Muḥammad al-Mu’āẓẓamī and his son ‘Īṣā al-Dīn, who were also joined occasionally by Ayyūb b. Badr al-Muqrī’ and Abū Bakr al-Balkhī.
However, it would be wrong to restrict the scope of Ibn ‘Arabi’s circle of companions to the individuals mentioned in the samā’s. In several passages in his works he refers to other disciples of his in Damascus whose names are not to be found in the certificates listed by O. Yahia. That is the case for example with Yahyā b. al-Akhfash, who became acquainted with Ibn ‘Arabi through the intermediary of the Prophet. There was among us in Damascus a virtuous, cultivated and pious man called Yahyā b. al-Akhfash. By origin he was from Marrakech, where his father used to teach Arabic. One day this man wrote to me the following letter from his home in Damascus, which is where I was myself. ‘Dear friend, yesterday I saw the Messenger of God in the Great Mosque of Damascus. He was near the preacher’s box (maqṣūrat al-khaṭaṭa) which is beside the chest containing the copy of the Qur’an that is attributed to ‘Uthmān. People were rushing towards him to make the pact. I remained standing, and waited for the crowd to diminish, then I presented myself in front of him and took his hand [to make the pact]. He said to me: ‘Do you know Muḥammad?’ I asked him which Muḥammad he was referring to.

143. They are the Kitāb al-‘ulūf, the Kitāb al-huqayq, Kitāb rashhādat al-huqayq and Kitāb shawārid al-huqayq, the Risāla al-ṣittīhā al-kawmī, the Risāla al-‘aswārī, the Kitāb mafdad al-ghāybah and the Kitāb muqād al-aswār’. Cf. R.G. §§ 26, 33, 234, 317, 386, 418, 551, 689.
144a. Ibid., § 336.

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The meeting of the two Seals

He replied: ‘Ibn al-‘Arabī’. I answered that, yes indeed, I did know him. He then said to me: ‘We have given him an order, so tell him “The Messenger of God you carry out the order you have received”. As for you: be his companion, you will profit from it. And also tell him: “The Messenger of God asks you to praise the Ḥusayn and Sa’d b. ‘Ubāda in particular.”’ 145 Then he called Ḥusayn b. Thābit over to us and said to him: ‘Ḥusayn, teach him a verse which he will transmit to Muḥammad b. al-‘Arabi, who will then compose his poem’. . . . Afterwards the Messenger of God said to me: ‘When he has composed this elegy of the Ḥusayn, transcribe it in a fine and readable calligraphy and take it on Thursday night to the tomb that you call qaḥr al-sitt. There you will find a man called Ḥāmid; give him the poem’. 146 As soon as he had related this to me, Ibn ‘Arabi continued: ‘I composed this qaḥr on the spot and presented it to him . . . ’

It is not difficult to guess the kind of teaching Ibn ‘Arabi was able to lavish on his companions, especially by using the device of sessions devoted to the reading of his works—occasions which will certainly have given rise to debates, with questions being raised by his disciples and explanations and commentaries given by himself. We can also form a fairly accurate idea of this process of oral elaboration of themes touched on in his writings thanks to the works of Ibn Sawdakī. As was noted earlier, when this disciple of Ibn ‘Arabi attempts for example to elucidate the Ṭajjallīyāt, the Kitāb al-‘aswār or the Masūmah al-aswār, he emphasises the fact that he is simply transcribing the actual words of his master. Another very valuable document is the Kitāb wasā’il al-sā‘īlī, 147 which is a discontinuous series of comments by Ibn ‘Arabi in response to questions addressed to him verbally and written down by Ibn Sawdakī. The comments are in the form of practical advice expressed in a simple and direct style, and it is easy to believe that one is listening to the actual voice of the Shaikh as he addresses himself to disciples who are not only attentive listeners but genuine murids who have submitted to his guidance. The man in whom Massignon and others have seen a mere ‘grammarian of esotericism’ speaks here of the pitfalls of spiritual life in a language dictated by concrete experience. So, for example, he warns against the temptation of excessive involvement in ritual, which runs the risk of giving rise to a dangerous automatism: ‘Giving oneself a programme of regular prayers (awrād), promising God to set oneself certain tasks, hold to

145. For this companion cf. El’. IV, p. 32. According to Ibn Juhayr (Voyages, p. 325) his tomb is situated ‘four miles to the east of the town’. The Ḥusayn were the Helpers of Muḥammad in Medina.
147. The text has been edited by Manfred Prolltich (Die Terminologie Ibn Arbaks im ‘Kitāb wasā’il al-sā‘īl’, Freiburg-im-Breisgau 1973).
certain resolutions and so forth, are things I condemn . . . . Regular prayers are actions that tend to perpetuate themselves through force of habit: actions that a man can perform through his gross nature alone and quite heedlessly, with his mind on other things. But when one does not set oneself fixed prayers but invokes God whenever one can and regardless of the time, so that one invokes Him with presence and application, then—contrary to what happens in the first case—one perceives the effect [of this invocation] due to the concentration of spiritual energy . . . .’ Similarly, one finds this supposed representative of an ‘intellectual Sufism’ denouncing the danger of inappropriate mental activity. The invocator (dhikr) ought not to preoccupy himself with the significance of the dhikr but simply with the dhikr itself. He must make it his sole support, without understanding [in a speculative sense] its meaning, and he must say to himself: ‘This is an act of worship which has been prescribed for me, and I act in conformity with that order’. When the invocator believes this firmly, the dhikr operates according to its specific virtue and according to what its essential reality requires.’

It is fair to suppose that this teaching was formulated differently depending on whether he was addressing the small group of ‘initiates’ or a larger audience of ‘’ulama’. But this raises the more general question as to the principles and methods Ibn ‘Arabi used for tarbiya or spiritual training, and also the question as to what he required of his companions. As we have seen, he wrote a vast number of works about the rules of the Path and the points to be observed by the disciple (adab al-murid);[148] but of all these writings it is the longest and most comprehensive chapter in the Futūhāt—the ‘Chapter of Recommendations’—which is the best able to provide answers to these questions. The chapter itself is somewhat unexpected: after elaborating in thousands of subtly written pages on his initiatory and metaphorical doctrine Ibn ‘Arabi chooses—so as to underline the fact that Sufism engages the whole being and not just the person’s intellect—to terminate the work by devoting a hundred or so pages to recalling some of the precepts (in themselves quite elementary) regarding the believer’s obligations towards God (‘abdādāt) and towards men (murāmalāt). When one thinks about this choice more carefully one realises that it is in perfect accord with Ibn ‘Arabi’s convictions and teaching. As he said to his friend Ibn ‘Atār who was reproaching him for refusing gifts from the sultan, ‘The right of God above all else!’ (thagg Allāh ubāq). This must without any doubt have been what the Shāfi‘i al-Akbār taught his disciples in the first instance, because it will be recalled that according to him shari‘a or Islamic law and haqiqiya or reality are identical, and that all spiritual realisation is attained through strict observance of the Law and scrupulous imitation of the Prophet’s Sunna. So it is that in this long final chapter we find him insisting on the fundamental obligations of prayer and ablution while simultaneously demanding of the disciple a permanent state of hukm or ‘presence’ with God. For instance, one passage reveals that he persistently advised his disciples never to cut their hair, nails and beard or even take off an article of clothing without being in a state of ablution—because, he explains, everything we own will be called on to testify either for or against us at the Day of Judgement. ‘One day I entered the public baths to perform the great ablution (ghubsh) and there I encountered Najm al-Dīn Abū l-Ma‘ālī Ibn Lahib, who was one of my companions. As soon as he called out to the barber to come and shave his head I cried out ‘Abū l-Ma‘ālī!’ Even before I could get my words out he replied: ‘I am in a state of purity! I had understood you’.[149] Plainly Ibn ‘Arabī had insisted on this point repeatedly in the presence of his disciples.

Of the supererogatory practices that Ibn ‘Arabi prescribed for his disciples, two in particular are known to us. One of them was discussed in an earlier chapter: muḥāṣaba, or the examination of one’s conscience, which involves keeping a daily inventory of one’s actions and thoughts. The other was the recitation of the shahīda seventy thousand times for the salvation of the soul of someone who has died. Regarding this second practice we have several texts at our disposal, the first of which is the Bagh al-wasāyā where Ibn ‘Arabi writes: ‘I recommend that you purchase your soul for God and preserve yourself from the fire [of hell] by reciting the formula ‘lā ilāha illā Allāh’ seventy thousand times. Through this practice God will grant you protection from the fire of hell either for yourself or for the person for whom you recite the formula . . . . I have practised it myself and I saw its blessed effect at the time of my wife’s death’. [150] A passage in Shaikh ‘Abd al-Ghaffār’s Wahādī shows that Ibn ‘Arabi did not hesitate to perform the rite for the benefit of his enemies. ‘It is related that someone in Damascus had made a rule of cursing Ibn ‘Arabi ten times after every prayer. When this person died Ibn ‘Arabi attended the funeral along with the other people present. Then, once the burial was over, he went to the house of one of his companions and sat facing in the direction of the qibla. When mealt ime arrived, the host brought the

150. Performing this recitation for the benefit of the dead seems to have been a fairly widespread practice in the Maghreb. According to an account preserved by Maqarrī (Nafh al-jīh, Beirut 1986, II, p. 264), Shaikh Abu l-Hasan Ibn Ghālib, a disciple of Ibn al-‘Arif, prescribed it to his disciples at the time of his death. Ibn ‘Arabi himself records that Shaikh Abu l-Rabi’ al-Ma‘alī also used to practise it on the occasion of someone’s death (Fut., IV, p. 474).
Shaikh something to eat; but he paid no attention whatever, did not touch the food, and remained in the same position. His host was distraught, and thought the Shaikh was upset or that something in the food had displeased him. The Shaikh remained as he was until the evening prayer. He performed the ritual prayers and then returned immediately to his position facing towards the qibla. After the evening prayer he went and joined the people present and, visibly radiant, asked for something to eat. The host told him how much his attitude had affected him, but the Shaikh replied: "It had nothing to do with that. I simply made a commitment to God that I would not eat or drink anything until He had pardoned the man who used to curse me; it was for his sake that I recited the formula 'là ilâha illa llâh' seventy thousand times, and I saw that he had been pardoned'."

Finally, thanks to the testimony of Quth al-Din Shirrâzî, we know exactly how Ibn 'Arabi and his disciples set about performing the rite. Sadr al-Din and Ibn 'Arabi had adopted the custom of reciting this formula on the night following somebody's death. They did so in the following way: ten thousand peas were massed together and divided up among the people present. Everyone had to count off the peas he had received seven times, while reciting 'là ilâha illa llâh' over each pea with the aim of delivering the deceased from the flames of hell. When everybody had finished, they would attribute the merit of these recitations to one of the people present and he in turn would attribute the merit to the deceased.

As for the type of dhikr practised by Ibn 'Arabi, we have already seen that towards the end of his life he appears to have favoured the shahâda formula in preference to the name 'Allâh' which had been transmitted to him when he was still a youth by Shaikh 'Uryabî. It will also be remembered that he took a formal stand against samâ's or gatherings in which invocation was accompanied by singing and musical instruments. However, a passage in Jândî's Sharh al-fusûs shows us Qunawi and Ibn Sawadkân participating in one of these musical dhikr sessions: 'Shaikh Sadr al-Din told me that one day he found himself together with Shaikh Ismâ'il b. Sawadkân, disciple of the Seal of the Saints, and Shaikh Sa'd al-Din Ibn Hamawâyî at a samâ' in Damascus. Shaikh Sa'd al-Din rose up during the course of the ceremony while everyone else was sitting on a bench in the house, and he remained standing for the rest of the samâ' with his hands on his neck and his head lowered, as when one wishes to glorify and honour somebody... When the ceremony was over he said, with his eyes still closed: "Where is Sadr al-Din? Where is Shams al-Din Ismâ'il?" We approached him, took him in our arms and embraced him. He opened his eyes, looked at us and then said: "The Messenger of God was there. I was standing before him just as you saw me, and after he had left I wanted my eyes first of all to look upon you!"'

When Ibn 'Arabi settled down in Damascus, in 620/1221, Mu'azzam, the son of Sultan 'Âdîl, had been reigning for five years. For reasons that are not altogether easy to understand, this Ayûbîd prince was one of the most popular rulers of Damascus. Perhaps his popularity had something to do with his abhorrence for the pomp and ceremonial with which oriental sovereigns usually surrounded themselves. That at least is the opinion of the chronicler of his period: not only of Sibt Ibn al-Jawzi who was an intimate friend of his but also of Abu Shâma, a writer less suspect of partiality, who says of him: 'He did not care for the splendour, honours and eulogies that kings have such a liking for... Often he would ride on horseback all alone, and those of his servants who wanted to followed him at a distance... His company was agreeable, he was generous to his companions and he would share everything with them as though he were one of them.' However, this image was to become slightly tarnished by Mu'azzam's attitude towards the qâdi Zakî al-Din Tâhir, a man who inspired a profound dislike in him and whom he publicly humiliated in 616. 'While he [Zakî al-Din] was seated at his home in Bâb al-Barid, in his court, he had one of his henchmen bring him a cloak and headgear that were of a ridiculous colour and shape, parodying the gesture of a sultan conferring on his servant a robe of honour (khilha) for the sake of honouring him. He obliged him to remain seated at his court in this grotesque get-up, carrying his mockery as far as to pay the humiliated qâdi the customary honours which are normally offered in such a situation... The unfortunate qâdi only survived a few months after this tragicomedy, which had been perfectly orchestrated by Mu'azzam; he died of grief in his home, which he no longer dared to leave. It is remarkable that in spite of this unpleasant affair, and also in spite of his decision to reinstate illegal taxes (mukâs), Mu'azzam was respected by the 'ulamâ'—who appro

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153. Sa'd al-Din b. Hamawâyî was, as already noted, a disciple of Najm al-Din Kubra (cf. Jâmî, Na'fshât, p.228) and met Qunawi and his master Kirmâni several times (cf. Mânaqib Kirmâni, p.98). Jâmî (Na'fshât, pp.472-73) records Sa'd al-Din being asked 'What was your impression of Muhyî al-Din Ibn 'Arabi' and replying, 'He is a hopeless ocear'. Are we to conclude from this that the two masters actually met? At any rate Corbin notes that they were on writing terms with each other (Creative Imagination, p.31, n.6).

154. Jâmî, Sharh al-fusûs, p.107. Possibly we are to detect here the influence of Iranian Sufis (Jalal al-Din Rumî and Awbâd al-Din Kirmâni) with whom Qunawi had connections.
156. Ibid., p.189.
158. Pouret, Aspects de la vie religieuse a Damas, l. p.131; Tarâjîm, pp.117-18.
ciated his profound knowledge of philology, grammar and matters of law—and especially by the Hanafites. In the case of the Hanafites, their sympathies for him are easy to understand: as was mentioned earlier, Mu‘azzam abandoned the Shi‘iite school with which the Ayyūbids were traditionally associated in favour of the Hanafite madhab—which of him he appears to have been a ‘fanatic supporter’. 

While foreign politics are concerned, Mu‘azzam’s reign is chiefly remembered for his clashes with his brothers Kāmil of Egypt and Ashraf of the Jazira; in 622 these conflicts induced him to form an alliance with the leader of the Khwarizmians, Jalāl al-Dīn Mangubirdī, who had taken possession of Iran, Azerbaijan and Dīvār Bakr. While Ashraf for his part sought the aid of Kaykūbd, the sultan of Anatolia, in 623 Kāmil sent a mission to Frederick the Second to propose a deal: Jerusalem in exchange for his military backing against Mu‘azzam. Among the Ayyūbids’ fraternity was just an empty word. At Baghdad, the caliph became disturbed by the alliance between Mu‘azzam and the Khwarizmians and dispatched a mission to Damascus to persuade the sultan to renounce on his agreement with Jalāl al-Dīn Mangubirdī. However, in Dhū l-Qa‘da 624, or November 1227, Mu‘azzam died before the dispute had been resolved. Just a few months earlier, in Ramadān of the same year, the ‘Emperor of the Mongols’, Genghis Khān, had died as well.

Ibn ‘Arabi was to remember this particular year for two visions he had of the Prophet. The first occurred during the night of Wednesday 20 Rabi‘ I, 624/1227, and allowed him to resolve the thorny problem as to the superiority or inferiority of angels with regard to men. ‘I saw the Prophet in a vision, and I asked him about this matter after mentioning to him the different opinions held by the ‘ulamā‘. The Messenger said to me: “Angels are superior to men.”’ I answered him: “I have faith in your reply, but what argument am I to give if I am asked about the matter?” He said to me: “You know that I am the best of men, and you are also familiar with the ḥadīth I have transmitted from God, in which He says: ‘Whoever mentions My name inside himself, I mention his name inside Myself, and whoever mentions My name in an assembly, I mention his name in an assembly better than his [i.e. among the angels].’ How many men have mentioned the name of God in an assembly where I was present, and so, how many men has God mentioned in an assembly better than that assembly!” Nothing could have delighted me more than this discussion, because it was an issue that had been bothering me.’

Eight months later, on the 23rd of Dhū l-Qa‘da in the same year, 624/1227. Ibn ‘Arabi had another discussion with the Prophet, this time regarding the resurrection of animals. ‘I asked him if animals will be resurrected on the Day of Judgement. He replied: “No, animals will not be resurrected on the Day of Judgement.” I asked him: “Is that certain? Is there no possible interpretation of the matter (ṣa‘īd min al-ghayr ta‘wil)?” He answered: “It is certain, no interpretation.”

With the death of Mu‘azzam, Damascus entered a period of fresh troubles. His son, Nāṣir Dāwūd, quite naturally laid claim to the throne, but Kāmil, who for a long time had been dreaming of annexing the land of Shām, had decided otherwise and dispatched his army to Damascus. Nāṣir sought the aid of his uncle Ashraf; instead, Ashraf entered into negotiations with Kāmil and eventually concluded a pact with him that they would dethrone Nāṣir. In the month of Rabi‘ I 626 (March 1229), al-Ashraf’s troops, joined by Kāmil’s contingents, commenced the siege of Damascus. Slightly earlier, on 22 Rabi‘ I 626 (18 February 1229), Kāmil had concluded the treaty with Frederick the Second which involved the ceding of Jerusalem. The surrender caused turmoil among Christians just as much as among Muslims. The muezzins and imāms of the al-Aqṣā and al-Sakhra mosques went to al-Kāmil’s tent and performed the call to prayer at the wrong time by way of protest. When the Emperor visited Jerusalem the chief muezzin uttered an adhān or call to prayer in which he added to the traditional formula two verses of anti-Christian polemic. But the most violent reactions occurred in the bastion of Sunnism. Damascus: besieged by the soldiers of Kāmil and al-Ashraf, the city felt doubly betrayed. In the words of Aḥū Shāma: “This surrender was one of the most painful disgrace ever inflicted on Muslims; it alienated the hearts of the population of Damascus from Kāmil and his men.” Nāṣir Dāwūd seized the opportunity, and asked Sibt ibn al-Jawzi to denounce the Jaffa treaty in his Friday sermon so as to stir up the anger of the
people of Damascus and rouse their enthusiasm to fight. Ibn Wāsil records that 'it was a day to be remembered; a day that resounded with the cries, weeping and moaning of the crowd'. However, confronted by the troops of Kāmil and al-Asraf. Nāṣir’s tenacity and the fierce resistance put up by his subjects proved vain and hopeless. After two months of the siege foodstuffs had become rare, prices had increased and for the first time the city had suffered serious damage.  

As Abū Shāma writes: 'My father and the shaikhs of Damascus have told me that this siege was the most severe they had experienced.' Finally Nāṣir yielded to reason and opened the gates of Damascus to his uncles, who entered triumphantly in Sha‘bān 626, June 1229.

What was Ibn ‘Arabi’s reaction to the announcement that Jerusalem had been surrendered to the Christians? Doubtless he was profoundly scandalised, like so many other Muslims: the man who some years earlier had requested Sultan Kaykūs to reinstate the rules regarding the status of dhimmis in the Islamic world could not have helped disapproving of a gesture so humiliating for Islam and for Muslims. Did he communicate his disapproval orally to his disciples? Very probably he did, but our only specific information on the subject is his recommendation in the Bāb al-waṣāṣaḥ declaring it illicit for a Muslim to stay in Jerusalem as long as the city is in Christian hands.

The absence of any criticisms of Kāmil and his political actions in Ibn ‘Arabi’s writings—at any rate in the writings that have come down to us: we may well suppose he was more explicit about the matter in his correspondence—need not surprise us. The fact is that, generally speaking, in the corpus of Ibn ‘Arabi’s works we never find him adopting a political position. For example, attention has already been drawn to his silence regarding Almohad doctrine and Ibn Tumart’s highly heterodox claim that he was the Mahdi.

This silence must not be taken as a sign of lack of interest. As we have seen time and time again, Ibn ‘Arabi showed considerable concern for the religious community, the Umma, kept a watchful eye on the acts and deeds of its leaders, and was anxious about the increasingly threatened future of the dār al-islām. The fact that in his writings he chose not to discuss these circumstantial issues was simply because they held no place in the message God had instructed him to transmit to future generations.

Some months after these dramatic events, at the end of Muḥarram 627 (December 1229), the Prophet came to find him and handed him the book of the Fusūs al-hikam, the ‘Bezels of Wisdoms’. ‘I saw the Messenger of God in a vision of good omen that was granted to me during the final ten days of the month of Muḥarram in the year 627 at Damascus—may God protect her! In his hand he was holding a book, and he said to me: ‘This is the book of the Fusūs al-hikam. Take it and give it to humanity so that they may obtain benefit from it’. I replied: ‘I hear you. and I obey God. His Messenger and those among us who are the keepers of the commandment’, as it has been prescribed (Qur’ān 4:59). So, I set about fulfilling this wish. With that aim in mind I purified my intention and my aspiration so as to make this book known as just as the Messenger of God had assigned it to me, without adding anything to it or taking anything away . . . . I state nothing that has not been projected towards me: I write nothing except what has been inspired in me. I am neither a prophet nor a messenger, but simply an inheritor; and I labour for the future life.’ This passage is followed by twenty-seven chapters which refer to twenty-seven specific divine wisdoms bestowed on twenty-seven prophets. These prophets—twenty-five of whom correspond to the prophets mentioned in the Qur’ān—represent the twenty-seven major prophetic types with which the lengthy series of prophets (anbiyā’) sent to mankind from Adam down to Muḥammad is affiliated.

This typology, based on the esoteric interpretation of Qur’ānic verses referring to the individuals in question, is of major significance for any analysis of Ibn ‘Arabi’s doctrine of sainthood (walāya). As all the saints or anbiyā’ are ‘heirs’ to the prophets, each of them incarnates one particular form of sainthood the model and source of which are represented by one of the ‘major prophets’. A saint can therefore be ‘Mosaic’ (mūsāwi), ‘Abrahamic’ (ibrāhimi), ‘Christic’ (‘iswā’i) in type. and so on—even combining in himself several of these ‘inheritances’. The distinction established in this way by Ibn ‘Arabi between various modes of spiritual realisation, plus the details he either gives or hints at regarding the signs of recognition that enable one to identify a saint’s specific nature, were subsequently to become one of the characteristic features of Islamic saintly literature.

But sainthood or walāya—and in particular the sensitive issue of the ‘Seal...
of the Saints’, broached in the second chapter devoted to Seth—is far from being the only subject of the Fusiṣṣ al-hikam. In a more condensed and abstract fashion than in the Futuḥāt—where autobiographical details abound, giving the exposition a personal warmth and emphasis which here are absent—the Shaikh al-Akbar presents all the principal ideas of his metaphysical doctrine: the Oneness of Being, the notions of ‘pre-eternal suchness’ (‘ayn thābita) and the Perfect Man (insān kāmil), the universality of the divine presence in every representation of God that created beings make for themselves, and the infinity of Mercy—from which Ibn ‘Arabi draws some radical consequences.

‘But one would think they haven’t read the Fusiṣṣ!’, cries the author of the Lisān al-mizān about those who have had the impudence, or at the very least the thoughtlessness, to praise the Shaikh al-Akbar. This veritable cry from the heart by Ibn Ḥajar is highly indicative of the indignation the Fusiṣṣ must have aroused among the ‘ulama’. In fact all the attacks which were to be launched on Ibn ‘Arabi by exorcists from the eighth century down to the present day (and probably on to the end of time) have been focussed on this particular work of his and on the themes it expounds. And yet not one of the themes tackled in the Fusiṣṣ—the Unity of Being, the final salvation of the Pharaoh, the non-eternity of infernal punishments, and so forth—is absent from the Futuḥāt. But in the one case they are given expression and in a sense diluted over thousands of pages, where they intermingle with a whole crowd of other notions; in the other case they are concentrated and expounded more systematically in a mere hundred pages or so. It was for this reason that—due allowance being made for the intellectual laziness of the jurists, who were generally happy simply to cite the ‘condemnable propositions’ already catalogued by Ibn Taymiyya—the Fusiṣṣ lent themselves to criticism far more readily than the Futuḥāt. It is also interesting to note that from the eighth century onwards Ibn ‘Arabi is referred to in the majority of sources—regardless of whether they are hostile to his school or favourable—as the ‘ṣāhib al-Fusiṣṣ’, ‘the author of the Fusiṣṣ’. This designation is almost always followed by a complementary one such as ‘shaykh waḥdat al-wujūd’, ‘he who teaches the doctrine of the Oneness of Being’; and indeed in the Fusiṣṣ one finds enunciated with more conciseness and openness than in the Futuḥāt those great articulations of Ibn ‘Arabi’s metaphysical doctrine which his disciples were in future to refer to as waḥdat al-wujūd, the Oneness of Being.

In recent times some important works have been written on the subject of waḥdat al-wujūd; especially worth mentioning are the books by Izutsu.

175. Izutsu. A comparative study of the key philosophical concepts in Sufism and Taoism. I: The

Afifi. Within the framework of this essentially biographical study it is impossible to contribute to the debate in any significant way, and it will be enough here simply to outline in brief the area covered by this convenient expression, which is also rather dangerous precisely because it is reductive.

The Oneness of God from the point of view of the Names that lay claim to us is the Oneness of Multiplicity (Aḥadiyyat al-kathara); but the Oneness of God in the sense that He has no need either of us or of the Names is the Oneness of Essence (Aḥadiyyat al-‘ayn). This passage from the Fusiṣṣ introduces a fundamental articulation of Ibn ‘Arabi’s teaching, because it implies three key ideas: Absolute Oneness, or the Oneness of unconditioned Essence in all its transcendental nackedness; the Oneness of Multiplicity, which is the level at which the Names appear as ad intra determinations; and finally the unfolding ad extra of this multiplicity, starting from the ‘Names that lay claim to us’ because each Name calls for a ‘place of manifestation’ (muzāhar) where it can produce its effects (the Lord, Rabb, needs a vassal, marbūb, and so on). So Ibn ‘Arabi envisages three levels of Being—or rather three aspects, because strictly speaking there is no hierarchy (which would imply some form of duality) any more than there is temporal succession. The first, the aspect of Absolute Oneness, is the aspect often simply referred to by Ibn ‘Arabi as Aḥadiyya. The second aspect under which the Names appear is the one he generally refers to as waḥidiyya or waḥdāniyya. This is the ‘Oneness of Multiplicity’ expressed in the famous hadith qudsi, ‘I was a hidden treasure and I wanted to be known, so I created created beings so that I could be known’. By definition a treasure contains riches, and in Ibn ‘Arabi’s perspective these riches are the Names; these are not identical to Essence, but at the same time they are not different from it because ‘every Name simultaneously designates both Essence and the particular meaning it assumes’. The Name is therefore the Named from the point of view of Essence, but it is distinct from it from the point of view of the specific significance attributed to it. This means that, inasmuch as each Name is identical with Essence, it contains all the others; their virtual differentiation only becomes actual to the extent that their authority (hukm) is capable

177. Ibn Arabi also uses the terms Aḥadiyyat al-abād or al-Aḥadiyya al-dhātiyya as alternative ways of referring to the same thing: cf. Surad al-ḥikam. Muḥājir. § 677.
179. 279. Fusiṣṣ, I, p. 79.
of exerting itself over receptacles (*mazâhir*). These receptacles are the ‘possibilities’ which are present from all eternity in the Divine Knowledge: the ‘immutable prototypes’ (*a’yan thubita*). This mode of presence is not an ‘existence’ (that would obviously imply a duality or ‘associationism’, *shirk*, on the one hand, and the *qidam al-‘alam* or eternity of the world on the other) but a permanence (*thubût*). 181 God knows these ‘prototypes’, but they do not know themselves. It is the Names’ nostalgia, their aspiration to manifest themselves, which endows the ‘immutable prototypes’ with *wujûd*—a word that must here be translated as ‘existence’. However, this is not to say that the ‘immutable prototypes’ have left the state of permanence (*thubût*) which is eternally theirs: their only existence is in God, their being is nothing but the Being of God. In a sense, then, the universe is ‘an illusion within an illusion’ (*khayâl fi khayâl*);182 but from another point of view Ibn ‘Arabî is not afraid to state—in apparent contradiction of the preceding statement—that the universe is ‘entirely Reality’ or ‘entirely God’ (*haqqun kulluhu*), or to make other similar declarations. 183 A third type of formulation resolves the contradiction: ‘The world is not God, it is only what manifests in the Being of God’ (or ‘in real Being’: *al-‘alam maa huwa ’ayn al-haqq in-namâ huwa maa zahrâ fi l-wujûd al-haqq*). Just as the distinction between Essence and Names is entirely conceptual, because none of the Names has any reality apart from Essence or adds to Essence anything it did not already contain, so the distinction between Names and ‘immutable prototypes’—and therefore also between the Names and created beings, whose predispositions and very nature (*isti’dâdat*) are determined by their ‘prototypes’ (*a’yan*)—remains completely relative: Names and prototypes are merely the two inseparable sides of the ‘objects’ of God’s Knowledge. As to God Himself, He is simultaneously the Knower and the Known—a fact expressed by the Divine Name *al-‘alam* which (like all names of agency) possesses this double meaning. 184

As Henry Corbin has shown remarkably well, 185 this nostalgia on the part of the Divine Names which lies at the root of the creation of the universe is nothing other than the unknown God’s amorous desire to reveal Himself so as to contemplate Himself—as illustrated in the second part of the *hadith* cited above: ‘so I created created beings so that I could know’. Through the ‘most holy effusion’ (*al-fa‘yîd al-qadâs*) which gives rise in Him to the plurality of possibilities, and then through the ‘holy effusion’ (*al-fa‘yîd al-muqaddas*)

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182. Fusâs, I p.104.
183. Cf. e.g. Fut., IV, p.40.
184. For these *fa‘îl* names cf. Fut., III, p.300.
185. See his fine analysis in Creative Imagination, pp.114–116.
188. Fut., IV, p.108. It will be noted that here again we encounter the idea of a treasure.
189. See above, pp.18–19.
191. Fusâs, I p.82.
conformity with [the knowledge] of your essence that you gave Me. Formulated in terms of the distinction between ḍādi’ or pre-eternal decree and ḍādi’ or existentiated decree, this amounts to saying: ‘qādi’ is God’s decree regarding things according to what He knows of them and in them; . . . whereas ḍādi’ is the actual existentiation at a given moment of that for which things are predestined by their essence. and no more: and the qādi’ only has effect on things themselves.

But how are we to reconcile predetermination understood in this way with the attribution of acts to God as this is expounded for example in the famous verse, ‘It is God who has created you—you and what you do’ (Qurʾān 37:96). On the night of Saturday 6th Rajab, 63/1236, Ibn Ṭarābi had a vision during the course of which he had a long discussion with God about this delicate issue. Through a visual revelation God showed me His creation beginning from the very first being created, which was preceded by no other created being because God was all there was. He asked me: ‘Is there any room there for confusion or perplexity?’ ‘No’, I replied. And He said: ‘Similarly, in everything you see in the way of contingent beings (al-muḥādithāt), there is nobody who in this matter has been granted any share whatever of influence or creation. I am He who creates things in causes and not through causes; so it is that they exist through My command’. . . . He said to me: ‘When I grant you knowledge of something observe the rules of propriety, because the Divine Presence will permit no contention’. I replied: ‘That is precisely what I was saying: where is the contention and where is the propriety as long as You are He who creates both contention and propriety? Since it is You who create them, they must indeed exercise their status!’ He said to me: ‘That’s fine! [But] when the Qurʾān is recited, listen and keep quiet’. I said to Him: ‘It’s up to You that it should be as You say. Create hearing so that I may listen, and create silence so that I may keep quiet! That which speaks to You now is none other than what You have created’! He answered me: ‘I only create what I know, and what I know is in conformity with the object of My knowledge (mā ʾakhlīq illā mā ʾalimtu wa mā ʾalimtu illa mā huwa al-maʿālim ‘alayhi)’. ‘

195. There are other verses which, on the contrary, attribute acts to the created being, and others again which attribute them to God and to the servant simultaneously (cf. e.g. Qurʾān 8:17: ‘When you shoot the arrows it was not you who shot the arrows but God who shot them!’). The Emir ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jaʿfarī resolves this apparent ambiguity in the following way: ‘If God has sometimes attributed acts to His servants, this is simply because they are forms and aspects of the One and Only Reality—a statement which is in perfect accord with Ibn Ṭarābi’s teaching. Cf. Écrits spirituels, p.146 (maṣūf 275).
196. An allusion to Qurʾān 7:204.
197. Fut., II, p.204.

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Ibn ʿArabi also describes the process of the unfolding of Multiplicity out of Oneness as being an uninterrupted and perpetual succession of theophanies (taḥallṣulāt) which are renewed at every instant. God, He of the ‘hidden treasure’, in His desire to contemplate Himself epiphonizes Himself in the forms of created beings. In the words of Ibn ʿArabi, ‘The world is nothing other than His epiphonisation in the forms of the immutable essences which cannot exist without Him’. And elsewhere he writes: ‘He is the mirror in which you see yourself, and you are the mirror in which He sees His Names and the manifestation of their status. And they are none other than He!’ Just as the Names merge with the Named from a certain point of view, but are differentiated from the point of view of their manifestation in the created beings over whom they exert their authority, so the theophanies are none other than the Mutajallī, ‘He who epiphonises Himself’, from the point of view of His Essence and yet are distinct from Him from the point of view of what receives them, because it is the receptacle that conditions the form of the theophany. By virtue of their predispositions in the state of permanence (thubūt), created beings are ‘theophanic loci’ of unequal purity: from the perfect transparency of the saint through to the opacity of the irreligious, the one and only light is diffused differently although without its own nature being in any way affected. Correspondingly, it is also the predisposition (istiḍād) which determines the capacity of each being to identify (both in all other people and in oneself) the theophanies for what they are: infinitely multiple and infinitely varied apparitions of the one and only Self-Epiphaniser (Mutajallī). It is reserved for the Perfect Man (insān kāmil) alone—stainless mirror of the higher and lower realities (al-ḥaqqīq al-ḥaqqīqyya wa l-khalqīqyya)—to recognise God in this way in all His forms and so validate all beliefs (fītiqādāt) without exception: for, whether the created being wants it or not, knows it or not, ‘He is the Worshipped in everything one worships’, and every way that one chooses of portraying or representing Him possesses some divine ‘support’, some istīṣād ilāhi.

During 627—the same year he wrote the Fisūṣ—Ibn ʿArabi also compiled an inventory (Fihris) of his works for Ẓāfī al-Dīn Qānūwā, who had joined his order.
up with him again in Damascus in 626 and was to remain with him for several years, as we see from a number of samâ'îs that show them together in 626, 627, 628, 629, 630 and 634.\footnote{204} One notes that this long period of companionship was devoted essentially to the study of those of Ibn 'Arabi's works whose esoteric nature is most pronounced: for example the 'Arârî muğhrîh, the Kitâb al-îsrâ and Kitâb ma'qâm al-qurba, and above all the Fussâs which Ibn 'Arabi transmitted to Qunâwî during a session in which, as we saw earlier, Qunâwî was the only hearer. Here we are fortunate in having the precious testimony of Jandi, who explains how Qunâwî and he 'received' the Fussâs. While my master and guide Muhammad b. Ishâq b. Yusuf al-Qunâwî was giving me a commentary on the prologue to the book [i.e. the Fussâs], the inspiration of the world of the mystery manifested its signs upon him and the Breath of the Merciful (al-na'as al-rahmânî) began to breathe in rhythm with his breathing. The air from his exhalations and the emanation of his precious breaths submerged my inner and outer being. His "secret" governed my "secret" (biştînî) in a strange and immediate manner and produced a perfect effect upon my body and my heart. In this way God gave me to understand in the commentary on the prologue the contents of the entire book. and in this proximity inspired in me the preserved contents of its secrets. When the shahîk [Qunâwî] realised what had happened to me, and that by this means the divine decreed had been fulfilled, he related to me that he too had asked our master, the author [of the Fussâs], to provide him with a commentary on the book; and that he [Ibn 'Arabi], through giving him a commentary on the prologue, had made him perceive the core of the quintessence reserved for those who are endowed with intellect, and had produced in him a strange effect by virtue of which he had understood the contents of the entire work.\footnote{205}

Ibn 'Arabi was to remember 628 (1230-31) as the year in which God spoke with him as He spoke to Moses,\footnote{206} 'without intermediary on the blessed plain (al-bu'â a-mubâraka, Qur'ân 28:30) and in a space the size of the palm of one's hand,\footnote{207} in a language that bears no resemblance to created language; what is understood by the person hearing it is precisely what is uttered. From what He told me I understood this in particular: "Be a heaven

\footnote{204} Cf. R.G. §§ 2. 30. 70. 115. 142. 150. 313. 314. 484. 639.
\footnote{205} Sharh al-fussâs. pp.9-10.
\footnote{206} Fat., IV, p.485; cf. also Kitâb-al-mubâhîlînîstâ (ms. Bayazid 1686, f° 60c; ms. Fatih 3322, f° 93), where Ibn 'Arabi specifies that the vision occurred during the night of Thursday 20 Rabi` I, 628.
\footnote{207} This translation of the word bila, which occurs both in the Futûbah and in the Bayazid manuscript (min bila 'ala qad al-kaff), is a conjecture: the normal meaning of the word ('humidity') makes no sense in the context. Perhaps tall ('hill') should be read in place of bila.

\footnote{208} For example Sha'ranî. Yawâqit. p.10; Ma'âshîh Ibn 'Arabi. p.76.
\footnote{209} Na'âfah al-râb wa ta'âfah al-fatâ'h. Tehran 1403/1382. pp.124-25 (personal communication from W. Chittick).
he arrived home Shaikh Şadr al-Din asked him: “Master, what have you done with your shoes?” “I forgot them at somebody’s house in Mecca.” “You mean to say that during these three hours that you were absent you went to and returned from Mecca?” “Yes”, the Shaikh replied. . . . Shaikh Şadr al-Din made a note of the day and the time. Some time later the friends [from Mecca] returned [to Damascus] bringing with them the Shaikh’s sandals, and they related that he had indeed appeared on such-and-such a day at such-and-such an hour and had left barefoot after the siesta to go and perform the tawât—for it was the custom of our shaikh when performing the tawât to take them off. When the people in the haram got wind of his presence they went to join him; but all of a sudden he disappeared, leaving his sandals with us.” Jandi adds at the end of this account a detail which is not without interest. He explains that this was not a case of what is ordinarily known as tâyy al-arâd, or retreating of the earth beneath the feet of saints, but an instance of something unique and specific to the Seal of Saints. This comment would seem capable of interpretation in the following way: tâyy al-arâd refers to the power certain saints possess of being able rapidly to traverse long distances with every step they take, but, rapid though the journey may be, they still perform a journey nonetheless. However, in the case of Ibn ‘Arabi as described by Qunawi, there is instantaneous translocation: he only had to think of Mecca to find himself there immediately, and the same thing happened to him on his return.

Three years later, in 632/1234, Ibn ‘Arabi embarked on a second draft of the Futûhât; this, he explains, included a number of additions and a number of deletions as compared with the previous draft. Essentially it was simply a matter of stylistic variants or doctrinal nuances which did not involve any substantial modification of the text or its content.

At the very start of this same year, 632, on the first of Muḥarram (26 September 1234), Ibn ‘Arabi wrote the ḥikâya for Sultan Ashraf,211 who had seized the throne from his nephew Naṣr Dâwûd in 626. This Ayyubid prince was clearly anxious to preserve strict orthodoxy in his realm.212 In 628 he ordered the imprisonment of Shaikh ʿAli Ḥarîrî, whom ‘Izz al-Dîn Sulaimân had accused of heresy: Abû Shâma, who is above suspicion of anti-Sufi prejudice, states that the Ḥarîriyya had been shamelessly contravening the shariʿa.213

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212. For his reign at Damascus cf. From Saladin to the Mongols, pp.208–14.
had imprudently declared at a gathering: ‘The lord whom you worship is beneath my feet’ (rabbakum tahta qadamî). It is said that the criminals were severely punished, and that the decision was made to bury the Shaikh al-Akbar on the very spot where the tragic event had occurred. But when they were digging his grave they discovered a chest filled with gold at the very same spot where he had been during the gathering. The teller of the story hastens to add that the Shaikh had wanted to show that really those corrupt jurists worshipped nothing but the goods of this world. This quite literal ‘golden legend’ has a certain flavour to it, but it is a complete fabrication, very probably invented by a story-teller in search of a public. We possess several accounts of Ibn ‘Arabi’s death and funeral—in particular the account by his contemporary Abu Shama’—and none of them mentions any incident of the kind. Yunni’s version, written only slightly after the event, specifies that three individuals took charge of performing the funeral rites for the deceased: the qâli Ibn Zakî, İmâd Ibn Nahhâs, and Jamâl al-Dîn b. ‘Abd al-Khâlij.220 The first of these men, as we well know, was Ibn ‘Arabi’s protector and host. The second, İmâd al-Dî ‘Abd Allâh b. Hasan Ibn al-Nahhâs (d. 654), was according to Abu Shama’ an ascetic (zâhid), a good man, one of the greatest and the noblest;221 according to the Wâfig222 he was a reliable transmitter in spite of being deaf, and we know from elsewhere that he transmitted hadiths to Ibn ‘Arabi.223 As for the third person, to date it has not proved possible to identify him.

According to another legend, transmitted and perhaps even forged by al-Qârî al-Baghdadî, at Ibn ‘Arabi’s death Damascus went into mourning for three days. The sultan, the viziers, princes, ‘ulamâ’ and jurists all joined the funeral procession, and the traders shut up their shops for three days as a sign of mourning.224 If this had really happened Abu Shâma’, who himself attended the Shaikh al-Akbar’s funeral service, would not have failed to tell us; in fact he confines himself to the sober remark that Ibn ‘Arabi had a ‘fine burial’ (janâza busana). A few rather moving lines in the Futûhât inform us of Ibn ‘Arabi’s own wishes: ‘I ask of God, both for myself and for my brothers, that when our lives reach their end the person who performs the prayer for the dead over us should be a servant whose “hearing, sight and speech” are God’.225 May it be so for me, for my brothers, for our children, for our fathers.

225. This is a reference to the hadîth qadîr frequently cited by Ibn ‘Arabi (Bukhârî, tâlîdû). According to him it designates the “supreme identity” —that is, the identity of Itâq, Divine Reality, and khalq, the world of creation (cf. Futûhât, I, p. 406, III, p. 68, IV, pp. 20, 24, 30)— which is “realised” by saints through the practice of supererogatory works (qurb al-nawâjîf). In this station

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When a ‘prayer of request’ (du‘â’) is completed, the prescribed response for those who are witnesses to it is āmîn. ‘So be it’. That will be my response here, just as it has doubtless been the response murmured throughout the centuries, from generation to generation, by stunned and grateful readers of the Shaikh al-Akbar.

God is perceived as being the servant’s very being, which is what He had been for all eternity. See further nawâjîf 132 in the Emir ‘Abd al-Kader’s Livres spirituels (pp. 94–8).
Conclusion

At the beginning of the Dīwān al-maʿārif Ibn ʿArabi describes the strange vision which became the point of departure for this small unpublished collection of poems. "Between the state of waking and sleep (fī wāqīʿa) I saw an angel come towards me with a fragment of white light; one would have thought it was a fragment of sunlight. "What's that?" I asked. The reply came: "It is the sura al-Shūʿarā'...". Next I felt something like a hair rising from my chest up to my throat, and then to my mouth. It was an animal with a head, tongue, eyes and lips. Then it expanded until its head reached the two horizons—in both the East and the West. After that it contracted and returned into my chest. I then knew that my words (kalāmi) would reach the East and the West..."

And so it was. Throughout the centuries following his death the Shaikh al-ʿArākī's teaching has continued to spread, more often than not by diffused and subterranean means, reaching the most distant countries and finally embracing both East and West, Mashreq and Maghreb: Syria, Egypt, North Africa, Iran, Turkey, India, Indonesia, China. In all these countries one can detect the infiltration of Ibn ʿArabi's teaching at some time or other, in some or other form.

This influence is undoubtedly easiest to spot in Sufi literature. The enormous corpus of Ibn ʿArabi's writings has given rise to a vast number of interpretative commentaries which have played a large part in making those writings known well beyond the limits of the Arabic-speaking world. In this respect the catalogue of a hundred and twenty commentaries on the Fuṣūs al-hikam which has been compiled by O. Yahia (and the list is by no means complete) is highly significant. Many of these works have been written by Iranians (both Sunnis and Shiites), sometimes in Arabic, sometimes in Persian; six of them are in Turkish. And there are many other texts that have been inspired by Ibn ʿArabi's teaching, both in prose and in verse, and written in all the vernacular languages of the umma: Urdu, Malay and probably (although the late lamented Joseph Fletcher was not able to confirm this before he died) Chinese. The impact of the Shaikh al-ʿArabī's works and thought has been so great that even outside the sphere of those who belonged to his school in the strict sense (Qūnavī, Jandī, Qāshānī, Qayṣārī and, subsequently, Jaʿnī, Nābulūsī and the Emir ʿAbd al-Qādir). Later Sufi writers have adopted his technical vocabulary regardless of whether or not they refer to him explicitly, have borrowed some of the key ideas of his doctrine—often without knowing it—and have elaborated on a number of his theories.

And yet Ibn ʿArabi's influence on Sufism did not only make itself felt at the level of doctrine. The chains or silsilas—for example the ones given by Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī and also by Sanūsī in the Salsabil al-maʿīnī—to testify to the

4. A large number of quotations and references can be found in Annemarie Schimmel's Mystical Dimensions of Islam. Chapel Hill 1975. Nonetheless, it has plainly been works written in Arabic and Persian—above all those by Ahmad Sirhindī and Shāh Wali Allāh al-Dhahbī—that have played the major role in spreading Ibn ʿArabi's doctrine. For Sirhindī (often wrongly portrayed by modern Indian writers as a reincarnate Ibn Taymiyya) and his relationship to Ibn ʿArabi see Y. Friedmann's thesis. Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindī. Montreal and London 1971. For Shāh Wali Allāh see the study (historical rather than doctrinal) by Sayyid Athar 'Abbas Rizvī. Shāh Wali Allāh and his times. Canberra 1980, and the article by 'Abdul Haq Ansārī. Shāh Waliy Allāh attempts to revise wahdat al-wujūd. Islamic Quarterly, XXVIII. 3, pp. 150-64.

5. We are especially indebted to Prof. Naqob Al-Attas for exploring the Malay sources and revealing both the extent of Ibn ʿArabi's influence and the vast range of debates that the interpretation of his writings has given rise to. See in particular his The Mysticism of Hamza al-Farānī. Kuala Lumpur 1970, and Ramīrī and the wujūdīyyah of 17th Acheh. Kuala Lumpur 1966.

6. However, we do know anyway that even after the Cultural Revolution the Fatḥabāt Makkīyya were still to be found in the only mosque in Peking which remained open during those troubled times (oral communication by M. Chodkiewicz).

7. For the school of Ibn ʿArabi, and especially for its growth in Persian culture, see the excellent study by James W. Morris. Ibn ʿArabi and his Interpreters. Journal of the American Oriental Society, CVI (1986), 3-4 and CVII (1987), 1. This study contains pertinent remarks on the particular forms of expression—their lives influenced by the school and philosophy of Avicenna—that were used by Qūnavī and his disciples, and which gave Ibn ʿArabi's doctrine a somewhat different emphasis from what we find in Ibn ʿArabi's own writings, where 'warmth' is never separable from 'light'.

8. A systematic study of Islamic manuscripts from North Africa remains a major desideratum: but in any case Ibn ʿArabi's influence and explicit references to his writings are easy to detect in a good number of published works, especially those by al-Hājī ʿUmār. However, it seems that quite often expurgated summaries (particularly by Shaʾrānī) have been used in preference to Ibn ʿArabi's own works.


transmission of the khirqa akbariya from generation to generation. From Syria—where the Shaikh al-Akbar died in 638—via Iran, this khirqa pursued its path indefatigably to re-emerge eventually in the Islamic West in the nineteenth century in the person of the Emir ‘Abd al-Qādir;14 and it continues to be transmitted today almost everywhere in the Islamic world.

Read, meditated upon, commented on and venerated in abundance, the Shaikh al-Akbar was to experience a quite exceptional postertext which in the eyes of his disciples was not so much the sign of a prolific genius as the proof of the spiritual authority he had been appointed to exert over the saints of the Muslim community. But there is more to the matter than that. Anyone who has read Ibn ‘Arabi knows very well that for him the umma, the religious community on whose behalf the Prophet had said he would intercede on the Day of Judgement, is not limited exclusively to the historical Muslim community but encompasses all human communities.15 It would have been quite inconceivable for the Shaikh al-Akbar to restrict the scope of influence of his own baraka to Muslims alone, according to the strict sense of the term ‘Muslim’. As supreme heir to he who was sent as a ‘mercy for the worlds’, it was not enough for him to be a source of inspiration to saints (awliyā’) and a source of gnosis to gnostics (’ārifān): he wished to be a source of hope for all created beings. In his own words: ‘Thanks be to God, I am not one of those who love vengeance and punishment. On the contrary, God has created me as a mercy and has made of me an heir to the mercy of him to whom it was said: “We have sent you only as a mercy towards the worlds”’ (Qurān 21:107).16 Elsewhere he affirms again: ‘Of the angels whom He has created, God has positioned four as bearers of the Throne, at the four columns that hold it up... He has attributed various degrees of excellence to these columns, and has placed me at the most excellent of them and has made me one of the bearers of the Throne. Indeed apart from the angels whom He has created to bear the Throne, God also possesses forms (zawwar) from the human race which sustain the Throne, the Seat of the Merciful. I am one of them, and

the column which is the best of all is mine: it is the treasury of Mercy. He has therefore made me an absolutely merciful being (rahīman muṭlaqan).17

Some interpreters of Ibn ‘Arabi—both Muslim and non-Muslim, eastern and western—have seen in his work nothing but an inspired metaphysical construction, and have obscured this fundamental dimension of universality and generosity which characterises both his person and his work without appreciating the seriousness of the amputation that in so doing they have inflicted on the Akbarian heritage. ‘God was shown to me in my inner being (fi ṣirrī) during a vision, and He said to me: ‘Make My servants know what you have perceived of My generosity... Why do My servants despair of My mercy when My mercy embraces everything?’’15 This leitmotif of Divine Compassion reaching out to all beings gives the work of the Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood its dominant quality: the quality of a universal message of hope, of a haunting reminder that Rahma, Mercy, will have the last word. Because all men worship God whether they know it or not, because it is the Sigh of the Merciful who has brought them into existence, because each of them bears within him the imprint of one of the infinitely multiple Faces of the One, it is to eternal bliss that they have been and are being guided from the beginning of eternity. As a messenger of Divine Mercy, Ibn ‘Arabi also wished to be its instrument; that is what he was in this world through the token of a saintliness whose effects were not extinguished with his death. He will also be its instrument in the other world because, as he has promised, on the Day of Judgement he will intercede on behalf of everyone who comes within his sight.16

Appendices
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<tr>
<td>589/1193</td>
<td>Algeciras</td>
<td>Jandi, Sharh, 220.</td>
<td>Has the vision of his destiny.</td>
<td>Death of Saladin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramadan</td>
<td>Ceuta</td>
<td>Fut., I. 32.</td>
<td>Attends courses by the muhaddith 'Abd Allah al-Hajari.</td>
<td>—</td>
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<td>—</td>
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<td>Fut., I. 579.</td>
<td>Meets the poet Abu Yazid al-Fazazi.</td>
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<td>Fut., IV. 129.</td>
<td>Meets the son of Ibn Qasi.</td>
<td>—</td>
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<td>—</td>
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<td>Dīwān. 332.</td>
<td>Realises he is Heir to the Knowledge of the Prophet.</td>
<td>—</td>
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<td>—</td>
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<td>Fut., III. 224.</td>
<td>Gains access to the 'Earth of Reality'.</td>
<td>—</td>
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<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Fut., I. 186; &amp; see Chapter 6.</td>
<td>Meets Khadjir for the second time.</td>
<td>—</td>
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<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Fut., III. 338.</td>
<td>Composes a poem in the Great Mosque at Tunis.</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—</td>
<td>Seville</td>
<td>Fut., III. 338.</td>
<td>Leaves for Seville and on arriving discovers that one of the 'rijāl al-ghaybi' has divulged his verses.</td>
<td>—</td>
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<td>—</td>
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<td>Fut., I. 222 &amp; Chapter 5.</td>
<td>Death of Ibn 'Arabi's father.</td>
<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>—</td>
<td>Near Rota</td>
<td>Fut., I. 186 &amp; Chapter 5.</td>
<td>Third encounter with Khadjir.</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—</td>
<td>Seville</td>
<td>Preface to the K. al-Mashāhid.</td>
<td>Writes the Kitāb al-mashāhid al-qudsiyya.</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>591/1195</td>
<td>Fez</td>
<td>Durra § 3.</td>
<td>Leaves for Fez, where he marries off his two sisters.</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
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<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Fut., III. 140.</td>
<td>Gains access to the 'Abode of the Pact between plants and the Pole'.</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Fut., III. 186–87.</td>
<td>Gains access for the first time to the 'Abode of Light'.</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>591/1195</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Fut., IV. 541.</td>
<td>Meets Muh. b. Qasim al-Tamimi, who transmits to him traditions regarding the saints of Fez.</td>
<td>—</td>
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<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>K. nasab al-khirqa.</td>
<td>Receives the khirqa from 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Ali al-Qasṭallāni.</td>
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<td>YEAR</td>
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<tr>
<td>593/1196-97</td>
<td>—</td>
<td><em>Fut.</em>, I, 491; II, 486.</td>
<td>Gains access to the 'Abode of Light' for the second time and becomes a 'face with no nape'.</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>593/1196-97</td>
<td>—</td>
<td><em>Fut.</em>, IV, 76.</td>
<td>Encounters the Pole of his time.</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>593/1196-97</td>
<td>—</td>
<td><em>Fut.</em>, IV, 50; I, 244.</td>
<td>Meets M. b. Qāsim al-Tamimi again.</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>594/1197-98</td>
<td>—</td>
<td><em>Diwān</em>, 333-37.</td>
<td>Realises he is the Seal of Muḥammadan Sainthood.</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>594/1197-98</td>
<td>Fes</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Receives the khirqa from M. b. Qāsim al-Tamimi.</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>594/1197-98</td>
<td>Couta</td>
<td><em>Fut.</em>, II, 348.</td>
<td>Divulges a divine secret.</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>594/1197-98</td>
<td>Fes</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>God reproaches him and informs him He has removed the secret from the breast of those to whom he had divulged it. Ibn 'Arabi returns to Fes with his disciple Habashi to verify this.</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>595/1198-99</td>
<td>Seville</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Bids farewell to his masters in Seville.</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>595/1198-99</td>
<td>Cordoba</td>
<td><em>Fut.</em>, I, 154.</td>
<td>Attends the funeral of Averroes.</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramadān 595/1199</td>
<td>Almería</td>
<td><em>Fut.</em>, I, 334; IV, 263 &amp; preface to <em>Mawāqiʿ</em>.</td>
<td>Composes the <em>Mawāqiʿ al-nuṣūm</em> in 11 days for Ḥabashi.</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>597/1200-1</td>
<td>Marrakech</td>
<td><em>Fut.</em>, II, 436.</td>
<td>Vision of the Throne. During the vision he is instructed to take M. al-Ḥaṣṣār as his companion to the East.</td>
<td>Earthquakes in Syria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>597/1200-1</td>
<td>Bougie</td>
<td><em>Ḥiyāṭ al-ʿabdal</em>, 8.</td>
<td>Inserts a chapter concerning the heart in a copy of the <em>Mawāqiʿ al-nuṣūm</em>.</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>597/1200-1</td>
<td>Bougie</td>
<td><em>K.</em> al-ḥāʾ, 11; <em>K.</em> al-kutub, 49.</td>
<td>Sees himself united with the stars and the letters of the alphabet.</td>
<td>—</td>
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<td>598/1201</td>
<td>Tunis</td>
<td>Fut., I, 98.</td>
<td>Frequent Shaikh 'Abd al-'Aziz Mahdawi.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>598/1201</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Fut., I, 667.</td>
<td>Receives a tablet from the treasury of the Ka'ba.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>598/1201</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Fut., I, 98:</td>
<td>Final departure from the Muslim West for the East.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>598/1202</td>
<td>Cairo</td>
<td>Rûh §§ 9, 10.</td>
<td>Is reunited with M. al-Khayyat and his brother A. al-Ḥarīrī (or Ḥarrār).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>598/1202</td>
<td>Hebron</td>
<td>Fut., I, 10.</td>
<td>Meditates at the grave of Abraham.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>598/1202</td>
<td>Jerusalem</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Prays in al-Aqṣā Mosque.</td>
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<tr>
<td>598/1202</td>
<td>Medina</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Visits the tomb of the Prophet.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>598/1202</td>
<td>Mecca</td>
<td>Khuṭba of the Fut.</td>
<td>Sees himself consecrated as Seal of Muhammadian Sainthood.</td>
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<tr>
<td>598/1202</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Fut., I, 47–51.</td>
<td>Meets the faṭā al-fā'it and reads in him the spiritual secrets which will be recorded in the Futahat.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Fut., I, 638: II, 15.</td>
<td>Encounter with the spirit of the son of Hārūn al-Rashīd.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>12 Jumādā I</td>
<td>Taif</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Malik 'Ādil receives the futuwwa investiture.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Preface and conclusion to the Rûh R.G., 630, samā' § 4.</td>
<td>Writes the Ruh al-quds and reads the work to seventeen disciples including Habashi and Qanawi's father.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>600/Nov. 1203</td>
<td>Mecca</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Dispute with the Ka'ba; composition of the Tāj al-rasā'il.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>600/1204</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Visits the tomb of the Prophet.</td>
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<td>601/1204</td>
<td>Jerusalem</td>
<td>R.G. 26, 68, 169, 205.</td>
<td>Writes the Kitāb al-jalālā, the Kitāb al-azāl, the Kitāb al-alf and the Kitāb al-ha.</td>
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<tr>
<td>601/1204–5</td>
<td>Baghdad</td>
<td>R.G. 639, sana`'s §§ 1.5.</td>
<td>Reads the Šah to Ibn Sukayna. Leaves for Anatolia accompanied by Qūnawi's father.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>R.G. 762.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Writes the Kitāb al-Tanazzūlāt al-mawṣūlīya</td>
</tr>
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<td>29 Ramadan</td>
<td></td>
<td>R.G. 639, sana`' § 7.</td>
<td>Reading of the Rūḥ to nine disciples including Ḥabashi and Qūnawi's father.</td>
<td>Genghis Khan reaches the Yellow River.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>602/1205</td>
<td>Damascus</td>
<td>Fut., I, 250; &amp; Chapter 9.</td>
<td>Meets Mas`ūd al-Habashi, a 'madman of God'.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 Sha`bān</td>
<td>Cairo</td>
<td>sana`' § 9 of the Rūḥ.</td>
<td>Reading of the work before six listeners including Ḥabashi, Ibn Sawdākin and A. al-Ḥarīrī (or al-Ḥarrār).</td>
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<tr>
<td>603/1207</td>
<td>The East*</td>
<td>R.G. 177, 412.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>The East*</td>
<td>Naḥf, II, 175.</td>
<td>Studies Muslim's Sahih with Abū l-Hassan b. Abī al-Bījā`i.</td>
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<td>609/1212</td>
<td>The East*</td>
<td><em>Muḥāḍarat</em>, II. 260; <em>Futuḥat</em>, IV. 547.</td>
<td>Corresponds with the Seljuk king Kaykâş.</td>
<td>The Christians are victorious at Las Navas de Tolosa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>610/1213</td>
<td>Aleppo</td>
<td>Preface to Ibn Sawdakin’s commentary on the <em>Ta’allûqât</em>.</td>
<td>Reading of and commentary on the <em>Ta’allûqât</em>.</td>
<td>Genghis Khan takes Peking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>611/1215</td>
<td>Mecca</td>
<td>Preface to the <em>Tarjumân</em>.</td>
<td>Writes the <em>Tarjumân al-ashwaq</em>.</td>
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<tr>
<td>611/1215</td>
<td>Aleppo</td>
<td><em>Dhikhr‘ir al-ar‘idâq</em>, preface.</td>
<td>Writes the commentary on the <em>Tarjumân</em> at the request of Ḥabashi and Ibn Sawdakin.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>612/1216</td>
<td>Malatya</td>
<td><em>Muḥāḍarat</em>, II. 241.</td>
<td>Writing to Kaykâş to tell him of the vision.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>615/1218</td>
<td>—</td>
<td><em>sama‘</em> § 3 of the Ṭâh.</td>
<td>Reading of the <em>Ṭâh</em> to several disciples.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Safar</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>End of Ḥašlahät.</td>
<td>Writing the Ḥašlahät <em>ṣüfiyya</em>.</td>
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<td>616/1219</td>
<td>—</td>
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<td>619/1222</td>
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<tr>
<td>620/1223</td>
<td>Syria</td>
<td></td>
<td>Settles permanently in Syria.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>29 Jumada I</td>
<td>Damascus</td>
<td><em>Dhâ‘lân</em>, 91.</td>
<td>Vision regarding Ibn Sawdakin.</td>
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<td>620/June 1223</td>
<td>—</td>
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<td>622/1225</td>
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<td>626/Nov. 1229</td>
<td>Syria*</td>
<td>R.G. 2, &lt;i&gt;sanâ'ī&lt;/i&gt; § 1.</td>
<td>Reading of the K. al-&lt;i&gt;‘abâd&lt;/i&gt;îlu to several disciples including Qûnâwî and Ibn Sawdâkin.</td>
<td>Death of Farid al-Dîn Aṭṭâr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>627/Feb. 1230</td>
<td>Damascus</td>
<td>R.G. 142, &lt;i&gt;sanâ'ī&lt;/i&gt; § 2: R.G. 414. R.G. 70.</td>
<td>Writes the &lt;i&gt;Fihris&lt;/i&gt; for Qûnâwî and gives him several &lt;i&gt;sanâ'ī&lt;/i&gt;'s.</td>
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<tr>
<td>628/1231</td>
<td>Syria*</td>
<td>K. al-mubahshirât.</td>
<td>Vision in which God speaks to him on Mount Sinai as He had spoken to Moses.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Safar 629/ Dec. 1231</td>
<td>Damascus</td>
<td>R.G. 135.</td>
<td>Finishes the first draft of the &lt;i&gt;Futûhât&lt;/i&gt;.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9 Jumâdâ I</td>
<td>Syria*</td>
<td>K. al-mubahshirât.</td>
<td>Vision in which Ibn 'Arabi is told he will have a thousand spiritual children.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>629/March 1232</td>
<td>Damascus</td>
<td>ms. &lt;i&gt;Fâtîh&lt;/i&gt; 5322, f° 92.</td>
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<tr>
<td>630/1233</td>
<td>Damascus</td>
<td>R.G. 150.</td>
<td>Reading of the &lt;i&gt;Fâṣûṣ&lt;/i&gt; to Qûnâwî.</td>
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<tr>
<td>630/1233</td>
<td>Syria*</td>
<td>R.G. 484, &lt;i&gt;sanâ'ī&lt;/i&gt; § 1.</td>
<td>Reading of the K. al-&lt;i&gt;muhâsharât&lt;/i&gt; to Qûnâwî. 'Imad al-Dîn Ibn al-'Arabi, Ibn Arabî's elder son, and several other disciples.</td>
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<tr>
<td>632/1234-35</td>
<td>Syria*</td>
<td></td>
<td>Begins the second draft of the &lt;i&gt;Futûhât&lt;/i&gt;.</td>
<td>Death of Suhrawardi, author of the 'A'wârîf al-mu'ârif.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Muharram</td>
<td>Damascus</td>
<td>Ijâza li-Malik...</td>
<td>Grants an Ijâza for his works to Malik al-Ashraf, King of Damascus.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>632/26-09-1234</td>
<td>Damascus</td>
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<td>6 Rajab</td>
<td>Syria*</td>
<td><em>Fut.</em>, II, 204</td>
<td>Discussion with God regarding the attribution of acts.</td>
<td>Cordoba is recaptured by the Christians.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>633/1236</td>
<td>Syria*</td>
<td>R.G. 736, <em>sama‘</em> § 3; R.G. 67, <em>sama‘</em> § 2; R.G. 414, <em>sama‘</em> § 3;</td>
<td>Grants a considerable number of *sama‘*s to an ever-increasing audience.</td>
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<td><em>sama‘</em> for the <em>Fut.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>634/1237</td>
<td>Damascus</td>
<td>R.G. 102</td>
<td>Composes the <em>Dhuln</em>.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>634/1237</td>
<td></td>
<td>R.G. 135</td>
<td>Gives several *sama‘*s for the <em>Futuhat</em>.</td>
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<td>Jawād becomes Sultan of Damascus.</td>
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<td>Death of Kāmil.</td>
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<tr>
<td>636/1238-39</td>
<td></td>
<td>R.G. 80, 472, 539, 685.</td>
<td>Writes these works.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 Rabi’ I</td>
<td>Damascus</td>
<td><em>Fut.</em>, IV, 553.</td>
<td>Completes the second draft of the <em>Futuhat</em>.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>636/1238</td>
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<td>637/1239-40</td>
<td></td>
<td>R.G. 135</td>
<td>Grants a considerable number of *sama‘*s for the <em>Futuhat</em>.</td>
<td>Molīk Sāliḥ Ismā‘īl takes Damascus.</td>
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<td>638/ct. 1240</td>
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<td>638/Nov. 1240</td>
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The teachers in traditional religious disciplines frequented by Ibn 'Arabi in the Muslim West

Here is a list of the teachers in the traditional religious disciplines whom Ibn 'Arabi frequented: it is based for the most part on the Ijāza, and sometimes supplemented by information preserved in other works. The names of 'ulamā‘ of minor importance are preceded by two asterisks: if famous, by three. Where possible their names are followed by date of death, some indication of the teaching given, the number of the corresponding entry in Ibn al-Abbar’s Takmilah (Tak = the Codera edition; Tak. b. = the edition by A. Bel and M. Bencheneb. Algiers, 1910), by the reference in the Ijāza (Ij.) and finally by references in other of Ibn 'Arabi's works. When the teacher in question is also a Sufi, his name is followed by a rectangle ．

*** 'Abd Allāh (Abū M. b. 'Ubayd Allāh al-Ḥajari): (d. 591/1194); hadith; Tak. § 1416; Ij. p.180; Fut. I. p.32; III. p.334.

** 'Abd Allāh (Abū M.) al-Tādirī: (d. 597/1200); qirā‘āt; Tak. § 1491; Ij. p.173.

** 'Abd al-Jalīl b. Mūsā: (d. 608/1211); tafsīr; hadith; Tak. § 1818; Ij. p.181; Durra, in Sufis of Andalusia, p.160.

*** 'Abd al-Rahmān (Abū Zayd) al-Suhaylī: (d. 581/1185); hadith; Sirā‘; Tak. § 1613; Ij. p.181; Mawqīf al-nujjām, p.90; Muḥādārat, I, pp.62. 72. 236.


*** Ayyūb (Abū Sabr) al-Fihri: (d. 609/1212); hadith; Tak. b. § 536; Ij. p.180; Fut. III. p.334.

** Ibn Abī Jamāra: (d. 599/1202); qirā‘āt; Tak. § 870; Ij. p.174.

** Ibn al-‘Arābi (Abū Wā’il or Abū Walid): hadith; Ij. p.117; Fut. I. p.32; Rūḥ, p.22.

** Ibn al-‘Āsh (M. b. A.) al-Bājī: qīfah; Tak. § 798; Fut. I. p.400; Muḥādārat, I, p.144; Rūḥ § 39, p.123; Sufis of Andalusia, p.152.


2. See the sketch in Tashawwuf § 241, p.416.

3. Cf. also GAL, S.I., 731. 4. It has proved possible to identify this person.

5. For Shaikh Fihri cf. Tashawwuf § 240 and Ibn Qunfudh, Unūs al-faṣīr, p.32. Ibn ‘Arabi attended his lectures at Cèuta at the same time as he attended Ḥajari’s.


7. According to the compilers Ibn al-Faras—who was qādi several times—excelled in poetry, philology and qiṣṭ. We do not know which of these subjects he taught to Ibn ‘Arabi.

8. It is difficult to determine whether or not Ibn ‘Arabi met this famous khatib in Baghie. In the Ijāza he states that ‘Abd al-Haqq transmitted to him all his works on hadith (hadithum li jamī‘ masnūfahum); but Ibn al-Kharrat died in the Maghreb during the revolt by the Bara‘ Ghaniyya in 581 (cf. Aliriq, p.197) and, as Ibn ‘Arabi did not visit the Maghreb until 589, this would suggest that Ibn al-Kharrat himself must have gone to Andalusia. However, none of our sources appears to mention such a journey by Ibn al-Kharrat; and, what is more, in the Muḥādārat al-‘abrīr (p.26) Ibn ‘Arabi specifies that he received hadiths from Ibn al-Kharrat by correspondence (kitābāt).

9. Ibn ‘Arabi refers to him as a muḥammadī ṣafi, and specifies that he studied hadith with him at Cèuta in his house. Sketch 98 in the Tashawwuf (p.377) is devoted to him.

10. Ibn Samhun was qādi of Almúncar; the correct reading is al-munakhab, not al-mukhāb as given by Badawi in Ijāza, p.180.

11. In the Ijāza Ibn ‘Arabi simply says that he received from him an Ijāza ‘amma, but in the Kitāb al-Muḥādārat he specifies that he spent time in his company in Seville.

12. Unidentified.

13. Unidentified.

14. In the Rūḥ Ibn ‘Arabi describes Zawāwī as a scholar and an ascetic; he studied his works and performed a one-day retreat (kaḥīla) with him. According to Ghubrini (‘Unwān al-dirāyah), § 29, Zawāwī used to give lectures in hadith and qiṣṭ.
The men of letters frequented by Ibn 'Arabi


--- 'Abd al-Mun'im al-Jilyani: (d. 602/1205 in Damascus); adib, poet, doctor; Tak., § 1815. Ibn 'Arabi does not specify whether he met him in the West or in the East. Fut., II, p. 129.

--- 'Abd al-Rahman (Abu Zayd) al-Fazazi: (d. 627/1230); poet. With a leaning towards Sufism; Tak., § 1641. Ibn 'Arabi met him. at Tlemcen in 590; Fut., I, p. 379.

--- Ibn Abi Rakab (Abu Dharr al-Khazanshi): (d. 604/1207); poet, philologist, jaqih, khatib of Seville and then qadi of Jaen; Tak., § 1098. Ibn 'Arabi met him at Seville at an adab lecture and called him 'sayyidi'; Muhadharat, I, pp. 127, 129, II, p. 247.

--- Ibn Farqad (A. b. Ibr): (d. 624/1227); poet; qadi at Granada and Salde; Tak., b, § 288; recited poems to Ibn 'Arabi; Muhadharat, II, pp. 98-99.


--- Ibn Kharuf (Ali b. M.) al-Ishbili: (d. 603/1206 or 609/1212); adib, linguist, mutakallim, grammarian; Tak., § 1884; Ibn Zubayr, Silat al-šilat, §§ 232, 245. Ibn 'Arabi spent time with him in Cordoba; Muhadharat, II, pp. 63, 236.


--- Ibn Zaydan ('Abd al-`Aziz b. 'Ali): (d. 624/1227); scholar-poet; mubahid; Tak., § 1721. He was a companion of Ibn 'Arabi in Fez; Fut., II, p. 514.


2. Two individuals who were contemporaries of each other both had this name (with the same ism and the same kunya); the biographers generally distinguish between them by designating them as Ibn Kharuf al-hifid and Ibn Kharuf al-shir (the 'grammarian' and the 'poet') respectively. Ibn 'Arabi simply speaks of 'Ibn Kharuf al-adib', which could apply to them both, and this makes it impossible to identify him.
The sīlatul of the khirṣa akhbariyya according to Shaikh Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Sammūs (d. 1276/1859), based on the Salsabil al-maʿin fī-lṭaʿārī qal-arbaʿaʿ in (in the margin of the Cairo edition of al-Mustadr ila al-ʿAshr, 135th, pp. 70–2).

Sanūsī (d. 1276/1859)
- Abu l-Baqā al-Makki
- Muḥammad (his father)
- Yūnūs (his father), known as ʿAbd al-Nabi
  - A. b. ʿAlī al-Dajānī
  - M. b. Ṭārīq
- Abū Fadl M. b. M., known as Ibn al-imam
  - M. b. Mūsā (descendant of Abū Bakr al-Mawṣili)
- Abū ʿAbd Allāh M. b. ʿAlī b. Jaʿfar al-Bilābī
- Abū ʿAbd Allāh M. Sirīn al-Maghribī

Saʿd al-Dīn al-Zaʿfārānī
- Abū ʿAbbas A. al-Ḥamdānī
- Mahmūd al-Zaʿfārānī (his father)
  - Qūṭb al-Dīn al-Qābiḥī
  - Naṣr al-Dīn ʿAlī b. Abū Bakr Dhū l-Nūn al-Malāṭī
  - Ṣādīr al-Dīn Qūnāwī
  - Ibn ʿArabī (d. 638/1240)
    - Abū Yaʿqūb Yūsuf b. Yakhlaẓ
    - Khadir
    - Abū M. Yūnūs b. Yahyā al-Hashimi
The silsila of the khiraq akbariya according to Murtada al-Zabidi. Sources: 'Iraq al-jawhar al-
thamim (s.v. wanajjara); Ibn 'Arraq and the ithal al-rafqaya (s.v. hathimija, sadriija).

Murtada al-Zabidi
(d. 1295/1791)

- Sulayman b. Yahya al-Husayni
  - his father
  - Hasan b. Ali b. Yahya
    - al-Makki
    - al-Mu'amar M. b. al-Ajil
    - al-Jamal M. b. 'Abd al-Rahman al-Fa'i
      - his father
      - Ibn al-'Arraq al-Musawi
      - al-Burhan al-Bijji
      - Abu l-Fadl M. b. Musa

  - Shams al-Din al-Baliali

- Zarqo
  - Abul 'Abd Allah b. Ibna
  - al-Husayni
  - Abul 'Abd al-Rahman b. Sidi
    - al-Makki
  - Abul 'Abd al-Fatuhi
    - al-Tarsusi

  - Abul 'Abd al-'Aziz b.
    - 'Abd al-Raqib al-Tarsusi

- Abul 'Abd al-Abbas A. b. M.
  - al-Nakhi al-Makki
    - al-Wali al-Iraqi
    - Qushkashish (d. 991/1071)
    - Abu l-Fath Maryghi
      - Jabi
      - Abu l-Hasan al-Wani

- Sa'id Namdar

- M. b. M. Srin al-Maghribi
  - A. al-'Abbas al-Hamdani
    - Sa'd al-Din
      - Zafarani

  - al-Qutb al-Qahibi
    - Mahmod al-Zafarani

  - Abu Bakr al-Siwasii
  - Nasr al-Din Abu Bakr
    - al-Malati

  - Shadr al-Din Qunawi

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Glossary and Index of Technical Terms

Page numbers for Arabic terms are only given in the case of references that help to clarify the meaning of the term in question.

‘abd, servant, slave 62, 195, 281
ābdal (plural of ābdal), substitutes 72 n.178, 89, 113, 125, 135, 161, 216, 222 n.19, 297, 301, 303, 304
ādab, propriety, rules of propriety, right conduct, edificatory literature 62, 94, 100-2, 147, 163, 270
āfād (pl. of fārd), solitary ones, the alone 65, 67 n.153, 71-3, 77-8, 126, 175 with n.25
āḥāl, ownership, unicity 279
āhād, commitment, pledge, covenant 47
ākhām (pl. of ākhām), properties, judgements, rulings, prescriptions 99
ākhwāl (pl. of ākhwāl), state, mystical state 9
ākhbār (pl. of khabār), traditions, stories 223, 250
ālām al-adhāyā, world of hidden things, world of spirits or angels 158 n.113, 215
ālām al-khawāsīl, world of the imagination, the imaginal world 10, 47
ālām al-shubāhā, world of the visible, world of manifestation 158 n.113, 195
ālām, knowing, knowledgeable 206, 280
āmāna, deposition, something put in someone’s care 219

Zaynab (daughter of Ibn ‘Arabi), 264
Zirkil, 257 n.62
Zoroaster, 248
Zotenberg (H.), 118 n.36
Zuhār, 11 n.4, 111 n.3, 115 n.23

ānbīyā (plur. of nabi), prophets 201, 277
‘aql, intellect, mind, reason 104-6, 211
‘ard Allah, God’s earth 117-18, 198
‘ard al-haqq, earth of reality 117
ā‘rif (pl. ‘ārifūn), knower, gnostic 64, 91, 105, 153, 203, 206, 224 n.32, 292
ārkan (pl. of rukn), corner, support, corner support 117
ārwāl (pl. of wāl), friends, friends of God, saints 22, 153-54, 219, 277
ākwād (pl. of wād), pegs, tent pegs, pillars 65, 117, 151, 161, 225
āyān ṭabīha (pl. ṣāfīn ṭabīha), immovable prototype, pre-eternal suchness 278, 280
bāḥt (pl. of bāḥt), fools, those who are mad, the ‘demented’ 88-9
barakū, blessedness, blessing influence 62, 67, 125, 142 with n.40, 195, 292
barakāh, intermediary world 89, 118, 126 n.62
baqira, inner certainty, inner perception 63-4
bila‘āt al-Rūm, the Roman’ provinces. Anatolia
bila‘āt al-Shām, the provinces of Shām, Syria
būt, stupefaction 258
dār al-hadith, building dedicated to the study of hadith 184, 189-92, 261

dār al-islam, the Islamic world, territories under the rule of Islam
dhikr, remembrance, invocation 36, 43, 49-50, 61, 123, 163-65, 270-72
dhimmī, a non-Muslim living under Islamic law, ethnic denomination for non-Muslim minorities 14-15, 234-35, 270
dīn, religion 39
dīwan, poetic anthology 209
falsa, philosophy 102-9
fainān, annihilation, extinction 43, 140, 161-62
faqīh (pl. faqīhā;), jurist
fakhr i-lā lāh, poverty in God, need for God
fāṣ, chapter
fath, opening, illumination 33-35-39, 91, 123, 153, 216
fatra, lapse, sense of abandonment 42-4, 172
fatwā, legal pronouncement, religious decree
fiqīh, jurisprudence, law 94
faqīhā (pl. of faqīh), jurists 94, 177, 191-92, 247, 250, 257, 259
futūwah, chivalry, heroic generosity, initiatory organisation 120, 162, 170, 183, 205, 226
ghaffar, needlessness 32
al-guţah, the invisible world 122
gina‘ bīllāh, sufficiency in God 165
hadith, utterance, saying of Muhammad, literature consisting of traditions about Muhammad 94-100
hadith qudsī, extra-Qur’ānic saying attributed to God 140 n.34, 214, 279, 288 n.225
hajj, one who has memorised the Qur’ān
hajj pilgrimage 193, 197, 215
hukm, sage, theosopher 105

 Giul (plur. ahwāl), state, mystical state 68
hāmid, public bath
huaqa, truth, reality, essential reality 205-6, 270
huaqa muhammadiyah, Muhammadan reality 77, 200
huqq, reality, truth, God 22, 138, 208, 249, 288 n.225
haram, sacred precinct. Mecca 124, 212-16, 222, 286
himma, aspiration 49
huqūq, possession, presence with God 271
huqūq, contingency, the contingent 118
hukm, authority, ruling, judgement 279-81

‘ibāda (plur. ‘ibādat), worship, act of worship 152, 204, 270
‘ījāt, inimitability 137
‘ijāza, certificate of authorisation 25, 187
‘ījāza ‘āmma, general authorisation, authorisation given in a person’s absence 45, 70, 97, 209, 250
ījīthā, personal effort, effort at interpretation 46
īkhtiyār, choice, free will, self-determination 71
‘ilm, knowledge, science 62, 136 n.20, 206
‘ilm tadāl, knowledge inherent in God 62
īqāq rabbān, lordly projection 159
insām, religious leader
insin kāmil, perfect man 278, 283
irāda, will 105
‘isāwī, Christic, related to Jesus 51, 277
isnād, chain of transmission of a hadith 11 n.4, 85 n.40, 98
isrā‘, night journey 154 n.94, 213
isrā‘i ‘ilūya, traditions relating to Jews and Christians 100
istādād (pl. istīḍādāt), predisposition 280-81
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*Sira*, biography of the prophet Muhammad 140-42
*sirh*, secret, the innermost 125, 132, 172
*sihba*, companionship, spiritual companionship 68, 143
*sulāk*, wayfaring, travelling on the spiritual path 35, 51, 64, 90, 296
*sunnah*, way of life, the Prophet’s manner of behaviour. orthodox Islam 44, 206
*sūra*, chapter of the Qur’ān
*
*tabaqāt* (plur. of *tabaqáta*), strata, generations, biographical dictionaries 6, 94, 222
*tadhrīr*, direction, governance 152
*tafsīl*, detailed exposition 203
*tafsīr*, commentary, exegesis 97
*tajallīyiyyat* (plur. of *tajallīl*), theophanies, divine revelations 139, 220, 283
*tajrīd*, stripping of oneself, emptying of oneself, self-denial 39
*takhri*, utterance of the formula Allah Akbar (“God is great”)
*taklif*, legal obligation 46, 141, 172
*tīlīb* (plur. *tīlībān*), student, disciple 143 with n.43
*tarabīḥum*, the formula Rahimahu Allah (“May God’s mercy be upon him”), spoken for someone who has died
*tarbiyya*, education, initiation, spiritual training 64, 162, 165, 270
*tariqa* (plur. *tariqā*), religious or mystical order, 57 n.110, 68, 190, 287
*tasawwuf*, Sufism 102
*tashbih*, anthropomorphism 135
*tawfīf*, circumambulation 212-17, 285-86
*tawwakul*, trust, reliance on God 86, 131, 207
*tawba*, conversion, repentance 23, 32, 34, 39, 44, 73
*tawhid*, unity, teaching of the unity of God 29, 100, 108, 143 n.43
*tawwīl*, allegory, allegorical interpretation of scripture 53
*tāyyar al-ard*, rolling up of the earth, the miraculous power of crossing great distances instantly or almost instantly 286
*thubāt*, permanence, stability 280-83
*turbē*, tomb
*‘abbād* (plur. of *‘ādib*), worshipper, devotee 24
*‘ubd al-‘adīyya*, servitude 40-1, 61-2, 72, 116-20, 152, 196, 207
*‘adab* (plur. of *adab*), literati, specialists in adab-literature 100
*‘ulama’* (plur. of *‘alīm*), men of knowledge, scholars, savants 94-9, 133, 184, 219-21, 246-78, 288
*umma*, community, religious community 124, 206, 219, 276, 291-92
*uwaysi* (plur. *uwaysiyāt*), someone like Uways, a mystic whose link with his teacher is not physical 64 n.143, 142 n.40
*waḥdat al-wujūd*, oneness of being 208, 231-32, 278-79
*wajdh*, ecstasy 164
*waḥda*, sainthood, the state of the friends of God 65, 71, 77-81, 93, 127, 199-200, 205, 277-78
*wāli* (plur. *awliyā*), saint, friend of God
*waqi‘*, religious endowment, consecration of property for religious purposes
*waqf* (plur. *waqfī*), annunciationary vision 34, 43 with n.36, 100, 107, 290
*wāqi‘* (plur. *wāqi‘ūn*), one who stands or stays, someone who remains constantly in the presence of God 139, 153
*wārid*, spiritual instant, spiritual inspiration 88, 91, 195

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**Glossary and Index of Technical Terms**

*waṣīl*, arrival, attainment of the divine 198
*zāhid*, renouncer, ascetic 22 n.52, 136 n.20, 288
*ziyāra*, visiting, visiting sacred places 172
*zuhhād* (plur. of *zāhid*), renouncers, ascetics 22, 24
*zuhd*, renunciation, asceticism 39, 41, 69, 94, 162